

# The Case For Grace: A Commentary On Romans 1-8

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# INTRODUCTION

The grace of God is almost too good news to believe. We approach gifts [‘grace’] with a cynicism born of hard experience in this world. Nothing’s really free; the special offer has small print attached; aid for the poor carries some unspoken expectation of response; our love for our children is given all too often with some strong hope in their appreciation and loyalty. The grace or giving of God is different; it’s not only as good as it sounds but has a *hyper* quality to it, something beyond, something exceeding our wildest dreams or most daring spiritual fantasies.

In trying to get this all expressed and explained within the paradigm of words on paper, even if they are Divinely inspired words, it’s almost inevitable that the argument is going to be reasonably long and intense. We can of course just simply accept it, with simple faith like those illiterate folk who first heard the essence of it all, “beside the Syrian sea”. But because God foresaw that many of us aren’t as great in spiritual stature as them, He provides us with the analysis of the good news which we have in Romans 1-8. Here we have explained the mechanics of how the Gospel works; of how it works out that we who are sinners end up saved and rejoicing in sure hope of eternal life. There’s an intensity in style and content which is appropriate; there’s a depth and tightness of thought in the intellectual argument from which Paul at times surfaces to gasp out his joy in the certainty of salvation, and the sheer wonder of it all.

The exposition of Romans has nearly always become bogged down in abstractions. I’ve therefore chosen to begin the exposition by demonstrating that the purpose of all the theology, the ideas, the doctrine which we meet in Romans 1-8 is in fact very practical; it is harnessed by Paul towards the radical transformation of human life in practice.

I don’t claim of course to have got it right on every point here. The density of the argument, the intensity of dealing with the most ultimate matters of the cosmos, means that the language of Romans sometimes defies interpretation in terms of ‘this phrase means that, then follows this phrase, which means this...’. And this is all further complicated by my conviction, which I many times exemplify, that Paul is often alluding to and deconstructing contemporary Jewish writings. Those allusions affect his word choice; and since we don’t have access to all those writings, it’s quite likely that in our reading and exposition we are

often walking unawares over an allusion or half quotation to some document now unknown. And so we embark upon Romans with prayer; really, we must do.

I'm open to your comments, reflections and corrections.

God's grace be with you all; accept the Gospel; believe in Him; keep the faith; and I look forward to seeing you 'there' eternally.

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*Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are either from the KJV or the New European Version [see n-e-v.info ]. The abbreviation 's.w.' means 'same [original] word translated as'.*

## The Structure Of Romans: The Power Of Basics

I am somewhat cynical of attempts to break down the books of the Bible into sections and sub-sections. These break downs may assist our interpretation, but I somehow doubt whether the writers or the Spirit of God behind them consciously intended to write in that way. However, in Romans there is a very distinct structure which cannot be denied. The structure of Romans is clear. The letter begins with a brief introduction regarding the Gospel, and concludes with a major dissertation about the preaching of the Gospel. This introduction and epilogue are evidently linked; thus " ..stablish you according to my Gospel" (16:25) looks back to " ...that ye may be established" (1:11); "your obedience is come abroad unto all men" (16:19) is "your faith is spoke of throughout the whole world" (1:8); and the idea that the Gospel is preached " for obedience to the faith" is the start and end point of the letter (1:5; 16:26). The main body of the letter in between this introduction and epilogue is comprised of a purely doctrinal section (chapters 1-11) and then a practical section (12-15). The purpose of this study is to show how the basic doctrines of the Gospel are to be the basis for our way of life. The practical teaching of Paul is consistently built upon the doctrinal exposition he has given in the first part of the letter; "I beseech you *therefore*" (12:1) is the turning point. The doctrinal section itself has a climax half way through, in the first part of chapter 6 concerning baptism. This is the fulcrum of the whole theological argument contained in Romans 1-8; and this is the section most frequently alluded to in the practical section: as if to say that the fact of our baptisms and what it means for us in an ongoing sense must be the basis for our daily living.

### **Romans 12-16 [practical commandments]**

12:1 We must live the practical life of obedience "by the *mercies* of God"

### **Romans 1-11 [exposition of the Gospel]**

This Greek word occurs only in 9:15: "I will have *compassion* on whom I will". The mercy / compassion of God is shown to us by grace, by some kind of predestination, and not because we deserve it. In view of these "mercies", therefore we ought to live the life Paul now outlines. Our understanding of the grace of predestination isn't something academic or philosophical- the mercy

and grace shown in it *beseech* us to live a better life. And according to Eph. 15,6,11,12 RV, predestination is not something that should merely confuse us, but rather it is there "to the end that..." we might praise God in lives of gratitude.

12:1 *Present* your *bodies* (12:1) occurs later in 14:10 [we will *stand before* the judgment seat] and in 16:2 [assist] Phoebe-yield yourselves to her in helpful support.

Baptism is a promise to *yield* [s.w.] our *bodies* to God's service (6:12,13,19). This means the Romans were to *assist* / *yield to* Phoebe and *present* themselves in practical service (12:1); we will present ourselves / yield ourselves before the Lord when we come before His final judgment (14:10), and so we ought to now, as we vowed at baptism.

12:1 Offer your *body* as a living sacrifice

Through baptism we show that we have died, the *body* of sin has been destroyed (6:6), we were crucified with Christ. So therefore, 12:1 is saying, don't be frightened to sacrifice / give up the things of this life. The appeal to present ourselves as "living men" after baptism (6:13) is surely to be connected with the appeal to present ourselves as living sacrifices in 12:1.

12:2 be not conformed to *this world / age*

Only three verses earlier in 11:36 the same word is used about how Christ will be glorified "for ever" (AV), the *world / age* [to come]. Live for that age, live the Kingdom life of glorifying Christ *now*, if you do that you can't be conformed to *this* age, but to the future one.

12:4,5 We are each *members of His body*, each of us must play our

6:13,19; 7:5,23 the members of our own personal bodies, every part of our physical and spiritual / emotional life, must be given to the service of Christ; we died with Him. By doing this, we will

part in the body /  
ecclesia of Christ;  
we each have an  
*office / deed* in it.

have our part in the body of Christ; we will be members of His body, if each of our own members has been submitted to Him. We must mortify the *deeds* of the body (8:3)- and then we will have part in the office / deeds of the body of Christ. This is why personal spirituality is a condition for ecclesial office.

12:6 We each  
have *gifts* of  
serving

But the *gift* emphasized earlier in Romans is that of forgiveness, justification, salvation (5:15,16; 6:23). The response to this gift is to serve practically; therefore the gift of God's salvation and grace is thereby also a gift / ability to serve His people (as in 1 Pet. 4:10).

12:8 He that  
*sheweth mercy*;  
the Greek can  
mean both to  
shew mercy (as  
here; 9:16; Jude  
22) and to obtain  
mercy (11:30,31;  
1 Cor. 7:25; 2  
Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim.  
1:13,16). To  
obtain mercy, to  
really believe it,  
means we will  
shew it.

The same phrase 'to shew mercy' is used in 9:15,16,18; 11:3-32 re. our obtaining mercy on the basis of God's pure and predestined grace rather than our works. Rooted in this experience, we must likewise show mercy to others on the basis of grace rather than their behaviour towards us.

12:10 give *honour*  
to each other

9:21 God gives *honour* on the basis of grace rather than works; He decides to honour one rather than another. In this sense we must honour all of our brethren, for who they are before God rather than for their works.

12:11; 14:18;  
16:18 *serve* Christ

6:6; 7:6,25 On account of your baptism don't *serve* sin but *serve Christ*



12:12 *rejoice in hope* as you go about your service of others in the ecclesia

*Rejoice in hope* because of the atonement, because of the death of Christ for you (5:2), after the pattern of Abraham's joyful hope, thanks to having been given the same promises which we have been (4:18 cp. Jn. 8:56). Such service in joy is difficult when the work we do for our brethren is repetitious- stamping envelopes or cooking food, e.g. Joy in service will only come from a conscious holding in our minds of the personal wonder of the promises, and the fact that the Lord died for us and really has given us such great salvation...and that we are doing what we are doing purely as response to that.

12:12 Patient in tribulation

Tribulation works patience because of our experience of the atonement (5:3). The love of Christ in the cross was so great that no amount of tribulation [poverty or sick and crying children, e.g.] should separate us from it; and therefore we can be patient whilst experiencing it (8:35).

12:16 Mind not high things but be like-minded towards each other. Be not wise in your own conceits, because of your own possibility of failure.

11:20 Be not high-minded but fear- if God rejected the Jews, you are only a Gentile, and of the same sin and failure-prone nature. Consideration of God's dealings with Israel and their failures should lead us to an appropriate attitude of mind.

12:17 *recompense* to no man evil for evil; if we want to be judged by grace then we must show it. If we give evil for evil then this is

2:6 God will *render* [s.w.] to each man according to his ways. If we want judgment by grace, then we must shew it now. If we do and show evil, we will receive it (2:9). And we all do evil at times (7:19). If we are to receive grace rather than evil for that evil, we must show it to others in our judgment of them.

how our sins will  
be judged at the  
last day.

12:19 Give place  
to God's *wrath*-  
don't avenge  
yourselves.

The wrath of God is really against sin right now,  
and it will be at the judgment (1:18; 2:5,8; 3:5;  
4:15; 9:22). The more we believe this, the less  
likely we will be to avenge sin against ourselves.  
Likewise the more we understand how God  
justifies us, *and the wonder of it*, the less likely  
we will be to justify *ourselves* and to be sensitive  
to what others may or may not imply about us.

12:20 Feed your  
enemy, love him-  
if he doesn't  
respond, your love  
of him will heap  
coals of fire  
[condemnation]  
upon him

5:10 We were enemies but reconciled by God's  
love; and yet we face condemnation if we refuse  
that reconciliation. From that experience we must  
be moved to love our enemies, to ever seek  
reconciliation; indeed we will be compelled to do  
this almost unconsciously, if we truly believe we  
were enemies and alienated, and yet by grace  
have been reconciled.

13:2 Don't resist  
God through  
resisting /  
objecting to the  
powers of  
Government

9:19 Who hath resisted His will? Pharaoh tried to  
but was brought to destruction because of this.  
We must learn the lesson, and show it in  
submission to the powers of Government in that  
they are manifesting the will of God towards us-  
even if it means persecution.

13:2 Otherwise  
you will receive  
*damnation*

2:2,3; 3:8; 5:16- which *must* come against sin,  
because of Adam's sin (5:16). Understanding the  
need for damnation of sin means we will not  
commit it so quickly.

13:7 render to all  
their dues Give "  
custom"

2:6 God renders to all according to their works,  
and we are to manifest God's judgment in little  
things like paying our taxes fairly; we must think  
of the future judgment, the way all will receive  
their dues (although ours will be ameliorated by

grace), and be influenced by God's judgment in the way we give others their dues. As God gives an "end" [s.w. 'custom'] to sin and righteousness (6:21,22).

13:8 Loving our neighbour fulfils the law

8:3,4 Christ died that we might fulfill the Law; He fulfilled it in His death, and in that we have a part in that death through baptism, we also must fulfill it in spirit. To fulfill the law is to love each other; Christ died that the law might be fulfilled, i.e. that we might love each other. This is why the remembrance of the Lord's death is in the *agape*, the love-feast, where we discern His body, our brethren, and resolve to love them to the end. John saw the same link when he wrote of how because Christ lay down His life for us, we ought also to lay down our lives for each other (1 Jn. 3:16; 4:9-11).

13:11 Awake out of sleep

This phrase is used in Romans only of the resurrection of the Lord (4:24,25; 6:4,9; 7:4; 8:11,34; 10:9). Because He rose and we are in Him and share in His resurrection and newness of life by baptism, therefore we shouldn't be apathetic in our service. This is the power of His resurrection and our association with it in baptism (6:4,9).

13:12 Put on the *armour* of light- as we put on Christ by baptism. Live the spirit of baptism in an ongoing sense.

At baptism we yield our members as *instruments* [s.w. 'armour'] of righteousness (6:13). Keep on doing this, keeping on and on arming yourself, clothing yourself, yielding yourself, just as you did at baptism. "Walk..." (13:13) as you began walking at baptism "in newness of life" (6:4).

13:13 Live with no strife or envy

1:29 there was strife and envy amongst the condemned Israel who walked through the wilderness. By having these things we show

ourselves to be condemned.

13:14 Don't fulfill the lusts of the flesh but put on Christ

6:12 Put on Christ by baptism, and therefore don't obey the flesh "in the lusts thereof". The language is so similar that surely Paul is teaching that baptism is an ongoing experience, in essence. Consider how the fire and water baptized Israel in the Red Sea, and yet continued over them throughout the Wilderness journey.

14:1 Receive the *weak in faith*

Abraham was not weak in faith (4:19) and we should seek to be like him; but receive those who are in his seed by baptism, but don't make it to his level of personal faith

14:5 Let yourselves be *fully persuaded*

As Abraham was "fully persuaded" (4:21)

14:23 He who *doubts* is damned

Abraham didn't *stagger* [s.w.] (4:20); ultimately, he must be our example, even if some in the ecclesia will take time to rise up to his standard, and unlike him are "weak in faith" .

14:7,8 No man lives or dies to *himself*

6:11,13,16 we share in the life and death of Christ, and therefore we *ourselves* are given to Him [s.w. *himself* in 14:7,8]. We are dead with Him. Because we are baptized into Christ, our own death and life are now not for ourselves. Therefore what we eat and drink is part of a life lived for the Lord, and therefore these things are irrelevant. The physicalities of life are necessary; but these shouldn't be of any major importance because our life is given over to Christ. This is a fundamental challenge, repeated in 2 Cor. 5:15: because of Christ's death and resurrection for us, we don't live to ourselves but to Him. The argument in Romans 14 is that therefore, all the physical things of our lives are merely incidental.

This is an unusual yet powerful way of telling the Romans not to get distracted by the issue of what some ate or drank: we are dead with Christ, our lives are only for Him, therefore what we physically eat to keep ourselves going, along with *all* the more material issues of life, are incidental to the main purpose of life. We live in a world which increasingly glorifies the frittering away of time and economy on the incidentals of life; yet the Gospel should make us see these things for what they are. Rom. 14:17 seems to have the same idea: "[the gospel of] the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness [a word used 33 times in the doctrinal section, regarding the righteousness of God imputed through the Gospel] , peace [cp. 2:10; 3:17; 5:1; 8:6] and joy [5:2] in the Holy Spirit. He who in these things serveth Christ...". Note how the Gospel is paralleled with the service of Christ; to believe it is to live a life of service.

14:13 Let us not judge one another *any more*

6:6 *henceforth* we should not serve sin. One example of this is that after baptism, living the life of Christ, we no longer judge each other. To do so is to serve sin.

14:18 we "serve Christ" by the life of righteousness, joy and peace. By being factious we no longer serve Christ (16:18)- we are no longer living out the baptism vow of serving Christ.

6:6; 7:6 we serve Christ after baptism- not so much in works but in attitudes.

15:4 By the comfort of " the

Paul quotes "the scriptures" to support his exposition of the Gospel: 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2.

scriptures" we  
have hope

His argument in practice gives comfort and hope.

15:9 The  
believing Gentiles  
will "sing unto thy  
name"

10:13; 9:17 The believer calls upon himself the name of the Lord in baptism; through God's work with the gentiles, His Name is declared through all the earth. The believer, baptized into the Name, will praise that Name and declare it in song and witness throughout the earth.

15:13 *abound* in  
hope

5:15 the grace of God *abounds* to us [s.w.]; but grace is something purely abstract unless it is really *felt*. In this case our abounding in hope will reflect the abounding of grace which we perceive. Romans 5 almost plays logical games in order to show just how abounding that grace is.

15:21 Paul  
preached because  
he wanted to take  
the Gospel to  
those "who have  
not heard"

10:14-18 argues that men will only hear the Gospel if there is a preacher; but it is prophesied that they have all heard, because Psalm 19 prophesies that the message has gone into all the earth. Yet the connection with 15:21 suggests that Paul saw that prophecy, which he so confidently quotes in the past tense, as if it has already happened, as dependent upon his own effort in witness. In this we see the limitation of God within human effort to witness.

15:28 Paul speaks  
of sealing unto the  
Gentile believers  
the "fruit" of their  
generosity.

6:22 After baptism we are to bring forth fruit to God. But we can help others do this, as Paul helped the Gentiles to be generous.

16:2 "assist"  
Phoebe

6:13,16,19 We must *yield ourselves* [s.w.] to the service of God. But this is shown by yielding our services to His servants. It is a strange way of describing assistance to Phoebe if this is not an intentional allusion [bear in mind how many

other references there are to Rom. 6 in the practical section of the letter].

16:17 "the doctrine which ye have learned"

6:17 the form of doctrine delivered to them before baptism. Anyone who teaches anything which affects the basic Gospel is to be avoided. This is because the doctrines of the Gospel affect the way of life we lead, not because the intellectual tradition of the church has been insulted <sup>(1)</sup>.

16:26 Making the Gospel known

9:22,23 as the power and riches of God were made known [s.w.] to the world of Egypt. He is likewise manifesting Himself through us in the work of witness.

The structure of Romans concludes with a section about the preaching of the Gospel, as if to say that the Gospel is in itself an imperative to go forth and live a life dedicated to the ministering of it to others. It will be apparent from the above analysis how central is Romans 6 to Paul's later appeal for a way of life in harmony with the Gospel he has expounded. The point is, the reality of the atonement that has been achieved in Christ, the fact we are baptized into it... if we believe these things rather than simply know them, these are imperatives which will force / compel us into the way of life we ought to lead. This is the *power* of the Gospel and a living faith. This is why it matters, and matters eternally, what we believe.

### **Note**

(1) On the other hand, this is why any teaching which does not have a practical effect on our lives cannot be considered a matter of fellowship, in that it is not part of the saving Gospel. The size of the temple Ezekiel describes, whether Melchizedek was Shem or not... these issues are not part of the basic Gospel, quite simply because they don't affect how we live our lives. They are matters of Biblical exegesis which are helpful in perceiving a wider picture in our survey of Bible teaching, but they are not part of the Gospel which Paul expounds in Romans. And seeing that our "fellowship [is] in the Gospel", they are not part of any basis of fellowship. The simple test as to whether something is fundamental is simply this: What effect does it have on our lives in Christ?

# ROMANS CHAPTER 1

## *Greetings and introduction*

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we received grace and apostleship, to obedience of faith among all the nations, for his name's sake. 6 Among whom are you also called to be Jesus Christ's.

7 To all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers 10 making request, if by any means now at length I may succeed by the will of God to come to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, to strengthen you. 12 That is: that I with you may be comforted in you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

13 And I would not have you ignorant, brothers, that oftentimes I intended to come to you (but have so far been hindered), that I might have some fruit in you also, even as in the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God to salvation to everyone that believes- to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith to faith. As it is written: But the righteous shall live by faith.

## *Humanity without excuse*

18 For the anger of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hinder the truth in unrighteousness. 19 Because that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it to them. 20 For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made- even His everlasting power and Divinity- that they may be without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honour Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of



birds, and fourfooted animals, and creeping things.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonoured among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the created rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 For this cause God gave them up to vile passions. Their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature. 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working unseemliness and receiving in themselves that reward of their error which was due.

28 And even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not appropriate, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; 30 whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, proud, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful. 32 Who, knowing the ordinance of God, that they that practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also give approval to them that practice them.

1:1 Time and again Paul brings before us the fact he really is our example; thus he begins his Roman epistle with a description of himself as Paul... called to be an apostle, separated...", but soon goes on to point out that the Romans were "*also* the called of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:1,6).

*Apostle*- the word literally means one who is sent, and is translated "he that is sent" in Jn. 13:16. It could be argued that all who have received the great preaching commission [which is all of us] have received in essence the same calling and apostleship which Paul did- and he therefore can hold himself up to us all as an example, seeing we have in principle received the same calling which he did. He uses the term "apostle" in Rom. 16:7 concerning brethren who were imprisoned with him who were clearly not amongst the apostles originally chosen by the Lord Jesus. He says in 1:5 that *we* have received apostleship because our Lord rose from the dead; because He rose, all in Him are sent to take that good news to others. And he uses the same word for 'calling' in :6, suggesting his calling and apostleship are to be ours.

*Separated unto the Gospel*- a reference to Acts 13:2 where Paul was separated to go on a missionary journey; although he felt he had been separated unto this from the womb (Gal. 1:15). God has likewise

separated each of us unto certain callings, but only later in our lives is this made apparent to us.

Paul was called to be a preacher of the Gospel, and yet he speaks of his work as a preacher as if it were a Nazarite vow- which was a totally voluntary commitment. Consider not only the reference to him shaving his head because of his vow (Acts 18:18; 21:24 cp. Num. 6:9-18), but also the many descriptions of his preaching work in terms of Nazariteship: Separated unto the Gospel's work (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15; Acts 13:2); "I am not yet consecrated / perfected" (Phil. 3:12)- he'd not yet finished his 'course', i.e. his preaching commission. He speaks of it here as if it were a Nazarite vow not yet ended. Note the reference to his 'consecration' in Acts 20:24. His undertaking not to drink wine lest he offend others (Rom. 14:21) is framed in the very words of Num. 6:3 LXX about the Nazarite. Likewise his being 'joined unto the Lord' (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 14:6,8) is the language of Num. 6:6 about the Nazarite being separated unto the Lord. The reference to having power / authority on the head (1 Cor. 11:10) is definitely some reference back to the LXX of Num. 6:7 about the Nazarite. What are we to make of all this? The point is perhaps that commitment to active missionary work is indeed a voluntary matter, as was the Nazarite vow. And that even although Paul was called to this, yet he responded to it by voluntarily binding himself to 'get the job done'. And the same is in essence true for us today in our various callings in the Lord's service.

1:2 Abraham was a prophet (Gen. 20:7) as was Sarah (Ps. 105:15). In line with Gal. 3:8, Paul may have the patriarchs in mind here.

1:3 The same Greek words translated 'Word' and 'made' in Jn. 1:14 occur together in 1 Cor. 15:54- where we read of the word [AV "saying"] of the Old Testament prophets being 'made' true by being fulfilled [AV "be brought to pass"]. The word of the promises was made flesh, it was fulfilled, in Jesus. The 'word was made flesh', in one sense, in that the Lord Jesus was "*made...* of the seed of David according to the *flesh*" (Rom. 1:3)- i.e. God's word of promise to David was fulfilled in the fleshly person of Jesus. The Greek words for "made" and "flesh" only occur together in these two places- as if Rom. 1:3 is interpreting Jn. 1:14 for us.

*Made*- Gk. *ginomai*, to be made, come into being- a nail in the coffin for the idea of a personal pre-existence of Christ.

1:4 More strictly, "the resurrection *of* the dead". "*From*" would require *ek*, which isn't present. The Lord's resurrection is in this sense ours, and ours is His. There is in this sense only one resurrection- that of the

Lord.

1:5 *We* is usually used by Paul in Romans regarding him plus his readership, i.e. all of us. We are all sent ones, apostles- see on 1:1.

*Obedience to the faith among all nations... for His name-* a reference to the great commission, which was enabled and necessitated by the Lord's resurrection. John speaks of preachers going forth to preach for His Name's sake (3 Jn. 7). We are not to merely inform them, but preach aiming towards a response- our apostleship, our being sent ones, is "for", *eis*, elsewhere translated "to the intent that". We should preach towards a response, expecting the ultimate obedience of at least some of our audience. In 6:16 Paul specifically associates obedience [s.w.] to the Gospel with baptism- this should be our initial aim and focus in witness. Peter likely does the same in 1 Pet. 1:2,22.

Paul makes a number of allusions to the great commission, in which he applies it to both himself and also to us all. The weak argument that it was 'only for the disciples who heard it' evaporates when it is accepted that Paul wasn't one of the 12, and yet the commission applies to him. Rom. 1:5 RV is an example: "...through whom we have received grace and apostleship, for the obedience to the faith among all the nations, for his name's sake". These words are packed with allusion to the great commission. And Paul is not in the habit of using the 'royal we' to refer solely to himself. He clearly sees all his readers as sharing in just the same calling. The early preachers travelled around "for his name's sake" (3 Jn. 7), even though they were not in the original band of disciples. Having alluded to the great commission, Paul goes on in this context to rejoice "that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:7 RV). He saw their example of faith in practice as being the witness that fulfilled the great commission; and goes on to speak of his sense of debt to spread the word to literally all men, hence his interest in preaching at Rome (Rom. 1:14,15). And here we have our example; "as much as in me is", we should each say, we are ready to spread the Gospel as far as lies in our power to do so.

Collective societies are all about submission and obedience to those above you in the hierarchy- yet repeatedly, Christians are exhorted to be obedient and submissive to the Lord Jesus and the new community in Him (Rom. 1:5; 6:16,17; 2:8 etc.). And even within the new community, Paul's own example showed that acceptance in the eyes of those who appear to be the pillars of the society of Christ is also of little ultimate value if they have fallen away from the understanding of grace (Gal. 2:9). To keep using the word "radical" doesn't do justice to the colossal change in worldview that was required on conversion to

Christ. Reflecting on all this, it seems to me that the reason the Jewish people crucified their Messiah was above all because He so powerfully turned their whole worldviews upside down- and they just couldn't handle it, just as so many families today turn against the one who truly turns to Christ.

1:6 We are also called to be apostles- see on 1:1.

1:7 *To all*- not just the leadership. Paul valued everyone, including the illiterate majority of the ecclesia to whom the letter would be read out loud, and upon whom the complexity and depth of much of his argument in this letter would likely have been lost.

1:8 *First*- the most important thing for Paul was that those he had expended spiritual effort for were strong in the faith. We sense the same in John's letters of 2 and 3 John. Our focus should be on helping others reach the Kingdom.

*Through Christ Jesus*- The fact we praise God and come directly to Him *dia*, through the Lord Jesus, does not mean that our words come to the Father through the Son as if He were a sieve or telephone line. We come direct to the Father *dia*, on account of, for the sake of, the work Christ achieved. The following are a few of many examples which give the flavour of *dia*: John was put in prison *dia Herodias*, for the sake of Herodias (Mt. 14:3); the Pharisees transgressed the commandment of God *dia*, on account of, through, their tradition (Mt. 15:3); the disciples couldn't heal *dia*, for the sake of, their unbelief (Mt. 17:20); the Angels of the "little ones" *dia*, for their sakes, behold the face of the Father (Mt. 18:10); because the Pharisees pretended to be pious they would *dia*, on this account, receive greater condemnation (Mt. 23:14); the faithful will be persecuted *dia*, for the sake of, Christ's name (Mt. 24:9); *dia* the elect's sake, on their account, the days will be shortened (Mt. 24:22). "I thank my God *dia* (through) Jesus Christ my Lord" (Rom. 1:8) doesn't therefore necessarily mean that Paul prays to God 'through' the Lord Jesus as some kind of connecting tunnel; he thanks God on account of, for the sake of Christ. The very same Greek construction occurs a few chapters later: "Who shall deliver me...? I thank God, through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 7:24,25). He thanks God that his deliverance is possible on account of the Lord Jesus.

1:9 *The Gospel*- Frequently Paul uses the word "Gospel" as meaning 'the preaching of the Gospel'; the Gospel is in itself something which *must* be preached if we really have it (Rom. 1:1,9; 16:25; Phil. 1:5 (NIV),12; 2:22; 4:15; 1 Thess. 1:5; 3:2; 2 Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:8). The fact we have been given the Gospel is in itself an imperative to

preach it. “When I came to Troas for the Gospel of Christ” (2 Cor. 2:12 RV) has the ellipsis supplied in the AV: “to preach Christ’s Gospel” [although there is no Greek word in the original there matching ‘preach’] .

*Mention*- the idea of the Greek word is of remembrance. Paul was bringing others to remembrance before God. Paul is surely alluding to Is. 62:6,7: “On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth”. Paul saw the Gentile believers in Rome as spiritual Jerusalem. It’s not that God forgets and needs reminding, but rather that by our prayers for others we as it were focus His special attention upon them. Paul several times states that he is day and night, continually in prayer for others. He likely had the Isaiah passage in mind; his brethren in Christ were now for him the Jerusalem upon whom his hopes were set, rather than upon the physical city as had been the case in Judaism.

There is a mutuality between God and His children in prayer. We ‘make mention’ of things to God (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; 1 Thess. 1:2; Philemon 4). The Greek word used has the idea of bringing to mind, or remembering things to God. And He in response ‘remembers’ prayer when He answers it (Lk. 1:54,72; Acts 10:31 s.w.). What we bring to our mind in prayer, we bring to His mind. Those who pray for Jerusalem “keep not silence”- and therefore they give God “no rest” (Is. 62:6,7). But the Hebrew word for “keep not silence” and for ‘give no rest’ is one and the same! There’s a clear play on words here. If we give ourselves no rest in prayer, then we give God no rest. His Spirit or mind becomes our spirit or mind, and vice versa. And hence the telling comments in Romans 8 about our spirit / mind being mediated to God in prayer through Jesus, in His role as ‘the Lord the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:26,27). Yet God Himself had stated that He will not rest nor hold His peace for Zion’s sake (Is. 62:1). Yet His doing this is conditional upon His prayerful people not allowing Him to rest due to their prayers.

*Without ceasing...* *always* is a double repetition to emphasize how constant was Paul’s prayer for others. In case it seemed he was exaggerating, he calls God as a witness. His prayerfulness- the hours spent on his knees and the amount of mental energy in daily life- was amazing, and inspirational.

1:10 *Prosperous journey*- Realize that prayer may be answered in totally unexpected ways. Paul prayed that he would have "a prosperous journey" in coming to see the Romans (Rom. 1:10). Little could he have realized, sitting in Corinth as he wrote, that the answer would involve many months of imprisonment in Jerusalem, a shipwreck that lead to an ecclesia in Malta... and so much other grief. But from God's viewpoint, the prayer was answered. See on Rom. 1:14.

*The will of God*- Paul felt that his prayers could influence or at least engage with God's will; he prayed that he might at some time [Gk.] be helped by God on the road [AV "have a prosperous journey"] to visit the Roman believer. He asks this not 'If it be God's will' but he asks this might be so *en* or in the will of God. He didn't see God's will as something to be passively accepted but rather engaged with in prayer.

1:11 Paul so longed (the Greek is very intense, s.w. "lust") to see the Romans so that he could give them some spiritual gift. Why was his physical presence so necessary in order to give this gift? Perhaps he refers to a literal laying on of hands which would've been necessary to impart the Spirit gifts? But that gift was so that they might be "established", confirmed and set in their way. Was there, therefore, a gift of spiritual confirmation which could only be given by the literal physical presence of Paul? Or was the miraculous gift he intended to impart intended to be a part of establishing them as group?

1:12 *That is*- Some manuscripts add "However". Paul didn't want it to appear that he was viewing himself as superior to them in imparting a spiritual gift to them, so he goes on to speak of how spiritual strengthening is a mutual experience in which he also would benefit from them.

*Mutual faith* seems to suggest that their strength of faith would affect Paul's faith and his faith would affect theirs. Hence the value of positive spiritual fellowship in Christ.

1:13 *Hindered* s.w. 'forbid' in Acts 16:6, where he was forbidden to preach in Asia. It seems Paul often worked against situations where He was forbidden to go somewhere- he still preached in Asia, still went up to Jerusalem, and still insisted on going to Rome. See on Rom. 1:15.

1:14 Paul had a debt to preach to all men (Rom. 1:14). But a debt implies he had been given something; and it was not from "all men",

but rather from Christ. Because the Lord gave us the riches of His self-sacrifice, we thereby are indebted *to Him*; and yet this debt has been transmuted into a debt to preach to all humanity. Reflection upon His cross should elicit in us too an upwelling of pure gratitude towards Him, a Christ-centeredness, an awkwardness as we realise that this Man loved us more than we love Him... and yet within our sense of debt to Him, of ineffable, unpayable debt, of real debt, a debt infinite and never to be forgotten, we will have the basis for personal response to Him as a person, to a knowing of Him and a loving of Him, and a serving of Him in response. If we feel and know this, we cannot but preach the cross of Christ. In Rom. 1:14 Paul speaks of his “debt” to preach to both “Greeks and Barbarians” as the reason for his planned trip to Rome- for in that city there was the widest collection of “Greeks and Barbarians”. And yet he later speaks of our ‘debt’ [Gk.] to love one another (Rom. 13:8). The debt of love that we feel on reflecting upon our unpayable debt to the Father and Son is partly an unending ‘debt’ to lovingly share the Gospel of grace with others, to forgive the ‘debts’ of others’ sins against us. We have a debt to preach to the world; we are their debtors, and yet this isn’t how we often see it (Rom. 1:14). Time and again we commit sins of omission here.

*Barbarians*- Paul felt a debt to preach to them, the total savages [from his perspective]. And so on the way to Rome, God arranged for him to be shipwrecked on Malta, and thus meet and convert such Barbarians- for the word occurs only four other times in the NT and two of them are in describing the people whom Paul met on Malta (Acts 28:2,4). See on Rom. 1:10.

*Unwise*- the Greek word is elsewhere always translated “fools” in the AV, and has the idea of stupidity, foolishness. Paul the intellectual felt a debt to preach to those who would have exasperated and irritated him in normal life.

1:15 *As much as is in me*- a window into the totality of Paul’s desire to spread the Gospel and upbuild the believers. But the phrase could also indicate an obsession with going to Rome, as was noted by Agrippa (Acts 26:32). See on Rom. 1:13.

*To you*- the “you” in the context is the believers in Rome. Paul wanted to build them up in their faith on the basis of the preaching of the basic doctrines of the Gospel. Thus there is a special emphasis in this letter on the implications of basic doctrine, as explained in our introduction to the letter on Romans 1:1.

1:16 Paul knew that his salvation partly depended upon not being ashamed of Christ's words before men; hence his frequent self-examination concerning whether he was witnessing as he should. Thus when he declares that he is not ashamed of the Gospel, he is expressing his certainty of salvation; he is implying that therefore Christ will not be ashamed of him at the judgment (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:8,12,16 = Mk. 8:38). When Paul warns Timothy not to be ashamed of the Gospel, he is therefore exhorting him by his own example (Rom. 1:16 s.w. 2 Tim. 1:8,12). Note the theme of not being ashamed in 2 Tim. 1:8,12,16.

The doctrines of the Gospel are power to all those who have already believed. Paul was going to Rome to visit the believers, and wanted to upbuild them by discussing the doctrines of the Gospel with them (1:15).

1:17- see on Rom. 4:13.

Having spoken of how the faith of the Romans is spoken of throughout the "world", Paul goes on to comment that the preaching of the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God "from faith to faith", or "by faith unto faith" (Rom. 1:17 RV). The righteousness of God is surely revealed in human examples rather than in any amount of words. Could Paul not be meaning that the faith of one believer will induce faith in others, and in this sense the Gospel is a force that if properly believed ought to be spreading faith world-wide? This means that spreading our faith is part and parcel of believing the Gospel. Whatever, there is here clearly inculcated the idea of an upward spiral of spirituality- from faith unto [yet more] faith. Faith, like unbelief, is self confirming.

*A righteousness of God*- a kind of righteousness which is given from God, given by Him; and Paul will go on to explain that is "of God", given from Him to us, by our faith in Him and in the simple fact that He has indeed given us this gift in Christ.

*The just shall live by faith*- the quotation from Hab. 2:4 is in the context of human pride: "Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith". Paul is interpreting this verse as talking about faith in righteousness being imputed to us, which leads to us being just or justified before God. The practical result of this is humility- for we realize through this process that we have absolutely nothing to be "puffed up" about. Our uprightness isn't because of our own works but because of God's righteousness being imputed to us by grace through faith.

1:18 *The Gospel*- Paul could say that "the preaching of the cross is (unto us which are saved) the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). Not 'it was



when we were baptized'; the power of that basic Gospel lasts all our lives. To the Romans likewise: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ (i.e. I don't apologize for preaching the same old things): for it is the power of God unto salvation... for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith (i.e. faith gets built up and up by that basic Gospel)" (Rom. 1:18). The Galatians needed to keep on 'obeying the Truth' as they had done at baptism (Gal. 3:1); conversion is an ever ongoing process (cp. Lk. 22:32). It is "the faith which is in Christ", the basic Gospel, which progressively opens up the Scriptures and enables them to make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).

*Is revealed-* it will be revealed from Heaven at the Lord's return, and yet in a sense, judgment is now, God's feelings about sin aren't restrained or passive until judgment day, they are revealed even now.

*Who hold the truth-* The point has been made that the Greek word for "hold" can mean 'to hold down' in the sense of repressing the Truth. But apart from the fact that Truth can ultimately never be held down, the word does carry the possible meaning of holding fast, possessing, retaining, and is translated like this in places. It could be that there were some in the Roman ecclesia who did indeed possess the Truth, but did so in unrighteousness- and thus God's wrath was especially against such people. This would fit in with the impression we have from the other NT letters, including those of the Lord Jesus to the churches in Revelation, that there was serious, gross misbehaviour going on in the early churches- and Rome would be no exception. This group of people were those to whom God had shown the truth about Himself (1:19). The following verses go on to allude to Israel's perversions in the wilderness- and they were a people who knew God rather than ignorant Gentiles. This group know God but don't glorify Him (1:21).

If we insist on understanding 'hold' as meaning 'hold down the [conscience of] the truth' on account of their unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18 Gk.), we can connect this with the statement that when this group come to know God, they darken their foolish hearts (1:21). And so it was with the preaching of the Gospel in Acts. Those who heard it were pricked in their conscience: some responded by wanting to kill the preachers (Acts 5:33; 7:54); others followed their conscience and accepted baptism (Acts 2:37). We too have our hearts pricked by the Gospel- and we either effectively shut up the preaching, or respond.

1:19 *That which may be known-* Gk. *gnostos*. This may be a strike at incipient Gnosticism; for Paul says that such knowledge, such *gnosis*, is showed to people *by God*. There are only some things which God makes known to us about Himself; we do not have the total truth about

God, we see but parts of His ways and hear only a little portion of Him (Job 26:14). Our perception and definition of “the truth” needs to bear this in mind. Absolute truth claims aren’t simply ignorant, they lead to all manner of relationship breakdown, arrogance and deformation of spirituality both in ourselves and others.

1:20 *Invisible things... are clearly seen*- a paradox, seeing the invisible. Such vision is only by faith. In the context, Paul is referring to those responsible to God. They are those who ‘see’ by faith, they are therefore inexcusable. One can have faith, even the faith that sees the invisible, and yet still ‘not get it’. See on Rom. 8:19.

*Things that are made.* The translation here is difficult. The invisible things of God are clearly seen in the things He makes- but the only other usage of the Greek word is in Eph. 2:10: “We are His *workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus”. The idea could be that the things of God are made visible, the abstract things of His power, personality and Name are made concrete and tangible- in us His people. We are living witnesses to His power and Divinity.

*Without excuse*- a legal term. The court of Divine judgment is sitting right now, and we who are His people are without excuse for our sin. Paul is building up slowly towards the crescendo of presenting us all as serious, inexcusable sinners, who can be saved by grace alone.

1:21 Only those who ‘know God’ have the potential to give Him glory and true thanks; but the problem is that some can know God and yet not go forward from that point to glorify God. Knowledge of God isn’t therefore an academic matter in itself; it leads on to gratitude towards Him and glory of Him.

Fundamentally praise is mental appreciation of Yahweh's Name, seeing His characteristics expressed in all things around us, e.g. food, weather, situations in life etc. Knowledge of God (and this doesn't *only* refer to abstract doctrine, but to an awareness of how He works and expresses Himself in our lives) is therefore proportionate to the quality of our praise (Rom. 1:21).

*Imaginations*- Gk. *dialogismos*. Their internal dialogues with themselves, the internal self, the mind at its deepest and most personal level, became vain- when the true knowledge of God should have made them so much more dynamic, purposeful and productive. The focus of the Bible is so often upon the ‘heart’, the most intimate and internal thought processes.

The foolish heart of Israel was darkened / blinded, the Greek implies (Rom. 1:21). God gave them a mind which wanted to practice homosexuality and lesbianism (v.28), and therefore they received a recompense appropriate to the delusion which they had been given (v. 27 Gk.) . Note that their punishment was to be given and encouraged in homosexual tendencies (diseases like AIDS are the result of upsetting nature's balance rather than the recompense spoken of in Romans 1). Christian men in the first century gave themselves over to sexual immorality (Eph. 4:19), and therefore God "gave them over to a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:24,26,28). "Blind yourselves and be blind", God angrily remonstrated with Israel; yet God had closed their eyes, confirming them in the decision for blindness which they had taken themselves (Is. 29:9,10 RVmg.). Later in Romans, Paul speaks of the Jews as the ones whose hearts were darkened (Rom. 11:10).

1:22 *Became fools*- "Became" implies that this is all talking about the people of God, who once were wise, but *became* fools. S.w. Mt. 5:13 about the salt "which loses its taste", lit. 'becomes foolish'. However it is God who makes worldly wise people foolish (1 Cor. 1:20 s.w.), just as in v. 21 it is God who darkens eyes. There's a downward spiral, in which God is active and the dynamic within it.

1:23- see on Rom. 5:12.

Again a paradox is presented- the incorruptible, unchangeable God is changed by mere men. Perhaps the point is that the glory of God, the extent to and form in which He is glorified, is to some extent in our hands. We can in this sense deface His image by the distorted reflection of it which we give. Note how they turned the image of God into the image of man; whereas the Lord Jesus, as a man, became in the image of God (Phil. 2:7). The implication from Paul's reasoning is that whatever we worship becomes God to us, and therefore we have re-cast God into that image. In a world of obsessions, we are to 'worship' God alone, and not reduce Him to the petty things which people waste their devotions upon.

The commands concerning Israel's behaviour after they had settled in the land form a large chunk of the Mosaic Law, and thus these were only relevant to the younger generation and the Levites who were to enter the land of promise (note how only those who were numbered and over 20 at the time of leaving Egypt were barred from the land; the Levites were not numbered). This younger generation were in sharp contrast to those aged over 20 at the Exodus. The extent of spiritual despair and apostasy amongst the condemned generation cannot be overstated. They neglected the circumcision of the children born to

them then (Josh. 5:5,6), thus showing their rejection of the Abrahamic covenant. There is good reason to believe that Romans 1 is a description of Israel in the wilderness; notice the past tenses there. Rom. 1:23 charges them with changing "the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like... to fourfooted beasts, and creeping things", clearly alluding to Ps. 106:20 concerning how Israel in the wilderness "Changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass" by making the golden calf. The effective atheism of Rom.1 is matched by Ps. 106:21 "They forgot God their saviour". The long catalogue of Israel's wilderness sins in Ps. 106 is similar to that in Rom.1. "Full of envy" (Rom. 1:29) corresponds to them envying Moses (Ps. 106:16), "whisperers" (Rom. 1:29) to "murmurers" (Ps. 106:25), and "inventors of evil things" (Rom.1:30) to God being angered with "their inventions" of false gods (Ps. 106:29). Because of this "God gave them up" to continue in their sexual perversion and bitterness with each other even to the extent of murder (Rom. 1:27,29). A rabble of about 2 million people living in moral anarchy with little law and order, driven on in their lust by the knowledge that God had rejected them is surely a frightening thing to imagine. The emphasis on sexual sin in Rom.1 is paralleled by 1 Cor. 10 stressing the frequent failure of Israel in the wilderness in this regard. Against such an evil and God forsaking background that young generation rebelled, to become one of the most faithful groups of Israelites in their history. As such they set a glorious example to the youth of today in rebelling against a world that mocks any form of true spirituality.

1:24 *Gave them up*- s.w. Acts 7:42, where God turned from Israel because of their apostasy and "gave them up" to worship idols. Again, God works with His sinful people by propelling them in a downwards spiral. In this context He did this by giving them over to their own sexual lusts, which resulted in their dishonouring their own bodies. God can confirm people in their sexual lusting; and by implication, He can also hold people back. The perversions of homosexuality spoken of in v. 26 are all this come to its ultimate term- when people are made to feel that they were 'born gay'. Unbridled sexual lust leads to self harm, a sin against self, in the sense that such behaviour is a dishonouring [Gk.: shaming, despising] of one's own body. This suggests that the body naturally has honour- Paul is attacking the view that the body is evil and to be despised, that God is angry with human flesh as flesh. We take that glory and honour away from our bodies by sexual misbehaviour. Paul uses the Greek word for 'dishonour' only once more in Romans, in 2:23, where he says that sin is a dishonouring *of God*. To dishonor ourselves, our own body, is to dishonor God. For we

are made in His image and likeness. Lack of self respect, an incorrect understanding and perception of who we are, is what so often leads us to sin.

1:25 *Changed*- Gk. 'exchanged'. These people once held God's Truth, but exchanged it for a lie. The same word occurs in 1:26, where we read that women changed / exchanged "the natural use into that which is against nature". Sexual sin, not least lesbianism, is a lie. The born gay argument, along with the argument that we can sexually sin and it's all going to be OK, is one of the greatest lies.

*The creation [created thing]*- the context of this verse, both before and after, speaks in a sexual context. The 'created thing' may refer to the human body- for worshipping the created thing is parallel with dishonouring the human body in v. 24. Praise and worship should be directed ultimately to God; sexual immorality seeks to break the connection between God and the human body, the awareness that the human being is made in the image of God. Treating people merely as bodies is to sever them [in our minds] from their connection to God. By perceiving their connection to God, we will never treat humans as merely bodies; nor will we perceive ourselves in that way either. The Creator is to be blessed by us for ever- and so we should start living like that now, rather than praising things He has created for what they are in themselves.

1:26 *Vile*- s.w. 'dishonour', 1:24. The dishonouring of bodies by homosexuality and sexual immorality is a result of allowing 'dishonourable' lusts / thoughts to be worked out in practice; the performing of mental fantasy in the flesh. Paul teaches that God propels those who wish to give free reign to their fantasies- He gives them over to their own lusts. Paul is using the example of homosexuality as part of a build up to a crescendo of demonstrating the depth of human depravity, and the subsequent depth of God's grace. He demonstrates the seriousness of human sin by showing that God pushes people downwards in a downward spiral of lust, if this is what they themselves truly wish- and Paul cites homosexualities as the parade example of this, whereby God so confirms sinners in their lusts that they even feel that what is truly "against nature" is in fact normal and natural.

These things are "against nature" (1:26); it is therefore impossible that by 'nature' some people are born with these "vile affections". "Nature" is used in Romans in the sense of "God's creative order". It would be inappropriate and even cruel of God to create men with natural desires and then tell them that these are in fact not natural, and He holds them guilty for having them. "Nature" (Gk. *physis*) was used in

contemporary Greek in the context of the God-designed, natural intention for heterosexual relationships; Strong suggests it refers to "natural production (lineal descent)"- Paul may be referring to how homosexuals can't reproduce. Plutarch speaks of "union contrary to *nature*"; Josephus comments that "The Law recognizes no sexual connections except for the *natural* union of man and wife". *Physis* is rendered "by birth" in Gal. 2:15 RSV. The homosexual is behaving "against nature", against the way in which he was born. Seeing Paul makes no distinction between different types of homosexuality, it is clear that all homosexuality is "against nature", against the order of our birth and the Genesis creation. This disallows the speculation that some people are born homosexual 'by nature'. If we accept this, we *must* see in Rom. 1 a distinction between different kinds of homosexuality. And yet this distinction is totally absent. It makes an interesting study to observe how gay 'Christians' wriggle on the hook of Romans 1. Their explanations are so mutually contradictory and logically flawed that it is evident that they are 'getting round' and 'explaining away' a passage which simply flattens their position. Thus some of them claim that in Romans 1 Paul is only condemning homosexual prostitution, because he was ignorant of any other kind of homosexuality. This implies that had Paul known of the concept of homosexual orientation, he would have written differently. This is a denial of Paul's inspiration, and as we demonstrated in the first section of this study, to reject the inspiration of the Bible is effectively a rejection of God. On the other hand, it has been claimed that "nature" in Rom. 1 refers to natural orientation, and what Paul is saying is that it is wrong for born homosexuals to change to heterosexism, and vice versa. However, this is assuming that Paul and the Bible are aware of the notion of homosexual orientation. In this case, the other Bible passages which condemn homosexuality outright do so in the full knowledge of the supposed 'fact' that some are born homosexual, and yet they make no reference to this fact (even if it is granted that Romans 1 does). If this were the case, these people are condemned for who they are by birth. The whole situation would then be morally and logically fallacious. We just have to accept that there can be no getting round the fact that the Bible does not recognize the concept of being 'born gay'. Homosexuals are behaving "against nature", against God's intended order at creation, and are thereby perverts of His way. The Greek *para* ("against") means just that. Thus Paul's accusers complain that he "persuadeth men to worship God *contrary* (para) to the law" (Acts 18:13); false teachers create divisions "*contrary* (para) to the doctrine which ye have learned" (Rom. 16:17).

1:27 Paul speaks of how sinful behaviour ends up in people doing things ‘contrary to nature’; and yet he uses a similar phrase to describe how being ‘grafted in’ to the true hope of Israel, with all it implies in practice, is likewise “contrary to nature” (Rom. 1:26,27 cp. 11:24). We walk against the wind, go against the grain, one way or the other in this life. And, cynically speaking, it may as well be for the Lord’s cause than for the flesh. See on Mt. 3:11.

The recompense refers not to AIDS but to God’s confirming of homosexuals in their sin to the extent that they believe it is natural and somehow coded into their bodies.

*Error-* s.w. deception. Homosexual sin is therefore the result of deception. Earlier Paul has said that God has given over homosexuals to their own lusts, to the point they believe that their sin is natural; here he says that homosexuals have been deceived. The deception is also by God, just as He sends “strong delusion” [s.w. “error”] upon those who don’t love the Truth, so that they believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:11).

1:28- see on Rom. 1:21.

*Even as-* the context is the last clause of 1:27, that homosexuality is an appropriate punishment for the sin of homosexual lust. Paul here repeats that point- that God gave them over to that kind of “reprobate mind”. That God ‘gave them’ this mindset is laboured three times (1:24,26,28).

*Retain... in their knowledge-* same Greek words only in Rom. 10:2, where Paul says that Israel do not hold or retain the knowledge of God. So here in 1:28 Paul seems to have his mind on Israel again, who didn’t any longer retain or hold God in their knowledge, and so their zeal became not according to knowledge (10:2). Of course the Jews would’ve insisted that they *were* mindful of God, they didn’t become atheists, far from it. But God wasn’t held in their knowledge, He wasn’t the defining reality in their thinking. *Retain* is the Greek word ‘echo’- our minds should be an echo of God’s.

Even in this life, those who will be rejected have “a reprobate mind” (Rom. 1:28)- they have the mind of the rejected, the unaccepted [this is how the Greek word is used in every other occurrence in the NT]. The mindset the rejected have in that awful day, is the mindset which they have now. This is how important our thinking is. Our thoughts, the thoughts of yesterday and today and tomorrow, will either accuse or excuse us in the last day, when God shall judge us according to our “secrets”, our inner thinking (Rom. 2:15,16).

The context of Rom. 1 is the power of the Gospel. Paul's discussion of homosexuality is part of his demonstration that there is an antithesis to Gospel power; namely, the power of sin. He develops this theme later in chapters 7 and 8, where he shows that the compulsive, ever growing power of sin in the unbeliever or apostate is the antithesis of the power of the Spirit at work in the faithful believer. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce this theme, and Paul is citing homosexuality as an example of the power of sin at work within men, as the antithesis to the power of the Gospel. He makes the same point in 1 Tim. 1:9-11. Paul argues that homosexual desire is God's punishment for men's sinful lusts. The point is being repeated at least three times, such is the emphasis:

<b>What men did</b>	<b>What God did</b>
Thought they were wise	Made them fools
"Became vain in their imaginations"	Darkened their foolish heart (1:21)
Had evil "lusts of their own hearts"	<i>Through</i> these lusts God gave them over to dishonouring their bodies between themselves
Changed God's truth (i.e. His word, Jn. 17:17) into a lie	Gave them vile affections which resulted in them committing homosexual acts
They refused to acknowledge the claims of God (Rom. 1:28 AVmg.)	God gave them a mind "void of judgment" between right and wrong (Rom. 1:28 AVmg.), so that they committed homosexual acts
Homosexually lusted for each other	Gave them an appropriate punishment for their error, i.e. homosexual desire.

It is clear from all this that God does something to the minds of men who justify homosexual lust; He makes them lust even more, and they



therefore commit homosexual acts, and He then makes them want even more of such gratification. This is a classic example of the downward spiral an apostate believer enters; God pushes such people into ever increasing confirmation in their evil way. The fact homosexuals feel convinced they were born like it is an example of God confirming these people in their desires. It must be noted that the text of Rom. 1 is largely concerned with attitudes of mind; people have homosexual lust in their minds, and God confirms this by giving them a homosexual mindset. This shows that it is not enough to simply abstain from homosexual acts; the homosexual mindset is in itself sinful. "The lusts of their own hearts" is paralleled with "to dishonour their own bodies"; "vile affections" with lesbian *acts*; "a reprobate mind" with *doing* those things which are abhorrent. For this reason alone it is impossible to accept the reasoning of Rom. 1 and also believe that some people are created by God constitutionally homosexual, with these "vile affections" as part of their natural fabric. It has been pointed out by many commentators that Paul in Rom. 1 is alluding to passages in the Wisdom of Solomon; and those passages are saying that God confirms men in the unrighteous desires they have chosen to follow. God often punishes men by turning them over to their sin completely. For example: "In return for their foolish and wicked thoughts which led them astray to worship irrational animals... thou didst send upon them a multitude of irrational creatures, that they might learn that one is punished by the very things in which he sins... therefore those who lived unrighteously thou didst torment through their own abominations" (Wisdom 11:15,16; 12:23). Rom. 1:29-31 associates homosexuality with a descending spiral of all sorts of other sins: envy, murder, inventors of evil things etc. This confirms that homosexuality is part of a general picture of sinfulness which is in opposition to the system of righteousness developed by the Gospel.

1:29 *Being filled-* by God.

*Murder-* one can only be filled with murder if we understand murder here as an attitude of mind, in the sense of 1 Jn. 3:15- hating our brother is murder. The context is speaking of how God is doing things to the *mind*, the mental attitude, of sinners.

The extent of spiritual despair, despondency and apostasy amongst the condemned generation cannot be overstated. They neglected the circumcision of their children (Josh. 5:5,6), showing their rejection of the Abrahamic covenant with them. There is good reason to think that Rom. 1 is a description of Israel in the wilderness. Rom. 1:23 accuses

them of changing “the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to... fourfooted beasts, and creeping things”, clearly alluding to Ps. 106:29 concerning how Israel in the wilderness “changed their glory (i.e. God) into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass” by making the golden calf. The effective atheism of Rom. 1 is matched by Ps. 106:21: “They forgot God their saviour”. The long catalogue of Israel's wilderness sins in Ps. 106 is similar to that in Rom. 1. “Full of envy” (Rom. 1:29) corresponds to them envying Moses (Ps. 106:16), “whisperers” (Rom. 1:29) to “murmurers” (Ps. 106:25), “inventors of evil things” (Rom. 1:30) to God being angered with “their inventions” of false gods (Ps. 106:29). Because of this “God gave them up” to continue in their sexual perversion and bitterness with each other, even to the extent of murder (Rom. 1:27,29). They were a rabble of about 2 million people living in moral anarchy, driven on in their lust by the knowledge that God had rejected them. The children of that generation who later turned out faithful- indeed the generation that settled Canaan were perhaps the most faithful generation in Israel's history- must have had to violently rebel against the attitude of the world and older generation around them.

1:30 *inventors*- the mind is creative, inventive, and must be channeled positively rather than towards the invention or creation of sinful things. Note that the origin or creation of evil in the sense of sin is within the human being, not in some cosmic Satan figure.

*Disobedient to parents*- this may appear a lesser sin compared to those which surround it. But Paul several times does this- listing what some would consider an apparently minor sin within a list of what some would consider major sins- to demonstrate that the apparently minor sin is indeed that serious.

1:31 *Without understanding* translates the Greek *asunetos*; “covenant breakers” translates *asunthetos*. The alliteration between the words is common in the Bible, and suggests that the Bible was recorded in such a way that it could be easily memorized by the initial hearers- for the majority of believers over history have been illiterate.

“Covenant breakers” and “without natural affection” may be understandable in a moral, sexual context. For in 1:27 Paul has written of homosexuality as a leaving of the natural intent of the body.

“Implacable”, Gk. ‘without [accepting a] libation’ suggests that unforgiveness, or being “unmerciful”, is as bad as all manner of major sexual sin listed in the same list. Yet so often those sins remain unforgiven by those who consider themselves more spiritual than those

who fail in such areas; yet such unforgiveness is of the same category as the grossest moral failure. Gk. 'without an offering', i.e. unwilling to accept a sacrifice in order to grant peace. This is a clear allusion to what God does for us; indeed most of the terms in v.31 are the very opposite of what God does in the atonement. His reconciliation of us must be the basis for our lives and mental attitudes.

*1:32 Who knowing-* the relevance of this verse is to those who know God's judgments, those who are responsible to Him. Those described in Rom. 1:32 know the judgment of God; they know it will come. But they have a mind "void of [an awareness of] judgment" (Rom. 1:28 AVmg.). We can know, know it all. But live with a mind and heart void of it. Tit. 1:16 AVmg. uses the same word to describe those who "profess that they know God" but are "void of judgment". We can know Him, but have no real personal sense of judgment to come. These are sobering thoughts.

*Commit-* Gk. keep on practicing, in an ongoing way.

*Such things-* some of the "things" listed in the preceding verses might appear to some to be minor sins. But they are "worthy of death" if we live in them. We need to think through that list in 1:29-31.

Disobedience to parents, lacking "natural affection", not being faithful to a covenant, implacable, not showing mercy- any one of those "things" if lived in as a way of life is "worthy of death". Refusing to fellowship one's brethren, refusing to forgive, ignoring elderly parents... is "worthy of death".

*Have pleasure in-* Gk. 'to assent to', 'to feel gratified with'. We can so easily 'feel gratified with' those who commit those sins through vicariously participating in them through watching and reading of them, and psychologically feeling gratified by the sin. Paul seems to be speaking here directly to the online entertainment generation... Paul may have written this with his memory upon how when Stephen had been stoned, he had stood there looking on and "consenting" with the murder, stone by stone- without throwing a single stone himself (s.w. twice, Acts 8:1; 22:20).

Paul warned the Romans that those who "have pleasure" in (Gk. 'to feel gratified with') sinful people will be punished just as much as those who commit the sins (Rom. 1:32). But he uses the very word used for his own 'consenting' unto the death of Stephen; standing there in consent, although not throwing a stone (Acts 8:1; 22:20). He realized that only by grace had that major sin of his been forgiven; and in that spirit of humility and self-perception of himself, as a serious sinner

saved by grace alone, did he appeal to his brethren to consider their ways. 'Feeling gratified with' such sins as are in this list is what the entertainment industry is so full of. We can't watch, read and listen to this kind of thing by choice without in some sense being vicariously involved in it- and this seems to be exactly what Paul has in mind when he warns that those who feel gratified in those sins shall share in their judgment. This is a sober warning, relevant, powerful and cutting to our generation far more than any other. For given the internet and media, we can so easily feel gratified in others' sins.

Paul reels off an awful list of sins in Romans 1, and builds up to a crescendo at the end of the passage. We're left waiting, with dropped jaws, for him to come out with some yet more awful sin. And Paul fulfils that expectation by listing the sin of having pleasure in those who commit sin (Rom. 1:32). Immediately we who are not grossly perverted and immoral are shaken from our seats. For in our generation like no other, one can secretly view sin, in movies, novels and on the internet, and vicariously get involved with it whilst not 'doing it' with our own bodies. This sin really is serious. It tops and caps and concludes the list of awful sins. And yet the whole section goes on to talk about the danger of condemning others for such sins (2:1). It could be that Paul is suggesting that by condemning others, eagerly exploring their sins in order to pass condemnation upon them, we are thereby gratifying ourselves through vicarious involvement in those very sins. In this case, the psychology presented would've been 2000 years ahead of its time.

Those described in Rom. 1:32 know the judgment of God; they know it will come. But they have a mind "void of [an awareness of] judgment" (Rom. 1:28 AVmg.). We can know, know it all. But live with a mind and heart void of it. Tit. 1:16 AVmg. uses the same word to describe those who "profess that they know God" but are "void of judgment". We can know Him, but have no real personal sense of judgment to come. These are sobering thoughts.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 2

### *The just judgment of God*

Therefore you are without excuse, O man, whoever you are that judge; for wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself! For you that judge practice the same things. 2 And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those that practice such things. 3 And do you think (O man who judges those that practice such things and yet you do the same) that you shall escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But after your hardness and impenitent heart you treasure up for yourself anger in the day of anger and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who will render to every man according to his works. 7 To them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and incorruption- eternal life. 8 But to them that are factious and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, anger and indignation- 9 tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that works evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek. 10 But glory and honour and peace to every man that works good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

11 For there is no respect of persons with God. 12 For as many as have sinned outside of law shall also perish without the law; and as many as have sinned under the law shall be judged by the law. 13 For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. 14 For when Gentiles that do not have the law, do by nature the things of the law, these not having the law, are the law to themselves- 15 in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them 16 in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ.

### *The hypocrisy of the Jews*

17 But if you bear the name of a Jew and rely upon the law and boast in God, 18 and know His will and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, 19 and are confident you yourself are a guide of the blind, a light to those that are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having in the law the form of knowledge and of the truth- 21 you therefore that teach another, don't you teach yourself? You that preach a man should not steal, do you steal? 22 You that say a man should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You that dread idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the law actually dishonour God through your transgression of the law. 24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, even as

it is written.

25 For circumcision indeed profits, if you be a doer of the law; but if you be a transgressor of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 If therefore the uncircumcision keep the ordinances of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? 27 And shall not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge you- who with the letter and circumcision are a transgressor of the law? 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God.

2:1 *Inexcusable*- s.w. only in Rom. 1:20, where lesbians and homosexuals are described as “without excuse”, inexcusable. The whole point is that those who are judgmental, in the sense of condemning ahead of time, are in the same category. The point is very powerful and telling. Perhaps Paul purposefully talks about lesbianism in Romans 1 because he knows it will shock and encourage his readers to condemn lesbians etc., and thus he has set them up for ‘condemnation’. Remember that Paul isn’t merely playing mind games with his readership- he’s building us up to a crescendo of conviction of sinfulness, which will form the backdrop for the good news of God’s amazing grace; and this, rather than ranting about sin for the sake of it, is the theme of Romans. “Inexcusable” is a Greek legal term, without defence / legal answer to make. As if whenever we judge others, we are ourselves standing condemned and speechless at the judgment seat of God. The rejected in the last day will be speechless, without any legal answer to make (Mt. 22:12). If we judge others, then we right now are condemning ourselves, speechless and ashamed before the Divine judgment seat. In this sense “wherein”, or insofar as, we judge others- we condemn ourselves. We “do the same things”, not literally, but insofar as by being judgmental or unmerciful (the context is Rom. 1:31), we are sinning in the same category of mortal sins which they are; for judgmentalism is as bad as the list of major moral failures Paul has been listing at the end of Romans 1.

*O man*- Paul is writing with at least some reference to himself personally. To be judgmental and feel spiritually superior to others would’ve been frequent temptations for him. Paul often writes assuming his readers’ response being in a certain way. Here he assumes that having read his talk of lesbianism and a whole catena of other sins in 1:29-31, that we will be shaking our heads and judging those sins.

But here in 2:1 he plays on that expected response from us [“Therefore...” is without referent unless it is to our assumed response to 1:29-31] and basically says: “Thou art the man!”. He confidently asserts that we who judge [in the sense of condemn] are doing the same things. He may mean that we all at times commit the sins of 1:29-31 and so are guilty. Or he may be saying that the very act of judging / condemning others is as bad as ‘doing those same things’. We must of course ‘judge’ in the sense of having an opinion; but to condemn people in the way that only God can is just as bad as lesbianism or whatever other sin in 1:27-31 we may wish to condemn.

*Wherein you judge*- the implication could be that if you condemn a person for a sin [in the sense of prejudging God’s personal condemnation of them], then you are counted as having performed the very sin which you so despise and condemn.

*Condemn yourself*- By condemning others we are as it were playing judge, and whilst at it, we’re reading out our own sentence of condemnation. The practical result of all this must be faced- there will, presumably, be some otherwise good living, upright Christian folk who come to the day of judgment and are condemned to darkness and gnashing of teeth simply because they in their brief lifetimes condemned some of the other sinners who are with them thrown out into condemnation. It may appear bizarre- hardened sinners like lifetime perverts and lesbians are there on the left hand side of the judgment seat along with the upright, righteous pillars of church life who never smoked, got drunk, had a telly or broke the speed limit. But they condemned their sinful brethren, those with whom they share condemnation. And that’s why they are there. This reality needs far more than some passing grunt of approval or sober nod of the head from us as we consider it. All this is not to say that we in this life can’t tell right from wrong- that’s the point of v. 2. We are indeed sure of what the judgment of God is about these gross sins, but we are sure of what *God’s* judgment is- and that, surely, is where the emphasis should be: “the judgment of *God*”.

We *know* right now the principles on which God will judge us. We can judge what is acceptable to the Lord (Eph. 5:10- judgment day language). We can judge / discern those things which are excellent in His eyes (Phil. 1:10). We are *sure* of what the judgment of God is going to be against persistent sinners (Rom. 2:2); and yet if we condemn them, we can be equally sure that even now we are condemned of ourselves, seeing that if we condemn, we will be

likewise (Rom. 2:1). The wrath of God is right now revealed, constantly disclosed, against sin (Rom. 1:18).

It is difficult to read Rom. 2:1 without seeing an allusion to David's condemnation of the man who killed his neighbour's only sheep: "Thou art inexcusable, O man, *whosoever thou art* that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself". Surely Paul is saying that David's massive self-deception and hypocrisy over Bathsheba can all too easily be replicated in our experience.

2:2 *We are sure*- again, it is only the believer, the person who knows God's word, who is aware and certain of the judgment of God. We can be certain that judgmentalism, lack of mercy and all the moral sins in the list at the end of Romans 1 will all lead to condemnation; yet we still do them, especially the sin of condemning others. This is the paradox Paul is bringing out- that we can be sure, intellectually and spiritually persuaded, that sin [including judging and being unmerciful to others] will result in condemnation- but this doesn't seem to mean we stop doing them. This is all part of Paul's build up to the crescendo of conviction of human sinfulness which so urgently necessitates our acceptance of God's grace.

*Commit*- Gk. 'to practice continually', rather than occasional failure.

*Judgment... against them*- Language of the law court, whereby a judgment [the contents of the judgment, rather than the act of judgment; a noun rather than a verb] is read out *against* a person. The oft made distinction between the person and the sin doesn't seem Biblical- God's judgment is against persons, not abstractions. It is individuals and not concepts which come before God's judgment.

2:3 *Do you think...?* There is the strong sense in human nature that 'this won't happen to me, yes it will happen to most people who do that, but not to me'. This aspect of our nature is at its most acute when it comes to committing sin. Others will die, for sure, truly, definitely, for doing those things (2:2)- but I will not. No wonder the sin within us is at times described as 'the devil', a liar, a deceiver. Yet this whole process of thought is described here as a 'reckoning' [AV "thinkest...?"], a process of discussion with ourselves. But it all takes place deep in the subconscious; for we don't literally have this kind of conversation with ourselves. We see here how the Bible tackles sin at its root- deep in the heart, within the subconscious thought processes, rather than blaming some supernatural cosmic dragon. Such an explanation is utterly primitive and has no praxis, compared to the Biblical definition of sin and the devil.



*Does the same-* I suggested under 2:1 that this may refer to *effectively* doing the same, by condemning the individuals.

*Escape the judgment-* Gk. 'to flee'. The rejected will ultimately flee from God's presence at judgment day. Paul appears to be playing on that idea- they think they can run away from it, and in the end they shall run from it in condemnation. All the same, apart from this word play, Paul is highlighting the basic human tendency to think that 'It won't happen *to me*. I can do the same as *they* do, they may suffer the consequences of it, but in my case, I will not'. Paul is addressing himself to our deepest psyche and internal thought processes: "Do you think [*logizomai*, to reason out] this [within yourself], O man... ?". This sense that 'I in *my* case can get away with it and not pay the price' is especially pronounced in spiritual matters; the idea is that we can sin and not die because of it. The psychology of criminal behaviour has emphasized this facet of the human mind, but in fact we all have it.

The rejected going away into... (Mt. 25:46) is only a reflection of the position they themselves adopted in their lives. They thought that they could flee away from the judgments of God (Rom. 2:3 Gk.)- and so they will flee from His judgment seat, although so so unwillingly.

2:4 *Despises-* we can despise God's grace if we condemn others; for who are we to say that God in the end will not save the sinners of 1:26-31? By condemning others [which is the burden of 2:1-3] we are despising God's grace, limiting it, counting it as not very powerful nor wonderful. And by condemning others we fail to realize that God's limitless grace and goodness- the very grace we wish to limit by condemning others- is in fact leading us personally to repentance from the sins which will in their turn condemn us too.

*Forbearance-* Gk. self-restraint. God restrains Himself by His grace. Not condemning us is a struggle for Him, and we despise that characteristic of His, ignore and downplay His marvellous internal struggle, if we simply write people off as 'condemned'.

*Leads-* Gk. 'is leading you', continuous present- all the while we are despising His grace, thinking others can't possibly be saved by it, He by grace is trying to patiently lead us to repentance. The only other time in Romans the word is used is in Rom. 8:14, where we learn that all the children of God are "led by the spirit of God" [just as God leads, same word, His children unto glory, Heb. 2:10]. This leading is therefore specifically to repentance, to actual concrete change in our lives in specific areas, not just a general sense that we are 'led on the journey of life'. It's amazing that God tries to lead even the self-

righteous, proud and judgmental of others to repentance. In Rom. 8:14 we read that all God's true children are led of the Spirit. Here in Rom. 2:4 it is the goodness, the kindness, the grace of God which leads us- to the end point of repentance. We are being led somewhere- to change, not just led on some road to Wigan Pier, to nowhere, led for the sake of being led... a journey for the sake of a journey. It's common to speak of 'being on a journey', but the question is, are we arriving anywhere, are we coming to radical change, *metanoia*, or not?

*Repentance*- from being judgmental? For that is the context of 2:1-3.

The context of Paul's challenge about whether we despise God's rich grace is his plea for us not to be judgmental and unmerciful. If we consider our brethren condemned by God and refuse to show them mercy and sympathy, then we are despising God's goodness; we're saying that all the riches of His grace aren't enough to save that person. Thus our condemning of others is effectively a limiting and despising of God's saving grace. All the time we are despising God's grace like this, God's grace is leading [continuous present tense] *us* to repentance of the sins which shall condemn *us*. The implication is that focusing upon judging others results in little attention to ones own need for repentance. This would explain why those so publically judgmental of others are so often exposed in due course as having hypocritically harboured some secret vice or moral failure in their own lives. Psychologically, this situation develops because their focus is so upon the failures of others that they perceive "sin" to be something purely external to themselves.

Paul summarises his argument of Romans chapters 1 and 2 by saying that there he has accused / charged (in a legal sense) all men and women, Jews and Gentiles, of being "under [judgment for] sin" (Rom. 3:9 Gk.). With typically devastating logic, he has demonstrated the universal guilt of man. Twice he stresses that whoever we are, we are without excuse (1:20; 2:1). All men have a conscience which is dynamically equivalent to the specific knowledge of God's law; in this sense they are a "law unto themselves" (2:14- although this phrase is used in a different sense in modern English). "By nature" (Strong: 'native disposition, constitution') they have the same moral sense that God's law teaches. This is why human beings have an innate sense of right and wrong- it's why, e.g., there is protest at ethnic cleansing. God is understood / perceived by what He has created, namely our own bodies. But through, e.g., sexual perversion, man has distorted the image and glory of God which he was intended to be, and has worshipped the created body rather than the creator (1:20-23). Fashion,

adverts and power clothing all do this, as well as the present obsession with sexual expression. The Lord Himself taught that because we are in the image of God, therein lies an imperative to give our bodies to Him. The goodness of God can lead *all men* to repentance (Rom. 2:4). God has set a sense of the eternal in the human heart (Ecc. 3:11 AVmg.). An awareness of judgment is alive as a basic instinct in people. God is “not far from every one of us...forasmuch as we are [all] the offspring of God” (Acts 17:27-29- stated in a preaching context), being created in His image.

*2:5 Hardness-* Judging / condemning others is because of hardness of heart. *Hardness* implies that the mortal sin being spoken about is a hardness of heart, a condemning of others (2:1-3). Later in Romans, Paul associates hardness of heart with Pharaoh, who was in turn hardened by God in response to his own hardness.

*Impenitent-* Continuing impenitently condemning others’ impenitence is what will lead to our condemnation; for so long as we continue condemning, we are treasuring up condemnation to ourselves. The paradox is huge and crucially relevant. The wrath and indignation for which these people are condemned (2:8) is surely wrath and indignation against those whom they condemn, claiming to have the “wrath” of Divine condemnation against others, a wrath which only properly belongs to Him. God is leading people to repentance (2:4), but some remain impenitent. In this they fight against God. He leads people by His grace to repent of their judgmentalism and condemnation of others, but not all accept His leading.

*Treasures up wrath-* Every continuance in condemning others and being unmerciful is a treasuring up of condemnation in the last day, adding to it bit by bit. Each act of condemnation, each incident of rejecting others, is as it were heaping up a piece of condemnation for ourselves in the last day. Our life is a laying up of treasure against the day of judgment (Mt. 6:19,20). The Greek *orge* translated “wrath” is elsewhere translated ‘anger’, ‘indignation’. These are exactly the feelings of those who condemn others- anger and indignation. There is therefore a direct, proportionate correspondence between human condemnation, anger and indignation against the weakness of their brethren; and the anger, indignation and condemnation of God against those who condemn in this way. *Wrath... day of wrath-* your wrath with others now (2:8) is going to be related to God’s wrath against you at the last day. Again the implication is that it is because people have shown wrath, i.e. Divine condemnation, that they will suffer wrath in the day of wrath which is to come. The point is that the day of judgment is the

day of God's wrath, not ours; and the day for wrath is then, and not now. It will be "revealed" only then- not now. The emphasis is upon the judgment and wrath being "of *God*", then- and not of man, nor now in this life.

*Revelation of the righteous judgment*- the Greek means 'the verdict', the judgment given. This will not be decided upon at the last day- it has already been created in this life, and we have created it ourselves- for we are our own judges. What happens at the last day is that it is revealed. The day of judgment is a metaphor- a human court sits down to assess evidence and pass a verdict. This isn't the case with Divine judgment, as God knows the end from the beginning, and isn't passive nor unaware of human behavior and the reasons for it- all at the very time it occurs.

There are several allusions to Job in Romans, all of which confirm that Job is set up as symbolic of apostate Israel. A simple example is Elihu's description of Job as a hypocrite heaping up wrath (Job 36:13), which connects with Paul's description of the Jews as treasuring up unto themselves "wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom. 2:5).

2:6 *Who will render*- the emphasis is perhaps on "will", for Paul is addressing the subconscious mentality that we ourselves can escape judgment (see on 2:3). "Render" is the same word translated "to give account"- we shall "give account" at the day of judgment (Mt. 12:36; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 4:5), "render" [s.w.] to God the fruits of our lives (Mt. 21:41). So God's rendering of account to us is really our rendering of account to Him- we are our own judges, we are working out the verdict now by our attitudes and actions.

*Render*- 'to give account'. It would seem that in some sense, there will be a 'going through' of all our deeds, and an account given by God related to each of them. How this shall happen is unclear (e.g. through the past flooding before our eyes like a movie, which is frequently stopped for us to comment upon). But in some sense it will happen, in that not one human deed performed or thought by those responsible to Divine judgment will as it were slip away unnoticed. This isn't only sobering, but also comforting.

It is God who will render to each person their account- therefore we should not sit as judges (the context of 2:1).

The judgement of works must be squared against the fact that we each receive a penny a day, salvation by grace. Our salvation itself is by grace, but the nature of our eternity, how many cities we rule over, how brightly we shine as stars, will be appropriate to our deeds in this life.

Or it may be that in the context here, the “deeds” which will be judged are our condemnation of others. This, as explained in 2:1-3, is as bad as the “deeds” being condemned by us; and so there’s a telling appropriacy in styling such condemnations “deeds”, as if they are the actual deed performed.

*2:7 Doing-* s.w. “deeds” in 2:6. Yet how can the right deeds be rewarded with eternal life, given Paul’s teaching about salvation by grace rather than works? Surely the answer is in the fact that salvation itself is by grace, the “penny a day” of the parable which all believers will receive; but our works aren’t insignificant, and they will be judged and will affect the nature of the eternal life, the salvation, which by grace we shall be given. Or it could be that the “well doing”, the ‘good deeds’, spoken of here are in fact a non-judgmental, merciful life. The good deeds are what we avoided doing, i.e. condemning others, which is the theme of this section of Romans.

*Immortality-* To those who earnestly seek for perfection, who would so love to be given moral perfection, who would so love never to sin again- they will be given eternal life in that state. Note the difference between the “immortality” which we seek, and the “eternal life” which we are given in response. The Greek for “immortality” is also translated “incorruption”, “sincerity”- it has a distinct moral sense to it. If we seek to live in moral incorruption, if our desire to be in the Kingdom of God is because we so yearn to live without sin and corruption- then we will not only be given that but also an eternity of life like that. But the essence is to seek to live in moral incorruption- and then the eternity will come as a natural part of that.

*Glory and honour-* terms frequently applied by Paul to the Lord Jesus. The righteous seek *His* glory and honour, and shall be given eternal life in which to do so. Or should we seek glory, honour- for others? For love doesn’t seek her own things (1 Cor. 13:5 s.w.). Paul could write of how he ‘sought’ others’ salvation (2 Cor. 12:14).

Paul tells the Hebrews [if he indeed was the author] and Romans to have the patient, fruit-bearing characteristics of the good ground (Lk. 8:15 = Rom. 2:7; Heb. 10:36).

*2:8 Contentious-* Gk. ‘factious’. The section is talking about those who condemn others (2:1) and who are unmerciful (1:31). It is this which creates faction-for if one person condemns another, they expect others to condemn them too, and cause faction over it. It’s significant that causing faction by being judgmental is chosen here as the epitome of wrong doing- despite Paul having spoken of sins such as lesbianism in

the context. His argument seems to be that condemning those who commit such sins and causing faction over the matter is in fact a far worse sin. To be contentious – to be divisive, endlessly creating strife (Gk.), is the very epitome of those who will not be saved. Yet sadly, contention against other believers is falsely painted as ‘spiritual strength’. This category of people are later in this verse called indignant and angry- confirming the view that this group are people within the ecclesia who are angry, indignant and contentious against others whom they judge (2:1-3 sets the context).

*Do not obey the truth-* As we have shown in comments on 2:2 that Paul has in view here those who know the Truth. The emphasis should therefore here be placed upon their disobedience to the Truth which they know. And that Truth requires mercy, grace and non-condemnation to be shown to sinners. That is obedience to the Truth. Or “the truth” may be a reference to the Law of Moses, as in Rom. 2:20; 3:7? Or to the Gospel, as elsewhere in Paul's thought.

*Obey... but... obey-* Paul introduces the paradox he develops so strongly in chapter 6- that we are slaves, and we obey either the flesh or the spirit. For all our fiercely claimed independence, we are presented by Paul as slaves with only two possible masters to whom we can yield obedience. What's telling in the figure is that the 'master' of the flesh is actually our own internal passions of wrath, indignation, unrighteousness. "Obey" is from a Greek word which really means to persuade. We are persuaded either by our own anger, or by the Truth of the Gospel. The same word recurs in 2:19.

*Obey... indignation and wrath-* As commented on under 2:5, it is those who condemn others who do so with indignation and wrath, thus heaping upon themselves Divine wrath and indignation at the last day. We all have latent wrath and indignation within us- but we are not to obey those passions in a wrong way. When we encounter the sinfulness of others, it seems that indignation and wrath are aroused and this leads some to condemn others. But if we obey those passions- we shall receive God's wrath and condemnation.

The rejected will want to be accepted. "When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you (quoted in Rom. 2:8 re. the judgment). Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me" (Prov. 1:27,28).

2:9- see on Rom. 2:23.

*Tribulation-* we have the choice of tribulation now for the sake of

living the truly Christian life (e.g. Mt. 13:21), or tribulation at the hands of God and His Son and their Angels at the last day. *Tribulation* was exactly what the apostate Christians were trying to avoid will come upon them at judgment day. The 'persecution' or 'chasing' is perhaps a reference to the Angel of the Lord chasing the rejected like chaff away from the judgment seat- the Angel will "persecute" the rejected along dark and slippery paths (Ps. 35:6).

*Anguish*- lit. 'narrowness of room'. They will have no place to run, compared to the sense of largeness and freedom which will be [and is with] God's accepted people. The anguish will not just be upon 'men' but upon every individual *psuche* (s.w. heart, life, mind) of man who has been disobedient. The suggestion is that the punishment will be psychological, a mental trauma.

*That does evil*- 1:32 has warned that those who don't so much do the evil but vicariously agree with it are just as culpable. The 'doing' is therefore as much mental as physical.

*The Jew first*- because the Jews have or had greater responsibility to Divine judgment?

2:10 *Honour*- the Greek word really refers to money, a financial price. There could be an allusion to the parable of the talents, whereby the faithful receives the one talent which the unfaithful hadn't used (Mt. 25:28).

The 'working good' in the context of 2:1-3 is not condemning our brother.

2:11 *No respect of persons*- i.e. both Jew and Gentile will be accepted in God's Kingdom. The spirituality of the Gentile believers will be rewarded just as much as that of Jewish believers. That the Jew-Gentile equality is such a theme in Romans would suggest that the ecclesia featured both Jews and Gentiles- hence Paul's many OT allusions in Romans, whilst at the same time making it clear in places that he is specifically addressing Gentiles ["ye Gentiles"].

2:12 *Perish*- i.e. in condemnation at the last day? For this is how the word is used in Jn. 3:18; 2 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 13:4. "Judged" is being used in the sense of "condemned". Not only those who knew the Mosaic law will appear at judgment day; some will be condemned there because of their disobedience to that law, but others will be condemned because of disobedience to other principles.

Watch out for the use of figures of speech. How we interpret the Bible accurately depends upon grasping these. Ellipsis and metaphor are the

most common. Ellipsis is where as it were a gap is left in the sentence, and we have to fill in the intended sense. Thus: "For as many as have sinned without law, shall perish also without [*being judged by*] law" (Rom. 2:12).

2:13 *Not the hearers*- there would have been a great tendency in the first century as in our own to think that regular attendance at a place of worship and simply hearing God's law read was enough for salvation.

*Doers of the law... justified*- Yet Paul elsewhere teaches that no works can bring about justification, it is not of works but of faith in God's grace. I've observed several times in these notes so far in Romans that Paul tends to use the idea of 'doing' with reference to mental attitudes rather than deeds. Or it may be that Paul is here quoting a rabbinic maxim, and agreeing with it only so far- to demonstrate that even passive religionists are all the same liable to a very real condemnation.

Mt. 7:21 = Rom. 2:13. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel.

2:14 *Gentiles*- Gentile believers in Christ. There's no article- it's not a reference to *the* Gentiles as a whole.

*By nature*- nobody seems to be naturally obedient to "the things contained in the law", rather is obedience and spirituality an hourly struggle. It's therefore tempting to seek to interpret this verse in the light of the immediate context- which is condemning some [Jewish?] members of the Rome ecclesia for doing that which is "against nature", i.e. lesbianism and homosexuality (Rom. 1:26). The Gentile believers *in that context of homosexuality* were "by nature" doing God's will in that area. Again, we see Paul teaching that nobody is 'born gay', such behaviour is not natural. Perhaps it is in this context that we can understand the rest of 2:14 and 2:15, which seem to suggest that conscience naturally rebels against such things. This is indeed the natural reaction to such perversion.

It's easy to get discouraged in our preaching by the apparent lack of response. But all the witnesses that we make, the points we get across, the bills we distribute, adverts we place... the people who receive them *don't* treat them as they would say a commercial advertisement.

*Everyone out there has a religious conscience*- let's remember that. They know, deep down, what they ought to be doing. And our preaching invites them to do it. If there is no immediate conversion, well don't worry. *You have touched peoples' hearts* by your witness. Paul describes our witness in terms of the burning of aromatic spices



during the triumphant procession of a victorious general, in our case, the Lord Jesus. His victory train goes on and on and on; and each generation of preachers is the aroma. But in Paul's image, the aroma strikes the bystanders in only one of two ways: some find it pleasing and life-giving, whereas others find it nauseating and deadly (2 Cor. 2:14-16). The point is, the fragrance of our witness penetrates *everywhere* (2 Cor. 2:14), and it is an odour which *cannot be ignored*. It is either repulsive, or life-giving. Our hearers will react in only one of those two ways, whatever their apparent indifference to us.

2:15 *Also bearing witness*- Along with the witness of God's law, their conscience also happened to agree with God's law about homosexuality. 1 Cor. 4:4 warns that our conscience isn't so reliable as to justify us at the last day; but in the 'natural' revulsion of the conscience against homosexuality, conscience is a joint witness with God's law. Again, it's apparent that Paul didn't believe the 'born gay' story.

*Thoughts*- Gk. 'logismos'. The internal words, the conscience, accused or excused [both are legal words] the behaviour; our internal words 'bear witness' as in a court, for or against us. Judgment is ongoing; and we are at times our own accusers.

2:16 *Secrets* - The focus upon our innermost thoughts and words spoken only within our own minds continues when we read that God will judge the "secrets" of men in the last day. It's our thoughts which are the essence of us as persons. These will be judged- and the context of 2:1-3 is of internal attitudes like judgmentalism being worthy of condemnation at the last day.

*According to my [preaching of the] gospel*- the Gospel as preached by Paul includes judgment to come as part of the good news. But the teaching about the judgment seat of Christ is only good news for those sure of their redemption in Christ, those who are now suffering, those who now in their thoughts and hearts are with the Lord but are condemned by others... for the day of judgment will be a turning of tables, a replacing of the external with the internal.

2:17 *You [singular] are called a Jew*- it's as if Paul is in the middle of giving a lecture and then suddenly addresses himself to one individual in the audience.

*Rests in* [RV "upon"]- the Greek idea is of remaining. Again it seems Paul is addressing himself to Christian Jews in the Rome ecclesia who had chosen to remain in the Mosaic law.

*make your boast*- as in 2:23, a reference to Jewish glorying in having and obeying the Mosaic law. But Paul uses the same word another three times in Romans, about how "we" boast in our reconcillation with God (Rom. 5:11), in the hope we have of salvation (5:2), and also in our humiliations which prepare us for that time (5:3). Our witness to others is part of this confident boasting about God's grace. But we can only confidently boast of salvation and reconcillation if by faith we have assured ourselves that these things are present realities, and not merely possible futures for us.

2:17-23 Paul's rebuke of the Jews in Rom.2 for their reliance on a mixture of worldly wisdom and that of the Mosaic law has many similarities with Job:

### **Rom.2:17-23**

### **Job**

"Thou art called a Jew... and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will, and triest the things that differ (AVmg.), being instructed out of the law;

A fair description of Job before his trials. Cp. Job's constant reasoning with God about things which differed from his previous concept of God; "Doth not the ear try words?" (12:11)

and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an

"I was eyes to the blind" (29:15)

instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?

"Thou hast instructed many ... thy words have upholden him that was falling... but now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest" (4:3-5).

Thou that preacheest a man should not steal... commit adultery... (worship) idols... dost thou?

These were the 3 main things of which the friends accused Job.

Thou that makest thy boast of the  
Law, through breaking the  
Law dishonourest thou God?"

Elihu, on God's behalf, says  
that Job's boasting of his  
righteousness implied God  
was doing wickedly in  
punishing Job (34:10)

Their belief that they possessed such great wisdom led the Jews to be self-righteous, in that they reasoned that if they were wicked, then their wisdom would reveal this to them. Job and the Jews were in this sense similar.

2:18 *know His will*- the very same Greek words which were spoken to Paul at his conversion by Ananias (Acts 22:14). This is yet another example of where Paul's conversion experience is alluded to him constantly, consciously and unconsciously, throughout his writings. Paul goes on to talk about how this individual Jew of whom he speaks could approve or prove or judge / discern excellent things- this surely is an allusion to the rabbinical process of casuistic interpretation of Scripture with which Paul had been brought up, and which dialectic is so evident in his Christian writing and reasoning. Surely the individual Jew whom Paul started addressing in 2:17 is in fact Paul himself. Perhaps he also has in mind the Lord's teaching (using the same Greek words) in Lk. 12:47, where in the context of responsibility to final judgment, the Lord warns that those who know His will shall be punished more severely than those who don't. Hence Paul's earlier comments about "to the Jew first".

2:19 This verse and 2:20-23 sound so similar to Paul. He is the Jew out of the audience whom he starts addressing in 2:17. Like Peter, his teaching of others is shot through with reference to his own failure and salvation by grace; and he is at pains to apply the exhortations, appeals and warnings he makes to himself personally.

*Confident*- persuaded. The same word is [mis]translated "obey" in 2:8. There we read that we are persuaded either of the Gospel, or by anger, judgmentalism etc. Who did the persuading? Presumably Paul's own pride and / or the peer opinion of others in the Jewish peer group.

*Guide of the blind*- this and the other similar phrases here and in 2:20 were all used by the Rabbis to describe their attempts to make Gentiles into Jews by proselytizing. However each phrase can equally be understood with reference to the true preaching of Christ as the light of the world.

As the Lord was the light of those that sat in darkness (Mt. 4:16), so Paul writes as if all the believers are likewise (Rom. 2:19).

Paul points out the humility which we should therefore have in our preaching: there are none that truly understand, that really see; we are all blind. And yet we are "a guide of the blind, a light to them that sit in darkness" (Rom. 2:19). Therefore we ought to help the blind with an appropriate sense of our own blindness. See on Mt. 13:16.

2:20 "Instructor of the foolish... teacher of babes" are Rabbinic terms used for Rabbis and Jewish orthodox missionaries bringing forth 'babes' of Gentile converts to Judaism. Such people had the "form of knowledge and truth" [another Rabbinic phrase] in the Jewish Law. Paul's hypothetical "O man" (2:1) is narrowing down to himself; for very few if any of the initial readership of Romans would've been former Rabbis, let alone Rabbis involved in missionary proselytizing. The only Christian former Rabbi and travelling proselytizer we meet in the New Testament is Paul himself. The allusion by Paul to himself rather than pointing the finger at any of his readership would've set them at ease, that there were no hidden messages nor hints that he was addressing a specific situation or person in Rome. He was applying his principles to himself, and by so publically doing so he appeals to each of his readers to likewise personalize the principles to ourselves.

2:21 Paul was teaching the Romans. Thus the allusion to himself is clear- he who teaches others must teach himself, must apply to himself the principles which pass his lips so easily. He may be referring back to his theme in 2:2,3- that we have a tendency to assume that Divine truths aren't relevant to us personally, that punishment for sin and condemning others isn't, actually, going to come *on me*, although we know it will surely come *on others*. And so Paul is saying that he too must be aware of this- that he places himself in the audience of those whom he is teaching. See on Rom. 3:19.

*Not steal-* Stealing was felt to be a crime which could and should be openly, publically rebuked.

2:22 Sexual double standards is perhaps the most obvious example of hypocrisy. Remember the context of this passage- the list of awful sexual sins at the end of chapter 1 lead Paul in to a discourse on the sin of condemning others for their sins, his point being that to do so was a despising of God's grace; and that by condemning others for their sin we are in fact guilty of that same sin. And so Paul could be meaning that if we condemn individuals for adultery, it is as if we have

ourselves committed adultery, for this would be in harmony with what he has taught earlier in this section (see on 1:32).

*You who abhors idols-* Jewish Rabbis like Paul were well known for their obsession with making any image of God.

*Do you commit sacrilege?*- Gk. 'temple robbery'. The theme which connects the three examples given by Paul is that of stealing, taking that which isn't yours. 'Do you steal?' (v.21) connects with 'Do you commit adultery?' because adultery is a stealing of that which isn't yours but which belongs to your neighbour (1 Thess. 4:6); and robbing temples is likewise stealing. Stealing was and is seen in the Middle East as the social evil and crime which could be shouted out against the most. Indeed in many cultures there is some equivalent of the English "Stop thief!".

Temple robbery was something Jews were accused of (Acts 19:37)- according to Josephus they were renowned for it, justifying it on the basis that the gods who 'owned' the treasures did not in fact exist (*Antiquities* 4:8, 10). So it's appropriate Paul would choose this example- condemning others, in this case for idolatry, but to our own personal advantage.

2:23 *You who makes your boast of the law-* Again, this is surely a reference by Paul to himself, who boasted of his Jewish roots and knowledge of the Law. The Jews boasted in God (2:17 s.w.) and in His law. Later in Romans Paul talks of how the Christian believer boasts in God on account of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 5:11 s.w.; AV "joy in God"). The Jewish boast in God was proven empty because of human sin and hypocrisy; whereas the Christian can boast in God because s/he is confident in His grace in Christ.

*You dishonour / shame God-* The same word has been used by Paul in Rom. 1:24 about homosexuals dishonouring their bodies. Relentlessly, Paul repeats his point- the apparently grosser sins such as homosexuality are just as bad and 'dishonouring' as those who know the Law, even boasting of it, and yet condemn others for sins like homosexuality.

There's a definite link between shame and anger. Take a man whose mother yelled at him because as a toddler he ran out onto the balcony naked, and shamed him by her words. Years later on a hot Summer evening the man as an adult walks out on a balcony with just his underpants on. An old woman yells at him from the yard below that he should be ashamed of himself. And he's furiously angry with her- because of the shame given him by his mother in that incident 20 years

ago. Shame and anger are clearly understood by God as being related, because His word several times connects them: "A fool's *anger* is immediately known; but a prudent man covers his *shame*" (Prov. 12:16); A king's *anger* is against a man who *shames* him (Prov. 14:35). Or consider 1 Sam. 20:34: "So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce *anger*, and did eat no meat the second day of the month... because his father had done him *shame*". Job's *anger* was related to the fact that he felt that ten times the friends had *shamed* him in their speeches (Job 19:3). Frequently the rejected are threatened with both shame and anger / gnashing of teeth; shame and anger are going to be connected in that awful experience. They will "curse [in anger]... and be ashamed" (Ps. 109:28). The final shame of the rejected is going to be so great that "they shall be greatly ashamed... their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten" (Jer. 20:11). Seeing they will be long dead and gone, it is us, the accepted, who by God's grace will recall the terrible shame of the rejected throughout our eternity. Their shame will be so terrible; and hence their anger will likewise be. Because Paul's preaching 'despised' the goddess Diana, her worshippers perceived that she and they were somehow thereby shamed; and so "they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:27,28). It's perhaps possible to understand the wrath of God in this way, too. For His wrath is upon those who break His commands; and by breaking them we *shame* God (Rom. 2:23); we *despise* his desire for our repentance (Rom. 2:4).

*Break... the law?*- The chapter has been arguing against judgmentalism and condemning of sinners. This is perhaps the rank breaking of the Law which Paul is talking about.

2:24 The Jews were so sensitive to honouring God's Name that they wouldn't even pronounce it. And yet their hypocrisy led to it being blasphemed world-wide. This is Paul's point- that hypocrisy is as bad a sin as the crudest, most widely spread blasphemy.

*It is written*- In Is. 52:5, where God says that Judah in Babylon had caused His Name to be blasphemed, but (the prophesy continues) because of that He would reveal His Name to His people as it is in His Son, and they would ultimately accept Him and thus the blasphemy of God's Name would cease. Yet Paul is writing in Romans to Jewish Christians. Clearly they had not really grasped Christ as intended.

2:25 *Circumcision indeed is of profit if you obey the law*- The corollary of this is that Christ will "profit" [s.w.] nothing if we chose to be circumcised (Gal. 5:2). The analogy of a wedding ring is perhaps helpful to explain Paul's sense here. A wedding ring, a ritualistic

external token, is helpful as a sign of marriage; but if one breaks the marriage covenant, the wedding ring [cp. Circumcision] becomes bereft of meaning and just a pointless external physicality.

*Circumcision is made uncircumcision-* Humanly speaking in the first century, this was impossible. Once the flesh was cut off, this was irreversible. But in God's opinion- and that surely is Paul's point- circumcision no longer counts if the covenant which defines the Law is broken. The Jew is therefore as the Gentile, the circumcised becomes uncircumcised because the Law, the old covenant which defined the whole relationship, has been broken.

2:26 Throughout Romans, the point is made that the Lord *counts as righteous* those that believe; righteousness is *imputed* to us the unrighteous (Rom. 2:26; 4:3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,22,23,24; 8:36; 9:8). But the very same Greek word is used of *our* self-perception. We must count / impute ourselves as righteous men and women, and count each other as righteous on the basis of recognising each others' faith rather than works: "Therefore we conclude [we count / impute / consider] that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law... Likewise reckon [impute] ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 3:28; 6:11). We should *feel* clean and righteous, and act accordingly, both in our own behaviour and in our feelings towards each other.

The readership in the Roman ecclesia appears to have been mixed, Jew and Gentile. The Gentile world of darkness doesn't keep the righteousness of the Law. "The uncircumcision" here must surely refer to the uncircumcised Christian believers, especially those in the Roman ecclesia. Indeed, "the circumcision" in Acts 10:45; 11:2; Tit. 1:10 and Gal. 2:12 refers to the circumcised *believers in Christ*; and so it's likely that here in Romans it has the same meaning. The Gentile believers were counted as Jews, under the new definition of 'Israel' which there now was in Christ: "For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3).

2:27 *Judge you-* The Christian Gentile believers, who were uncircumcised, would judge / condemn the Jewish Christian believer who trusted in keeping the letter of the Law and in his circumcision rather than in Christ. They would 'condemn' them in that at the last day, those rejected will as it were be compared against other human beings and be relatively 'condemned' by their example (Mt. 12:39-41). Paul has been emphasizing the need not to condemn our brethren (2:1 etc.)- he's saying that it is God who will use us to condemn others, of

His choosing, at the last day judgment. The very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27), just as Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world (Heb. 11:7) and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees (Mt. 12:27). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world"

"Shall not uncircumcision (i.e. the Gentiles)... judge thee (first century Israel), who... dost transgress the law?" (Rom. 2:27) is an odd way of putting it. How can believing Gentiles "judge" first century Jews who refused to believe? Surely there must be some connection with Mt. 12:41, which speaks of Gentiles such as the men of Nineveh rising "in judgment with this generation (first century Israel), and shall condemn it: because they repented...". I can't say there is a conscious allusion being made here. But the similarity is too great to just shrug off.

We may again need to read in an ellipsis when we read that uncircumcision fulfills the Law. The Gentile Christians fulfilled [the essence of] the Jewish Law. This was a paradox- the Law demanded circumcision, so how could the uncircumcised fulfill the Law? Another explanation is to understand that they 'fulfill the Law' in that God counts them as having done so. And as soon as we think about fulfilling the Law, our minds surely go to the fact that the Lord Jesus was the One who fulfilled the Law by His life of perfect obedience. And Rom. 8:4 makes the point that the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled "in us" because of the fact that the Lord Jesus died His representative death for us. Thereby, His righteousness is counted to us. He, the circumcised, perfect keeper of God's law, died as our representative. If we identify with Him by faith and baptism into Him, then women and uncircumcised men alike are all counted to be as Him. And in this way, uncircumcised, disobedient, law-breaking believers in Christ will as it were condemn those who have attempted to justify themselves by the circumcision ritual and obedience to the letter of the Law.

*By the letter-* Gk. 'gramma', s.w., "Scriptures". Neither the Scriptures nor circumcision in themselves make a person break the Law of Moses.



So we must read in an ellipsis here. By trusting in our obedience to these things we can put ourselves in a position where we are coming before God on the basis of justification by our own obedience rather than our faith in Christ. In this lies the danger of 'Biblicism' when it's used the wrong way. If we are obsessed with obedience to the letter of God's Word and external, ritual signs such as circumcision, then we shall end up condemned as law breakers- because perfect obedience to God's word is actually impossible.

2:28 *He is not a Jew who is one outwardly* was a radical, hard hitting statement. And coming from a Hebrew of the Hebrews like Saul of Tarsus, it really was stinging. Self-identity in the Mediterranean world of the first century was all tied up with who one was externally. The new identity in Christ challenges our self-perceptions to the absolute core.

Rom. 2:28 explicitly states the principle of our real spiritual self being hidden, by saying that the true believer will "inwardly" (same word translated "hidden" in 1 Pet. 3:4) circumcise his heart. The works of the flesh are "manifest", but by inference those of the Spirit are hidden (Gal. 5:18,19). Mt. 6:4,6,18 gives triple emphasis to the fact that God sees in secret. He alone truly and fully appreciates our spiritual self. This is sure comfort on the many occasions where our spirituality is misunderstood, both in the world and in the ecclesia. Yet it also provides an endless challenge; moment by moment, our true spiritual being is known by the Almighty, "Thou whose eyes in darkness see, and try the heart of man". The spiritual man which God now knows ("sees") and relates to, will be what He sees at the day of judgment. God dwells in "secret", i.e. in the hidden place, as well as seeing in "secret". God is a God who hides Himself (Is. 57:17) due to human sinfulness. If we fail to see the spiritual man in our brethren, this must be due to a lack of real spiritual vision in us. It is human sin which is somehow getting in the way.

2:29 It was indeed a radical thing for Paul to re-define self-identity from the outward and visible to the internal and invisible. External appearances were and are what define a person, both within society and to him or her self. By becoming "in Christ", this all changes- radically. "Inwardly" is the same word translated "secrets" when we read a few verses earlier that God will judge the secrets, the internal things (Rom. 2:16). This is what He looks upon.

It's significant that circumcision was in any case a private matter. The Canaanite tribes each had various markings or tattoos, usually on the face or somewhere public and visible, just as many African tribes do

today. It was immediately obvious that the person was from whatever tribe. God's people, however, had a body marking on the most hidden and intimate place on a man's body, which was not on public display. This in itself reflected how relationship with God was and is something intimate, personal and not immediately visible, in a sense, to the world around us. We who line up in a supermarket look, smell, talk and chose our shopping in a virtually identical way to the world around us. Our separation unto God is internal, intimate and not externally visible. Note that Paul has been talking about not judging; and from that he moves on to talk about circumcision. The connection is in the fact that we cannot judge others because we can only view them externally; God will judge the "secrets" (2:16), the internal things, because the sign of our covenant connection with God is by its very nature internal and personal to the believer and God. We cannot possibly, therefore, judge others- for we see only the visible and external.

Circumcision under the new covenant doesn't refer to anything outward, visibly verifiable. For now "he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Rom. 2:29)- seeing we can't judge the secret things of others' hearts, how can we tell who is circumcised in heart or not? The 'sealing' of God's people today, the proof that they are the Lord's (2 Tim. 2:19), is not anything external, but the internal matter of being sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30), or being sealed with a mark in the mind / forehead, as Revelation puts it (Rev. 7:3; 9:4).

*Praise-* We will be praised by God in that He will 'go through' all our good deeds, when we fed the hungry and visited those in prison (Mt. 25:36). He will rejoice over us, glory in us, in the way that only a lover can over the beloved whom He views through eyes of love, counting perfection to us in His eyes (1 Cor. 4:5). This is the real meaning of being 'Jewish'- for Paul is making a word play on the word 'Jew' coming from 'Judah', the praised one (Gen. 49:8).

## ROMANS CHAPTER 3

What advantage then has the Jew? Or what is the profit of circumcision? 2 Much every way! First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3 For what if some were without faith? Shall their lack of faith make of no effect the faithfulness of God? 4 God forbid. Yes, let God be found true, but every man a liar. As it is written: You must be justified in Your words and must prevail when You come into judgment.

5 But if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who visits with anger? (I speak after the manner of men). 6 God forbid. For then how shall God judge the world?

7 But if the truth of God through my lie abounded to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? 8 And why not do evil that good may come? (As some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just).

9 What then? Are we better than they? No, in no way. For we before laid to the charge both of Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin. 10 As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one. 11 There are none that understand. There are none that seek God. 12 They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that does good, no, not so much as one. 13 Their throat is an open tomb, with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips, 14 whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood, 16 destruction and misery are in their ways 17 and the way of peace have they not known; 18 there is no fear of God before their eyes.

19 Now we know that whatever things the law said, it speaks to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God. 20 Because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

### ***A righteousness obtained by faith***

21 But now apart from the law, a righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets- 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all them that believe. For there is no distinction. 23 For all have sinned, and all fall short of the glory of God; 24 but are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. 25 Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to show His righteousness in the passing over of the sins done previously, in the forbearance of God, 26 for the showing of His righteousness at this present time; that He might Himself be just, and the justifier of him that has faith in Jesus.

27 Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law?

Of works? No, but by a law of faith! 28 We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by faith. 31 Do we then make the law of no effect through faith? God forbid. No, we establish the law.

3:1 Whilst accepting Paul's Divine inspiration, I have always found the logic of this and the next few verses to be difficult and twisted. It's as if Paul wishes to say something nice about the Jews to as it were keep on board the Jews in his audience, having spoken against the significance of natural Jewishness so strongly in 2:27-29. But what he says there isn't quite compensated for by the reasoning he now comes out with- or so it seems to me. If natural descent is so irrelevant and Jewishness has been redefined, what real advantage is there, then, in being ethnically Jewish? "Advantage" translates a Greek word which is a superlative meaning more 'pre-eminence', 'exceeding abundance'. Paul appears to say that the Jews do have indeed such a superlative position; whereas elsewhere in this context Paul speaks as if the Jews are as sinful as or even more sinful than the Gentiles, and that both are "under sin" (Rom. 3:9). Both need baptism into Christ to be the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29). Paul's claim that their amazing blessing and advantage is because the Law was given to their fathers seems to strangely contradict the Law being elsewhere described as "weak and beggarly elements" (Gal. 4:9), "weak through the flesh", whose glory was nothing, as dirty garments, compared to the excellency and surpassing wonder of Christ. I therefore suggest in the light of all this that we may be justified in reading Paul's words in Rom. 3:1,2 as a kind of sarcasm: "What superlative, amazing pre-eminence then has the Jew! Or what profit at all is there in being circumcised! Much every way, indeed! The important thing to note is that the oracles of God were firstly given to them..." - and then Paul builds on that point to speak of Israel's disobedience to those commandments, leading up to his crescendo of convicting Jew and Gentile as desperate sinners who must throw themselves upon God's grace.

3:2 *Were committed*- Gk. *pisteuo*, God had faith in Israel (3:3), in giving them the commandments. He believed in them. The God who can know the end from the beginning allowed His emotion of love to take such root in Him that He as it were allowed His omniscience to be limited, just as He at times limits His omnipotence; and He desperately

believed in them. For loving someone elicits also faith and hope in them.

3:3 *Not believe*- Israel never adopted atheism nor did they ever inform Yahweh He was no longer their national deity. Yet for all their professions of faith and loyalty to the temple cult, God viewed them as unbelievers. Or it could be that Paul's implication is that they did not believe in Christ, in their Saviour Messiah.

*The faith of God*- God's faith and hope in His people. See on Rom. 3:2. The awkward translations can make us miss the wonderful point here: Israel's unbelief didn't abolish [Gk.], do away with, make of no effect [AV], God's faith in Israel. Here we see His love, His grace; a faith and hope in a weak other party which can only come from very deep love. They didn't believe in Him, but He didn't stop believing in them.

"Some" Jews didn't believe (Rom. 3:3); the majority, actually, but the Father is more gentle than that. The whole tragic history of God's relationship with Israel is a sure proof of His essentially positive character. Right at their birth by the Red Sea, the Almighty records that "the people feared Yahweh, and believed Yahweh, and His servant Moses" (Ex. 14:23). No mention is made of the Egyptian idols they were still cuddling (we don't directly learn about them until Ez. 20). Nor do we learn that this "belief" of theirs lasted a mere three days; nor of the fact that they rejected Moses, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. "There was no strange god" with Israel on their journey (Dt. 32:12); but there were (Am. 5:26). The reconciliation is that God counted as Israel as devoted solely to Him. The Angel told Moses that the people would probably want to come up the mountain, closer to God, when in fact in reality they ran away when they saw the holiness of God; almost suggesting that the Angel over-estimated their spiritual enthusiasm (Ex. 19:21-24 cp. 20:18). Likewise the Angel told Moses that the people would hear him, "and believe thee for ever" (Ex. 19:9). Things turned out the opposite. At this time, God saw no iniquity in Israel (Num. 23:21).

3:4 *Let God be true*- Paul is continually using legal language. Let God be found [in a legal sense, through legal, forensic analysis] true [Gk.] and faithful by man's judgment of God. The amazing statement in 3:3- that God remains faithful even when we are not- is hard to believe. Paul understands our internal doubts as to the extent of God's grace as man effectively putting God in the dock and trying the veracity of His claims. In one of the finest paradoxes of all, Paul will go on in Romans to use this very legal language to describe how God the judge as it were turns it all around, puts man, us sinners, in the dock, and justifies us the

humanly unjustifiable.

*Every man a liar*- in that our false accusations against the real extent of God's saving grace are exposed as untrue and lies.

*That You may be justified*- God comes through the trial of His grace by doubting man as justified, declared right. And yet this very term is what Paul uses to describe how God declares us righteous in *His* judgment of us. We judge God, but in the end, God judges us.

*And overcome when You are brought to judgment* [Gk.] - "Overcome" is the legal word for winning a case in court. It is our doubts as to the extent of God's grace, that He abides faithful even throughout our unfaithfulness, which is effectively our bringing God to court, to judgment. Paul is here quoting Ps. 51:4, which were David's words of reflection upon his sin unto death, and God's forgiveness of him. He reflected that he had sinned *so that* God might be justified when He is brought to judgment by us. Again we are up against an amazing grace. God uses our sin, our doubt of His forgiveness, in order to declare Himself yet more righteous when He is put in the dock to answer against our false charges: 'Is He really able to forgive me *that*? Will He really not hold *this* eternally against me? Will I *really* be saved, sinner that I am? Can God really accept *me* after what I have done, all I have failed to do as I should, all I have not been...?'. These are the kinds of questions with which we accuse God. Effectively the case against God's grace is that He will *not* actually forgive, justify and save weak sinners. And He gloriously wins the case against us. And He even uses our sin, as He used David's (who becomes a figure of us all), in order to prove this to us and to the world. And so, in a matchless logical *tour de force*, Paul triumphs in 3:5: "Our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God", just as David sinned *so that* God's righteousness would be declared.

3:5 *Our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God*- see on Rom. 3:4 "And overcome...". God commends His love to us in that when we were still sinners, Christ died for us, the just for unjust (Rom. 5:8). Thus on all sides we have God's saving love commended to us- by our own unrighteousness on the one hand, and by God's self-commendation of His desire to save us through giving His Son to die for us, taking the initiative whilst we were as yet unborn and still from His perspective "sinners". The Greek for "commend" means literally to place beside, e.g. Lk. 9:32 "the men that *stood with him*". God and man come to stand together in that court room. Our unrighteousness and His righteousness stand together. The accused [God] comes to stand together with the accusers [our doubts, sinful man]; and then the roles

change, God becomes the accuser and we become the accused, and He through His love comes to again stand with us, having condemned and yet then justified us. Truly, even under inspiration, Paul is lost for words: “What shall we say?”.

David recognized that God works through our sinfulness- he is effectively saying in Ps. 51:4: 'I sinned so that You might be justified...'. These words are quoted in Rom. 3:4,5 in the context of Paul's exultation that " *our* unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God" - in just the same way as David's did! Because God displays His righteousness every time He justifies a repentant sinner, He is in a sense making Himself yet more righteous. We must see things from God's perspective, from the standpoint of giving glory to God's righteous attributes. If we do this, then we can see through the ugliness of sin, and come to terms with our transgressions the more effectively. And Paul quotes David's sin with Bathsheba as our supreme example in this. We along with all the righteous ought to “shout for joy” that David really was forgiven (Ps. 32:11)- for there is such hope for us now. David is our example. And yet the intensity of David's repentance must be ours. He hung his head as one in whose mouth there were no more arguments, hoping only in the Lord's grace (Ps. 38:14 RVmg.). Notice too how Ps. 51:1 “Have mercy on me, O God...” is quoted by the publican in Lk. 18:13. He felt that David's prayer and situation was to be his. And he is held up as the example for each of us.

*Takeh vengeance*- another legal term- ‘to judicially afflict’. God would not be and is not wrong to press the case against our sin to its final term- vengeance, wrath, as will be seen at the final judgment. Would He be wrong to do this to us? Of course not.

3:6 God will indeed take vengeance, press the legal case to its ultimate end, in condemning the unbelieving world. The judgment against sin cannot be minimized just because we know that it will not in fact be meted out upon those who believe in Christ- see on Rom. 3:5. I prefer to translate this verse as an exclamation: “Because how much [i.e. ‘how severely!'] shall God judge the world!”.

3:7 *The Truth of God*- the profound truth of Rom. 3:4, that God is willing and eager to save sinners, to remain faithful when we are unfaithful (3:3).

*Abounded through my lie unto His glory*- this is the same idea as in 3:5, that our unrighteousness actually commends the righteousness of God. Every man is a liar, a false accuser of God's grace (3:4) in that we all

doubt the reality of God's saving grace for me personally. And Paul focuses on himself- he along with every man is one of those liars. Yet his doubt, his false accusation of God's saving grace, only abounds unto God's glory, in that God will and is finally justified in all this by forgiving, justifying and saving us.

*Why yet am I also judged as a sinner?*- A reference to how his opponents judged him as a sinner. But as he elsewhere says, we are to pay no attention to how men judge us, because the only judgment worth anything is God's (1 Cor. 4:3). If we are judged and justified by God, so what how men judge us?

3:8 Paul's opponents repeated the gossip ["we be slanderously reported"] and fabricated primary evidence that they had actually heard Paul say ["and... affirm"] that therefore we should sin so that blessing would come from God. Note the legal language again- they were as it were putting Paul in the dock and making affirmations against him. Vilification is something which every preacher and teacher of the Gospel has to put up with, and we shouldn't be surprised when we encounter it. Paul speaks of such slanderers and word twisters in very tough terms: "Whose damnation is just". This of course is in the context of his having just pointed out that the legal condemnation of the unbelieving world is just and right. He perceived his critics within the ecclesia as actually being in the unbelieving world. He also sees their damnation as a present thing- human behaviour is played out before the judgment seat of God right now. It's not that He is unaware of it and will only consider it at the future judgment seat. Slandorous words and fabricated evidence against God's children is seen as an 'affirmation' made in the Divine court- and it will be judged with damnation.

To God, slanderers and false teachers within the ecclesia already are given their condemnation (Rom. 3:8). "The Lord shall judge the people... God judgeth (present tense) the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day... he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows" (Ps. 7:8,11-13). God is now judging men, and preparing their final reward. For the wicked, the arrow is prepared in the bow, the sword is sharpened- all waiting for the final day in which the present judgments will be executed.

3:9- see on Rom. 2:4.

*Are we better than they?*- RV "in better case", do we have a better legal case than them? The "they" could be the Gentiles- as if Paul is saying that we Jews have no better case than the Gentiles. In this case our



retranslation of Rom. 3:1 [see there] would be the more justified- for Paul would be saying that actually Jews have no real advantage over Gentiles. But the “they” contextually would more comfortably refer to the unbelieving world (3:6). We have no better case than them, because both Jew and Gentile are all sinners.

*We have proved-* to legally accuse, RV “laid to the charge”. It is in fact God who does the accusing; but Paul for a moment sees us as on His side, accusing all humanity, ourselves included, of sin.

*All under sin-* Paul alludes here when he says that “I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). And yet he also draws the contrast between being “under the law” and now after baptism being “under grace” (Rom. 6:14). Paul sees himself from outside himself when he says that he has legally accused all men of being sinners- and he includes himself in that mass of humanity. Repeatedly, he wishes to emphasize that he too is a sinner and not, as the teacher, somehow separate from sinful humanity. He sets a great example to every teacher and preacher in the ecclesia. For he previously warned against the human tendency to assume that what happens to all men will somehow not happen to *me* (Rom. 2:2,3).

Paul speaks of both Jew and Gentile as being “under the power of sin” (Rom. 3:9 RSV) – which in itself suggests that he saw “sin” personified as a power. If sin is indeed personified by the Bible writers – what real objection can there be to the idea of this personification being at times referred to as ‘Satan’, the adversary? It has been argued that Paul was well aware of the concept of dualism which the Jews had picked up in Babylonian captivity, i.e. the idea that there is a ‘Satan’ god opposed to the true God; but he reapplies those terms to the conflict he so often describes between flesh and spirit, which goes on within the human mind.

3:10 The quotation from Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3 is about the fools who say in their heart that there is no God. Yet Paul applies this to every one of us, himself included. What he’s doing here is similar to what he does at the end of Romans 1- he speaks of the grossest sins such as lesbianism and reasons that we are all in essence guilty and condemned as serious sinners before God. Here he quotes passages which speak of effective atheism and applies them to us all, himself included- even though atheism was abhorrent to the Jews, and Paul may have seemed the last person to be an atheist. But the ‘atheism’ of Ps. 14:1 occurs within the psychological thought processes of the human mind- the fool says in his heart that there is no God. In the context of Romans, Paul is arguing that we call God a liar when we disbelieve His offer of justification and

salvation. To deny this is to effectively say in our hearts that there is no God. If God is, then He is a Saviour God. To deny that He will save me is effectively to say He doesn't exist; for a God who won't save me may as well not exist. Far too many people claim some level of belief in God's existence, but in their hearts deny Him, in that they personally doubt whether His promised salvation is really true for me.

3:11 *None that understands*- in the context, understands, perceives, the reality that God will really save me.

*Seeks after*- translating the Hebraism for 'to worship'. Nobody really grasps the reality of personal salvation and falls to the ground in worship as they should. If we would only let ourselves go and realize that His desire to save me is greater than my failure, that my sin is no barrier to His grace- we would be the most ecstatic and profoundly devoted worshippers of Him. But actually nobody really is like this, for their faith is not total and therefore their worship cannot be either, whatever outward appearance of ecstasy and profound expressions it may appear to have, in lyrics and music.

3:12 *All gone... together become*- although quoting still from Ps. 14:1-3, the idea is very similar to "we like sheep have gone astray" (Is. 53:6). We sin because of our group mentality, the influence of others is so strong upon us, we sin because we are sheep who follow the rest of the flock rather than stand alone against sin. Peer pressure is simply far stronger than we can ever imagine. In the context, Paul is reading "all" and "together" as meaning that both Jew and Gentile have alike gone astray, united and undivided in their joint sinfulness, no matter how they may culturally differ in the flesh.

*None that does good*- the Greek word essentially means profitable, useful. The contrast is with how we are all become "unprofitable"- none is profitable to God. It's not that nobody ever does any good deed; rather the idea is that we are like the vine tree, not useful of ourselves to God (Ez. 15:2-6) unless He justifies us and makes us useful in His service.

3:13 *Throat... tongue... deceit... lips*- the connection is surely with how Paul has said that all men, himself included, are liars (3:4,7). Yet the lie he had there in view was the lie that God will not save me, will not and cannot justify me as He has promised. And in this we falsely accuse God, putting Him in the dock. Paul talks of this in the harshest of language here, as if we are poison spitters, the seed of the serpent, in how we speak against God. This is a theme with Paul- to use exaggerated and extreme language about our disbelief and sinfulness.

Because of God's abhorrence of sin, sins of ignorance were still counted as offences against God, requiring atonement. This should really humble us- *if we are sensitive to this fact*. It therefore follows that we should lift up our voice for understanding of God's ways, for ignorant sin is still sin to Him- even though His judgment of us may possibly take into account our level of appreciation. In this context we should also be aware that God remembers unforgiven sin. Over time we can forget that we cursed our wife on 6.6.96 or whenever and never bowed down in repentance. But He doesn't. The haziness of our memories can work as a kind of pseudo-atonement for us. With Him there is no distinction between past and present and future. The sin remains before Him. By the law comes the knowledge of sin *to men*, but this doesn't mean they aren't culpable for those sins before God (Rom. 3:20; 7:7)- for sins of ignorance still needed atonement. "Sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom. 3:13) most likely means, in this light, that it is not imputed by those who do the sin. But God still notices... We only have to consider the passion of Peter's appeal to Israel in Acts 3:17-19: "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did your rulers... repent ye *therefore*". His Jewish hearers would immediately have spotted the allusion back to the Mosaic protocol about what to do when you and your rulers realized you'd committed sins of ignorance. But the sacrifice required was now not an animal- it was the sacrifice of a broken heart and a baptism into Jesus.

It should be noted that verses 13-18 are quoting from the Septuagint of Psalm 14- they aren't found in the Hebrew text. Time and again the inspired New Testament writers quote from the LXX rather than the Hebrew Masoretic text, often preferring the LXX over the MT, and in this case accepting the LXX addition of verses which the MT omits. It's hard to gauge the wider significance of this. The LXX versions of the genealogies in Genesis would, e.g., not support the contention that the Genesis 1 creation occurred 4000 years before the birth of Christ.

3:14 This and Rom. 3:16 especially could be appropriate to the descriptions of the rejected at the day of judgment. The idea being that we are all rejected, for we are all sinners; but by grace, the believers in Christ have been declared righteous. We seem to have Paul declaring the sinfulness of humanity in the most graphic terms he can- quoting verses which immediately trigger the reaction: "But that's not quite true of me. I may be a sinner, but I don't do *that*", e.g. cursing and blaspheming all day long. I think this is intentional; for Paul writes very sensitive to his audience's likely reaction. It's similar to how he speaks about the grossest moral sins such as lesbianism in chapter 1,

and then proceeds to count us all guilty in essence. It's a powerful device to try to highlight to us all the extent of human sinfulness.

3:15 *Shed blood*- Paul may be quoting this and applying it to us all in the sense that he gave full weight to the Lord's teaching that the hateful thought is as bad as murder. Or he may be wishing to shock us with the extent of our sinful position (see on Rom. 3:14).

Eliphaz thought there were only a few very sinful people in the world (Job 15:35); but His words are quoted by the Spirit in Is. 59:4 concerning the whole nation of Israel; and this in turn is quoted in Rom. 3:15-17 concerning the whole human race. This same path of progressive realization of our sinfulness must be trodden by each faithful individual, as well as on a communal level.

3:16 *Destruction*- Gk. 'a dashing to pieces', perhaps an allusion to how the stone of Messiah's second coming would dash the kingdoms of men to pieces at His return (Dan. 2:45; Rev. 2:27). But sinners are going now in way of such destruction. Damnation begins now- in the way of life people chose to live.

*Misery*- the wretchedness of the condemned. But remember Paul is applying this to us all, as apart from Christ we are all sinners, even now living out our future condemnation. Yet Paul uses the very word about himself in Rom. 7:24: "O wretched [s.w. miserable] man that I am...", going on to exalt that Christ has saved him from that position, that misery, the misery of the condemned sinner. What is true of all humanity is true of Paul too- he repeatedly emphasizes his own personal share in the condemned human situation.

3:17 *The way of peace have they not known*- Remember that Paul is writing to Christians who have known God's ways, convicting them that they with him are, naturally speaking, condemned and the most wretched of sinners. "Peace" in Paul's thought nearly always refers to peace with God through forgiveness and salvation in Christ. It is this which they have not known all the time they refuse to really believe that they have been forgiven and justified in Christ.

3:18 *No fear of God*- Again, the language appropriate to the most hardened, atheistic blasphemer is being applied to all men, including Paul and all in Christ. This is Paul's attempt to shock us into a deeper realization of how serious our position is as sinners. He has already convicted us of in essence being lesbians and homosexuals in chapter 1; he has applied the language of atheists to us in Rom. 1:28; 3:10. And now he as it were crowns it all by quoting a description of the very dregs of human society, who live with no fear of God, and applying it

to us- we who fear His judgment and condemnation in our faithlessness that His grace is enough to save us. It's a paradox- if we fear God's judgment, not believing in His grace, then we are categorized along with those who have *no* fear of God.

Although I have argued that Paul is quoting from the LXX of Psalm 14 here in Rom. 3:13-18, it would seem that this verse is also quoting Ps. 36:1: "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes". This has a strange appropriacy. David says that the sin of the wicked is speaking within *his* [David's] heart. This is the same spirit in which Paul is applying the descriptions of the very worst of humanity and admitting that in essence, this is what is going on within *his* heart and within the heart of every man. Truly, bad man only do what good men dream of.

3:19 "The law" here seems to be used in the Rabbinic sense of 'the OT scriptures'. There seems no sense if Paul is saying that the Law, the Scriptures he has just quoted, speak only to those "under the law", and that therefore the whole world is condemned and guilty before God. I think we have to read in some ellipses here; the Message seems to get it right: "This makes it clear, doesn't it, that whatever is written in these Scriptures is not what God says about others but to us to whom these Scriptures were addressed in the first place!". This would be continuing the theme of 2:2,3- that we are not to give in to the human tendency to assume that the consequences for all men because of sin will somehow not come upon us personally. See also on Rom. 2:21.

Those verses Paul has just quoted, speaking of the worst of sinners, apply to us all (3:9,10). Paul realizes we are prone to respond that no, that's not quite me... I'm not *that* bad. And so he has warned: "Whatever is written in these Scriptures is not what God says about *others* but to us" [The Message]. The intention is that "every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God". The Greek for "stopped", according to Vine, refers to "the effect of overwhelming evidence upon an accused party in court". It is the speechlessness of the rejected of which the Lord speaks in Mt. 22:12. Each of us should so know our sinfulness that we really feel as if we are standing at the judgment seat of Christ and have been condemned. We, along with all the world, "become guilty", become sentenced [Gk.] before His judgment seat, right now. Only by having some sense of this will we be able to have any emotion of relief, joy, gratitude, praise, exaltation etc. at the wonder of having been declared right, accepted, by God's grace in Christ.

We can however interpret “the law” as the Law of Moses. Its’ purpose was “so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). Paul is quoting here from Ps. 63:11: “the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped”. He’s reasoning that because we’re all sinners, we’re all liars- for untruth is the essence of sin. We are not being true to ourselves, to God, to His word, to our brethren... we profess covenant relationship with God, to be His people, and yet we fail to keep the terms of that covenant. And the Law of Moses convicted all God’s people of this, and in this way led them to the need for Christ. Yet Is. 52:15 prophesied that the crucified Jesus would result in men shutting their mouths. The righteousness and perfection displayed there in one Man, the very human Lord Jesus, has the same effect upon us as the Law of Moses- we shut our mouths, convicted of sin. Note that Ez. 16:63 speaks of mouths being shut not only in wonder at the extent of our sinfulness but in awe at the extent of God’s forgiveness: “That you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more, because of your shame, when I have forgiven you all that you have done”.

Rom. 3:19 (A.V.mg.) defines "all the world" as those "subject to the judgment of God" - which is only the responsible. The Lord Jesus took away the sin “of the world”, but the Jews died in their sins; “the world” whose sins were taken away is therefore the world of believers. "Every knee shall bow to me... every tongue shall confess... so then every one of us shall give account" (Rom. 14:11,12) is another example- 'all men', 'every man' means 'every one of us the responsible'. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men" (Tit. 2:11)- certainly not to every human being that has ever lived; but to the " all men" of the new creation. For not "all men" will be saved. The Lord tasted death "for every man" (Heb. 2:9)- for every one who has a representative part in His sacrifice through baptism. Christ "reconciled the world" in that He obtained forgiveness for us (2 Cor. 5:19)- we are "the world" which was reconciled, we are the " all things" purged by His blood (Heb. 9:22). 1 Cor. 4:9 seems to make a difference between "the world" and "men", as if Paul is using "the world" here as meaning 'the world of believers'. The Lord was "a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6), although it was only us, the redeemed, who were ransomed by Him out of sin's slavery (Lk. 1:68; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rom. 8:13; Rev. 5:9; 14:3,4). The “all flesh” upon whom the Spirit was poured out in the first century was clearly enough a reference to those who believed and were baptized (Acts 2:17).

Sodom being a type of latter day events, it is not surprising that Scripture provides a wealth of detail concerning Sodom. The Genesis record summarizes what we glean from later revelation by saying that "the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Gen.13:13). "Before the Lord" recalls the earth being "corrupt before God" prior to the flood (Gen.6:11), another clear type of the last days. Indeed their sin being "before the Lord" may hint that Lot (or Abraham?) had preached God's requirements to them, and therefore they were consciously disobeying Him. Thus Rom.3:19 speaks of the world becoming "guilty before God" by reason of their having the opportunity to know God's word (cp. Rom.2:12,13).

3:20 *Therefore*- because we are convicted sinners facing condemnation, no good works we do in other areas can change the outcome nor displace the sins we have already committed. 'Just' one sin brings death, as evidenced by the sin of Adam and Eve. "Guilty before God" in 3:19 is reflected by "[not] justified in His sight" in 3:20. Because we are already standing dumbstruck and declared guilty before Him, we cannot be now declared right, it can't all be made OK, by doing some other good works according to that same system of law parts of which we broke. If you murder your neighbor and stand in court condemned for it, you can't put it all right by then doing the good deed of mowing your other neighbour's lawn and taking his garbage to the dump. Indeed, trying to obey "the law" in one aspect isn't going to declare us right when that same system of law condemns us. The only possible way to 'get right' would be to somehow get to the judge through another paradigm than obedience or disobedience to the law. And this is exactly what Paul is building up to. For the Judge of all the earth Himself thought up such a way. Seeing that "by the law is the knowledge of sin", or as 1 Cor. 15:56 puts it "the strength of sin is the law", a way simply has to be found for our salvation which doesn't depend upon our obedience or disobedience to the law.

3:21 *The righteousness of God*- a poor translation which is out of harmony with the context of 3:20 [see there]. The idea is that the justification of God, the way God sets a person right, without reference to the law, outside the paradigm of law- is in fact revealed (RV "has been manifested", already) within the Old Testament prophets and the Law of Moses itself. The Old Testament scriptures are described with yet another legal term- they are right now witnessing in court, attesting. It's as if we stood in the dock condemned and silent before God; but then the very law which we had broken and the Scriptures themselves take the witness box- and offer a way for us to be declared right.

3:22 God's way of putting us right operates through our faith in [RV, Gk.] Jesus Christ, which Paul will later define more concretely in chapter 6 as baptism into His death and resurrection; for this is what constitutes in the first instance our believing into Christ. Whoever, any human being, who believes into Him will be counted right by God. And therefore "all", "any", who believe will be saved, there is no difference or distinction between them in terms of their being Jew or Gentile. The same word is used in this connection in Rom. 10:12.

3:23 *For all*- the context suggests that the enormity of our condemned position before God should mean that we do not uphold any human distinctions between us, e.g. on ethnic grounds. Perceiving the enormity of our sin, how we are all in this together, and the wonder of God's saving grace, ought to be the most powerful inspiration to unity known to humanity. The "all" who have sinned could refer to 'all believers in Christ' which is the subject of the preceding verse 3:22; and 3:24 suggests that this same "all" are those who are justified freely by His grace.

*Come short of the glory of God*- We have all already sinned [aorist past tense] and we do now [present tense] fall short of God's glory, i.e. the complete perfection, the glory of God which was seen in the person of His Son (2 Cor. 4:6). God declared His glory to Moses in terms of His character (Ex. 33:18 cp. Ex. 34:4-6). We fall short of that perfection of the Father's character which was revealed in its fullness in His Son. Heb. 12:15 uses the same Greek word for "come / fall short" in warning lest any man "fail / fall short of the grace of God". We come far short of God's glory, but we are not to fall short of His grace whereby the righteousness of His Son, His glory, is counted to us and we are thereby declared right with Him. Jewish writings such as the Apocalypse of Moses 20.2 and 21.6 claimed that Adam "came short of the glory of God" by his sin in Eden; Paul is clearly alluding to this and is saying that Adam is everyman, we each are as Adam in Eden, with the tidal wave of realization breaking upon us as to the seriousness and eternal consequence of our so easily committed sin. It must be remembered that the Jewish writings frequently paralleled Adam with Israel (1). But Paul is arguing that Adam is every single human being, not just Israel. For Adam was created well before Israel, and all humanity are his offspring, not just Israel. The universal experience of sinfulness therefore leads to the offer of God's grace to all types of human being, not just Israel; and there will be an ensuing unity between those who believe in this grace, regardless of their ethnic background.



The Bible itself continually reflects a distinction in the mind of God between the person and the behaviour, the sin and the sinner. When we allow ourselves to be offended and to offend others, we have ceased to make that differentiation. We so easily equate the person and their behaviour, and thus they offend us. Consider how we are in the habit of saying: “We’re all sinners”. You may think I’m being pedantic, but Rom. 3:23 says otherwise- that “all have sinned”. And there’s a slight and subtle difference. We have committed sin, and therefore we can be called sinners. But the Biblical focus is on the action committed rather than the branding of the person with a label.

3:24 *Freely*- Gk. ‘without a cause / reason, as a gift’. We are justified, declared right in our court case, for no reason. This declaring right is therefore by the purest grace imaginable. The same word is used of how we should freely, without a human reason, preach the Gospel (Mt. 10:8; 2 Cor. 11:7); our receipt of such a “free” salvation should naturally inspire us to share it with others in the same spirit. Any form of charging for the Gospel, getting personal benefit or glory out of sharing it with others, is absolutely outlawed. The free nature of the grace we have received must be reflected in our sharing it with others in the same spirit; God’s giving to us has to be translated in our giving to others. Sharing the Gospel isn’t, therefore, an irksome duty, something we salve our conscience with, something we are asked to participate in by a church leadership team; but a natural personal outflowing of the free gift we have received.

*The redemption*- We are declared right here and now, we receive redemption in that our sins are forgiven (Eph. 1:7); but redemption is in fact a process, culminating in the redemption of our body at the return of Christ, the final change from mortality to immortality in a corporeal, literal sense (s.w. Rom. 8:23), in “the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).

3:25 *Set forth* -“Whom God put forward as a place of atonement by his blood” (NRSV margin) seems to be the right sense. The reference is to the mercy seat, not to the sacrificed animal. Vincent comments: “The word is used by Herodotus of exposing corpses (v. 8); by Thucydides of exposing the bones of the dead (ii. 34)”. The sense of public display is picked up later in the verse in the word “declare”. Crucifixion is by its very nature a public event. There was once a doctor in Paraguay who spoke out against human rights abuses. Local police took their revenge by torturing his teenage son to death. The local people wanted to stage a huge protest march, but the father disallowed them and chose another means of protest. At the funeral, the father displayed his son’s body as it was when retrieved from jail- naked, scarred from electric

shocks, cigarette burns and beatings. And the body was displayed not in a coffin but on the blood-soaked prison mattress. This public display of a body was the most powerful witness and incitement possible. And the public nature of the display of God's tortured son was for the same basic reason. "He was manifested, that he might put sins away" (1 Jn. 3:5) could suggest that in His atoning death, 'He' was manifested. There God set forth Jesus in His blood, for all to see and respond to (Rom. 3:25 Gk.). There the real essence of Jesus was publicly shown forth. And there we come to know what love is (1 Jn. 3:16).

*A propitiation*- the Greek word doesn't *have* to mean "mercy seat" / atonement cover, with reference to the ark, even though this is how it is translated in Hebrews. The idea is essentially a place of atonement or the atonement victim, the sacrificed animal. Instead of that place of blood sprinkling been hidden away on the top of the atonement cover, the ark of the covenant within the Most Holy Place which the High Priest saw only once per year, God through the cross set forth publically, He declared, the place of atonement to be in the very publically displayed blood of His Son. The public nature of crucifixion therefore was appropriate. The Son of Man had to be, therefore, "lifted up" (Jn. 3:14) so that He could and can be believed in. Rom. 3:25 states that the Lord in His death was "set forth to be a propitiation". Graham Jackman comments: "Though the primary meaning of the word 'set forth' (*protithemi*) seems to be that of 'determining' or 'purposing', another sense, albeit not in the New Testament, is said to be that of exposing the bodies of the dead to public view, as in a lying in state". See on Mk. 15:29.

*To declare*- see on "set forth". But the word also carries the sense of setting forth evidence, proof. The legal flavor could possibly suggest that the blood of Christ, His death upon the cross, is brought forth as a proof in the court case that actually, we really have been declared in the right. Whilst Christ's death was multifactorial, it would be true to say that God could have saved us any way He chose, without being forced, as it were, to have a begotten Son who was publically crucified. Maybe He did this because He so so wishes us to believe, and He wanted to commend His love in all its depth and costliness as publically as possible, so that we would indeed perceive and believe it.

God's method of declaring us right deals with the sins "that are past", for which we stand condemned before His judgment seat with no way to make amends; and also "at this time" (3:26), right now, we are declared righteous by status, declared in the right, if we are believers into Jesus.

*Forbearance*- We shall all be saved by the forbearance of God, hence we should not deny to others the forbearance of God. Hence in Rom. 2:4 the same word is used, in stating that those who condemn their brethren are despising the forbearance of God, in that they are assuming that His forbearance can't apply to the person whom they have condemned. If we are saved by God's gracious forbearance, it's not for us to deny this to another.

3:26 *Declare... at this time*- see on Rom. 3:25.

*That He might be just*- the whole process of justifying sinners is achieved without infringing upon the justice and integrity of God. Quite how... isn't explained (although I am aware of many attempts to explain it, but they all seem to fail). I think we are asked to accept this on faith.

*And the justifier*- God's plan of declaring us right takes care of our past sins (Rom. 3:25), right now "at this time" declares us right, and will justify us at the coming day of judgment.

*In Jesus*- It's rare for Paul to refer to the Lord Jesus Christ as simply "Jesus" with no title. Perhaps he is trying to bring out the simplicity of it all- that by believing in the very human Jesus, a man of our nature with one of the commonest names amongst first century Palestinian Jews, i.e. 'Jesus', we really can be declared right before God.

3:27 *Boasting*- the Jewish boasting about obedience to the Mosaic Law of Rom. 2:17. If we are saved by grace, any feelings of superiority are excluded. "It is excluded" is a mild way of translating the aorist- the sense is that boasting has once for all been cut off, ended, excluded; by the death of Christ, and by that moment when we believed into Christ, and stood declared righteous before the judgment seat of Christ. Paul must refer to boasting in a wrong sense, a boasting in our works and obedience; for he uses the word quite often in his letters of his boasting of God's grace, and of the faithfulness of other brethren which had been inspired by that grace (e.g. 2 Cor. 7:4,14; 8:24; 9:4; 11:10,17).

*By what law? Of works?*- Boasting in the sense of feeling superior to others hasn't been excluded by law, i.e. it's not that we no longer boast because there's a law that says 'You shall not boast'. It has been cut off by the law or principle of salvation by faith rather than works. This simple reality, that we really are saved, not by works but by faith in God's grace through Jesus, is so powerful that it quite naturally excludes boasting.

3:28- see on Rom. 2:26.

*We conclude-* the legal sense of the word refers to the summing up of a court case. Here again, Paul assumes the role of judge. The summary of the case is that a man is declared right by God on account of his faith in God's grace and the blood of Christ. This is "without", quite apart from, any acts of obedience to law.

3:29 *God of the Jews only?* Paul brings out the practical implications of the doctrine of justification by faith in God's grace. Seeing that all men are sinners, and the basis of salvation is our faith in His grace through the blood of Christ- there can be no basic division between believers. God becomes "the God" of those He has saved, that seems to be implication- and so He isn't the God of only the Jews.

The Roman concept of *religio* allowed each subject nation to have their own gods, so long as the cult of the emperor was also worshipped. But Rom. 3:29 states that the God of Israel was the one God of the Gentiles too. This is in sharp distinction to the way the Romans thought of the god of the Jews as just another national deity. Caesar was king of many subject kings, Lord of many conquered and inferior lords. In this we see the radical challenge of 1 Tim. 6:15,16: that Jesus Christ is the *only* potentate, the Lord of Lords, the King of all Kings.

3:30 *It is one God-* the belief which the Jews held most dear; they felt that their monotheism divided them from the rest of the world. But it is the fact that there's only one God which binds together Jew and Gentile believers in Christ; for that one God justifies each human being on the same basis. The seriousness of our personal positions and the wonder of His saving grace is such that any ethnic difference between us becomes irrelevant.

*By faith... through faith.* The Greek words *ek* ["by"] and *dia* ["through"] may simply be being used in parallel, meaning effectively the same thing, as they are in Gal. 2:16. "The circumcision" refers to Jewish Christians who believed; "the uncircumcision" is perhaps also a technical term, in this context, for believing Christian Gentiles.

That God is one is not just a numerical description. If there is only one God, He therefore demands our *all*. Because He is the One God, He demands all our worship; and because He is One, He therefore treats all His people the same, regardless, e.g., of their nationality (Rom. 3:30). All true worshippers of the one God, whether Jew or Gentile, are united in that the one God offers salvation to them on the same basis. The fact there is only one Lord Jesus implies the same for Him (Rom. 10:12). Paul saw these implications in the doctrine of the unity of God. But that doctrine needs reflecting on before we come to grasp these conclusions.

Paul, writing to those who thought they believed in the unity of God, had to remind them that this simple fact implies the need for unity amongst us His children, seeing He treats us all equally as a truly good Father: " If so be that God is one... he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and [likewise] the uncircumcision through faith" (Rom. 3:30 RV). Unity amongst us is inspired by the fact that God seeks to be one with us, exactly because He is Himself 'unity', one in Himself. The Rabbis have always been at pains to point out the somewhat unusual grammar in the record of creation in Genesis 1, which literally translated reads: "One day... a second day... a third day", rather than 'One day... two days... three days', as we'd expect if 'Day one' solely referred to 'firstness' in terms of time. "The first day" (Gen. 1:5) therefore means more strictly 'the day of unity', in that it refers to how the one God sought unity with earth. "*Yom ehad*, one day, really means the day which God desired to be *one* with man... the unity of God is a concern for the unity of the world".

3:31 *Make void*- Consider where the same word is used in the context of showing that the Law has indeed been 'made void' or done away: Rom. 7:2, we are "loosed" from the Law, "delivered from the Law" (Rom. 7:6), the Law was "done away" (2 Cor. 3:11), "abolished" (2 Cor. 3:13), "done away" (2 Cor. 3:14), "abolished... the law of commandments" (Eph. 2:15). Clearly enough, the Law is indeed "made void"- by the death of Christ. The emphasis should therefore be on the fact that it is not *us* ("we"), who made it void. We as lawbreakers have no right to simply abrogate Divine Law, to void it because we broke it and we want to avoid the consequences. It can only be done by the Divine lawmaker and His Son. Our faith in Him and His saving grace doesn't mean that *we* make the law void; we by our sinfulness and acceptance of it do in fact establish or 'make to stand' Divine law. Paul is anticipating the objections of his Jewish audience- that he was teaching that sinners could merely abrogate the Law they had broken. We sense how on the back foot Paul was- his critics must have been persistent, and his stress level must have been very high by constantly seeking to anticipate their objections and parry them [did he actually need to have done this?]. By believing in God's grace in Christ and not trying to get justification from keeping the Law of Moses, we are in a strange way fulfilling the "righteousness of the law" (Rom. 8:4). It may be that Paul here is using "law" as a reference to the Old Testament scriptures generally, which he has been quoting so freely to prove his point (he uses "law" like this in Rom. 3:19,21; although "law" in the first half of 3:31 seems to refer to the Mosaic Law specifically).

"Think not that I am come to destroy ("to make void", Darby's Translation) the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17) has some kind of unconscious, hard to define link with Rom. 3:31:" Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law". The Greek words for "destroy" and "make void" are different; yet the similarity of phrasing and reasoning is so similar. I can't pass this off as chance, yet neither can I say there is a conscious allusion here. There is, therefore, what I will call an 'unconscious link' here.

### **Notes**

(1) N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) pp. 18-40 for documentation.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 4

What then shall we say about Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 2 If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 What did the scripture say: And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. 4 Now to him that works, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. 5 But to him that works not, but believes in Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness. 6 Even as David pronounces blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works, saying: 7 Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not count sin. 9 Is this blessing then pronounced upon the circumcision, or upon the uncircumcision also? For we say, to Abraham his faith was counted as righteousness. 10 How then was it counted? When he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision but in uncircumcision. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they be in uncircumcision, that righteousness might be counted to them also. 12 And the father of circumcision to those who are not only of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had whilst he was uncircumcised.

13 For the promise to Abraham and his seed, that he should be heir of the world, did not come through the law- but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if they that are of the law are heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is made of no power. 15 For the law works anger; but where there is no law, neither is there transgression. 16 Therefore it is of faith, that it may be according to grace; to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed. Not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all 17 (as it is written, A father of many nations have I made you) before Him whom he believed, God, who gives life to the dead, and called things that are not, as though they were. 18 Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to what had been spoken: So shall your seed be. 19 And without being weakened in faith when he considered his own body, now as good as dead (he being about one hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb; 20 but instead, looking to the promise of God, he did not waver through unbelief, but grew strong through faith, giving glory to God, 21 and became fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore also it was counted to him for righteousness.

23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was counted to him;  
24 but for our sake also, to whom it shall be counted, who believe in Him  
that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 Who was delivered up for  
our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.

4:1 *What shall we say* - Paul's frequent "What then shall we say to this?" occurs at least 5 times in Romans alone (Rom. 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 9:14,30)- and this is the classic phrase used by Jewish teachers at the end of presenting their argument to their students. Seeing then that Paul writes in a rabbinic way, as if He is giving a stream of *Midrash* on earlier, familiar writings [e.g. the words of Jesus or the Old Testament], we should be looking for how he may quote or allude to just a word or two from the Lord, and weave an interpretation around them.

*Abraham our father*- Paul was writing to Jewish and Gentile believers. Yet he speaks of "our" father as if he's writing mainly to Jews here- but see on Rom. 4:11. Alternatively, it could be that Paul in wishing to be as personal as possible in addressing his readers is referring to Abraham as "our father" in the sense that he personally was Jewish. Paul in this section is now exemplifying what he has taught so far in Romans from the example of Abraham. This whole 'Abraham' section is written in the style of Rabbinic Midrash, with Gen. 15:6 as the verse being expounded. Paul's point is that Jewish and Gentile believers can trace themselves back to Abraham because the family likeness is in faith not circumcision. Jewish proselytes were forbidden to call Abraham "our father" (1).

*As pertaining to the flesh*- the same Greek phrase is used five times in Romans 8 in the negative sense of "according to the flesh". The suggestion may be that walking according to the flesh rather than the Spirit was related to placing meaning on the fact that Abraham was a fleshly ancestor. Being or emphasizing ones' Jewishness was therefore related to *unspirituality*, whereas the Jews thought that being Jewish was a sign of spirituality. Paul's style was so radical, but then so are the demands of the grace which has saved us.

*Has found*- in the context of Rom. 3:27,28, what has he found to boast / glory about? The answer is- nothing, according to his works.

4:2 *If Abraham were justified by works*- as the Jews said he was. Jubilees 23:10: "Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well pleasing in righteousness". Indeed some of the Jewish writings claimed Abraham never sinned.

*Whereof to glory*- alluding to Sirach 44:19, which says about Abraham in the context of his good works: "None has been found like him in



glory”. This allusion to and deconstruction of other writings is something which Paul does quite often- and probably even more frequently, if we had access to more first century texts from which to perceive his allusions. Significantly, Sirach is in the Apocrypha, but Paul evidently disagrees with the book and shows it teaches wrongly about Abraham. This would possibly confirm the Protestant tradition of rejecting the Apocryphal books as inspired, although the recorded words of men in the canonical books are also of course quoted and deconstructed. But the quotation from Sirach is from the actual words of Ben Sira, which are claimed to be directly inspired.

*But not before God-* Before the judgment throne of God, of which Paul has been speaking in chapter 3, especially 3:19. He demonstrated there that all humanity, Abraham included, stand shamed and speechless before God. The idea that Abraham was sinless is therefore disputed strongly by Paul. The Greek phrase “before God” occurs several times in Romans. Because we are justified by faith, we have peace “before God” [AV “with God”, Rom. 5:1]. The practical section of Romans brings out what we ought to do, therefore, with that position- Paul prayed for Israel “before God” (AV “to God”, Rom. 10:1), and he urges the believers to likewise pray “before God” (AV “to God”, Rom. 15:30). If we are justified, declared right before God by grace, then as we stand there in His presence with His gracious acceptance, we ought to from that place beg His mercy for others. This is the practical outcome of the courtroom parable. We stand there accepted, with the judge lovingly smiling at us in gracious acceptance, with nothing now laid to our charge, declared right with God; and what should we then do? We who have peace before God should whilst before God, beg Him for mercy upon others. Job is really a working model for us in all this. He said the *wrong* things about God, as Elihu points out on God’s behalf; and yet before God’s awesome throne he was declared right, as if he had spoken what was right; and then he prays for his friends.

4:3 *What says..?*- the Bible as a living word continues to speak with us, in part of an ongoing dialogue between God and man.

*Counted-* the Greek word occurs very often in this section. Significantly, Rom. 3:28 says that we are to conclude [s.w. “count”] that we are justified by faith rather than works. We are to view ourselves, impute to ourselves, as God does. His view of us is to be our view of ourselves. The Septuagint uses this word with regard to sacrifices [symbolic of Christ’s death on the cross] being “reckoned” to a person (Lev. 7:18; Num. 18:27,30); and of Shimei asking David not to “reckon” his guilt to him, to judge him not according to the obvious

facts of the case (2 Sam. 19:20). The Old Testament is at pains to stress that Yahweh will *not* justify the guilty (Ex. 23:7; Is. 5:23; Prov. 17:15). This is where the unique significance of Jesus comes in. Because of *Him*, His death and our faith in it, our being in Him, God can justify the wicked in that they have died with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-5), they are no longer, they are only "in Christ", for them "to live is Christ". They are counted as in Him, and in this way sinners end up justified.

4:3-5 Abraham's weakness at the time of the Genesis 15 promises is perhaps behind how Paul interprets the star-gazing incident in Rom. 4:3-5. He is answering the Jewish idea that Abraham never sinned (see on Rom. 4:2). He quotes the incident, and God's counting of righteousness to Abraham, as proof that a man with no "works", nothing to glory before God with, can believe in God to "justify the ungodly", and thereby be counted righteous. Understanding Abraham's mood as revealed in Gen. 15:1-4 certainly helps us see the relevance of all this to Abraham. And it helps us see Abraham more realistically as the father of us all... and not some Sunday School hero, well beyond our realistic emulation. No longer need we think "Abraham? Oh, yeah, Abraham... faith... wow. But me... nah. I'm not Abraham...". He's for real, truly our example, a realistic hero whom we can cheer and pledge to follow. For Abraham is an example to us of God's grace to man, and a man in all his weakness and struggle with God accepting it and believing it, even when he is "*ungodly*", rather than a picture of a white-faced placid saint with unswerving faith:

"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, hath found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not toward God. For what saith the scripture? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Rom. 4:1-5).

It is in the very struggle for faith that we have that we show ourselves to have the family characteristic of Abraham. That moment when the "ungodly", doubting, bitter Abraham believed God's promise is to be as it were our icon, the picture we rise up to: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Know therefore that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:6,7).

The struggle within Abraham at the time is brought out by Paul in Rom. 4:18-24, which seems to be a kind of psychological commentary upon the state of Abraham's mind as he stood there looking at the stars

in the presence of God / an Angel ("before him [God] whom he believed", Rom. 4:17): "Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be. And without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead".

It may be that Abraham realised his own spiritual weakness at this time, if we follow Paul's argument in Rom. 4:3,5: "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory... (but) Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness... to him (alluding to Abraham) that worketh not, but believeth (as did Abraham) on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith (like Abraham's) is counted for righteousness". Surely this suggests that Abraham felt *ungodly* at the time, unworthy of this great promise, recognizing he only had moments of faith, and yet he believed that although he was ungodly, God would justify him and give him the promise, and therefore he was counted as righteous and worthy of the promise. There is certainly the implication of some kind of forgiveness being granted Abraham at the time of his belief in Gen. 15:6; righteousness was imputed to him, which is tantamount to saying that his ungodliness was covered. In this context, Paul goes straight on to say that the same principles operated in the forgiveness of David for his sin with Bathsheba. It would actually appear that Paul is writing here, as he often does, with his eye on deconstructing popular Jewish views at the time. Their view of Abraham was that he was perfect, "Godly" in the extreme- and Paul's point is that actually he was not, he was "ungodly", but counted righteous not by his acts but by his faith.

4:4 *He that works*- the same word for "works" is used in Mt. 25:16, where we are to trade or 'work' with our talents and will be judged for the quality of that working. The point surely is that we will be saved by grace, not works; and yet our works in response to that grace will be judged, and will determine the nature of the eternity, the salvation, which we enjoy- reigning over 10 or five or two cities etc. By a sublime paradox, the "work" we are to do is to believe in Jesus (Jn. 6:28-30). So

here in Rom. 4:4 we have to again read in an ellipsis: "He that [trusts in] works [for his justification]"

*Of debt-* The only other time the word occurs in the New Testament is in the request for our debts [i.e. sins] to be forgiven (Mt. 6:12). We are in debt to God, to suggest He is in debt to us is bizarre- as bizarre as thinking that we can be justified by our works rather than His grace.

4:5 *But believes-* the content of Abraham's faith was in the promise just given him that he would have a great descendant, the Lord Jesus, who would become many. The content of our faith in Christ which results in justification is the same. Note that Abraham wasn't presented with a complex theology of Christ which he had to say "yes" to. He was presented with very simple facts concerning Jesus- that He would be the future descendant of Abraham, and through connection with Him, blessing would be received and eternal inheritance of the earth. This is the same basic content of the faith in Christ which we are asked to have.

*The ungodly-* Abraham, whom the Jews argued was sinless and Godly because of his works (see on 4:2). The word is used about gross sinners (e.g. Rom. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 4:18). Again, Paul is using extreme language to demonstrate how serious is sin; a man like Abraham whom we would consider a Godly man was in fact ungodly- because he was a sinner.

*Counted for righteousness-* Paul comments that he persecuted the Christian church "zealously" (Phil. 3:6). He was alluding to the way that Phinehas is described as 'zealous' for the way in which he murdered an apostate Jew together with a Gentile who was leading him to sin (Num. 25). Note that the Jews in Palestine had no power to give anyone the death sentence, as witnessed not only by the record of the trial of Jesus but Josephus too (*Antiquities* 20.202; *BJ* 2.117; 6.302). Paul was a criminal murderer; and he had justified it by saying that he was the 1st Century Phinehas. Ps. 106:30 had commented upon the murder performed by Phinehas, that his zeal "was accounted to him for righteousness". This sets the background for the converted Paul's huge emphasis upon the fact that *faith* in Jesus is what is "reckoned for righteousness", and it is in *this* way that God "justifies the unGodly" (Rom. 4:3-5; 5:6; Gal. 3:6). Paul is inviting us to see ourselves as him- passionately obsessed with going about our justification the *wrong* way, and having to come to the *huge* realization that righteousness is *imputed* to us by our faith in the work of Jesus.

4:6 *Blessedness of the man*- the Greek idea is of 'beatification', making a man into a saint. This exalted language, the kind of thing the Rabbis did only for stellar examples of spirituality like Abraham and David, is actually the process which happens to every man who believes in Christ.

I've often asked myself *how* exactly the Mosaic Law led people to Christ. Was it not that they were convicted by it of guilt, and cried out for a Saviour? "The law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that... grace might reign... unto eternal life by Jesus" (Rom. 5:20,21). This was the purpose of the Law. And thus Paul quotes David's rejoicing in the righteousness imputed to him when he had sinned and had no works left to do- and changes the pronoun from "he" to "they" (Rom. 4:6-8). David's personal experience became typical of that of each of us. It was *through* the experience of that wretched and hopeless position that David and all believers come to know the true 'blessedness' of imputed righteousness and sin forgiven by grace. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Ps. 32:1), David wrote, after experiencing God's mercy in the matter of Bathsheba. But Paul sees this verse as David describing "the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works" (Rom. 4:6). Each of us are in need of a like justification; therefore we find ourselves in David's position. The Spirit changes Ps. 32:1 ("Blessed is *he* whose transgression is forgiven") to "Blessed are *they*" (Rom. 4:7) to make the same point.

*Without works*- in that there was no defined sacrifice for David to offer to atone for the murder of Uriah and adultery. We stand speechless and defenceless before the judgment seat of God in the same way. Again we see Paul urging us to accept the depth of our sinfulness- the position of a man guilty of adultery and murder is that of each of us.

4:7 *Blessed*- this is perhaps the thread of connection between the examples of Abraham and David. Abraham believed God's promise of blessing (which the New Testament interprets as forgiveness and salvation, e.g. Acts 3:25,26); he received the blessing for no works he had done, but simply because he believed. David likewise received a similar blessing- just because he believed.

4:8 *Blessed is the man*- connects with "blessed are *they*" (4:7). David becomes representative of us all.

*Will not*- a double negative in the Greek, He absolutely will not count us as sinners!

4:9 *This blessedness*- is paralleled with “righteousness” in the second half of the verse. Paul’s reasoning is that Abraham was uncircumcised when he received this blessing of righteousness, therefore circumcision is irrelevant. But the implication is that Abraham received the blessing, the righteous standing, immediately upon his belief, right there and then. Because the crux of the argument is that he received these things whilst uncircumcised. We therefore should be able to rejoice here and now that we right now are counted righteous before God’s judgment throne.

4:10 *How...?* – not ‘When?’. How, in what manner was righteousness reckoned- obviously not thanks to circumcision.

4:11 Circumcision was a sign given as a testament or seal to the faith Abraham had before he was circumcised, the faith which justified and saved him. Circumcision itself, therefore, was nothing to do with his justification. Paul appears to be laboring his points somewhat, but he was up against a colossally strong Jewish mindset that considered circumcision itself to be what saves and defines a person as God’s. The “seal” which we now have is in our foreheads, Rev. 9:4, a mental attitude, a seal stamped within our hearts by God’s Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30); as such it is invisible, an internal condition rather than an external mark in the flesh. But what exactly is it? Surely if we believe the good news which Paul has been explaining, that we stand ashamed and condemned before God’s judgment seat but are then declared righteous, justified and saved, standing there in the very presence of God clean and justified- this will make an indelible psychological mark upon the person who believes this. ‘Once saved always saved’ is too primitive a teaching- we can fall from grace. But all the same, if we have really and truly experienced this great salvation, we have the mark of it, the seal of it in our hearts, and it will become evident in our thinking and speaking and behavior in this world. Whatever we do subsequently with this grace, our experience of standing justified before God will leave as I put it, an indelible psychological mark upon us. This is what I suggest is the sealing of which the New Testament speaks. And it has to be inevitably observed that many who bear the name of Christ would appear by the way they reason and act to simply not have that indelible psychological mark upon them. Which is the value of Romans, working through the mechanics of salvation in this dense, intense manner, to bring us to the point where we too are convicted, converted and can stand rejoicing “before God”, declared right.

Another angle on this is that the circumcision which we receive is to be connected with baptism (Col. 2:11-15). The cutting off of the flesh is therefore achieved by Christ operating directly on our hearts, rather than by the midwife's knife. In this case, baptism likewise would be a "seal" upon our faith in God's righteousness being counted to us in Christ; and it is this faith which is the essence of our salvation.

However, Romans 6 seems to place baptism as more than a mere piece of physical symbolism of the same value as circumcision; it is the means by which a believer believes into Christ and thus becomes "in Christ", thereby having His righteousness counted to them. 1 Clement, the Shepherd of Hermes and other early Christian writings likewise speak of baptism as the "seal" upon Christian faith.

*That righteousness might be imputed to them-* because Abraham is their spiritual father. Here we see the power of example. Abraham inspires our faith, and so the amazing grace of righteousness being counted to us happens, in one sense, because of him- because he opened the paradigm, of being declared right before God just because he believed. The crucial family likeness in the Abraham family is therefore faith, not marks in the flesh placed on the male members of the tribe. This of course was blasphemy for the Jews to hear... In this sense therefore, Abraham was father of "all" the believers in Rome, both Jew and Gentile. Connection to him should therefore create unity between ethnic groups rather than exclusivity.

*Walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham-* see on 4:1.

Walking in the steps of Abraham suggests that his journey of faith from Ur to Haran to Canaan becomes typical of the walk of every single believer towards salvation in the Kingdom, a journey only motivated by our faith that we will be there, that we are declared right before God in Christ. Abraham walked by faith- but the content of that faith, Paul is arguing, was faith in justification by God. Likewise we will not get very far in our walk to the Kingdom if we fail to believe that we are already right now justified and right with God; we aren't walking to judgment day in the vague hope that we will inherit the Kingdom, walking to the Kingdom to see if we shall enter into it. We walk [Gk. 'march'] in faith, faith that we are already declared right before God, that ours is the Kingdom, and we are walking there to obtain it, just as Abraham took his steps toward Canaan not to just have a look at it and see if he would obtain it, but rather believing that it already was his. The Greek word "steps" is in fact a form of the word 'arrival'; we are walking to the Kingdom and yet we have in a sense arrived there.

Lk. 19:9 = Rom. 4:11,12. If you have real faith, you'll be like Zacchaeus. You'll have his determination, his unashamedness to come out in the open for Christ your Lord.

4:13 *Promise*- the Greek really means an announcement. It's not a vague possibility, the 'promises' to Abraham were an announcement that he would inherit the Kingdom. The promise Paul refers to was given to Abraham because of, *dia*, on account of, his being declared right with God by faith in Gen. 15:6. Perhaps Paul specifically has in mind the promise of Gen. 22:17,18. Having been declared right with God, Abraham was then promised that he personally would be heir of the world- the implications of being right with God, counted righteous, were thereby fleshed out and given some more tangible, material, concrete form. He would therefore live for ever, because he was right with God; and the arena of that eternity would be "the world".

*Heir of the world*- Abraham was only explicitly promised the land of Canaan, not the entire planet. Perhaps Paul is interpreting the promises that his seed would comprise "many nations" and that he would bring blessing on "all the peoples of the earth" (Gen. 12:2,3 etc.). In this sense, they would become his, and he would thereby inherit them. Thus Is. 55:3-5 likewise implies that Abraham's promised inheritance was therefore not only the land of Canaan but by implication, the whole planet.

God promised Abraham a very specific inheritance in Canaan. And yet this promise seems to be interpreted in later Scripture as referring to the *world-wide* Kingdom which will be established at the second coming (e.g. Rom. 4:13 speaks of how Abraham was promised that he would inherit the world; Ps. 72 and other familiar prophecies speak of a world-wide Messianic Kingdom, based on the promises to Abraham). One possible explanation is found in Psalm 2, where the Father seems to encourage the Son to ask of Him "the *heathen* [i.e., not just the Jews] for thine inheritance, and the *uttermost parts of the earth* [not just the land of promise] for thy possession" (Ps. 2:8). Could it be that due to the Lord's spiritual ambition, the inheritance was extended from the Jewish people to *all* nations, and from literal Canaan to all the earth? This is not to say, of course, that *fundamentally* the promises to Abraham have been changed. No. The promise of eternal inheritance of Canaan still stands as the basis of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Gal. 3:8), but that promise has been considerably extended, thanks to the Lord's spiritual ambition.

Abraham believed God in Gen. 15, but the works of Gen. 22 [offering Isaac] made that faith "perfect". Through his correct response to the



early promises given him, Abraham was imputed “the righteousness of faith”. But *on account of* that faith inspired by the earlier promises, he was given “the promises that he should be heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13). That promise in turn inspired yet more faith. In this same context, Paul had spoken of how the Gospel preached to Abraham in the promises leads men “from faith to faith”, up the upward spiral (Rom. 1:17).

Through his correct response to the early promises given him, Abraham was imputed “the righteousness of faith”. But *on account of* that faith inspired by the earlier promises, he was given “the promise that he should be heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13). That promise in turn inspired yet more faith. In this same context, Paul had spoken of how the Gospel preached to Abraham in the promises leads men “from faith to faith”, up the upward spiral (Rom. 1:17).

4:14 The huge importance attached to faith in Gen. 15:6 would be pointless if obedience to the Law was what guaranteed the promise of inheritance the world- as Jewish theology taught about Abraham. The promise of the Kingdom would become irrelevant because Paul has demonstrated in Romans 1-3 that all men, Abraham included, are sinners, law breakers, and condemned before the judgment seat of God. Nobody would therefore inherit the promised Kingdom, and so the promise of it would have been pointless- see on 4:15.

4:15 *wrath*- the wrath of Divine condemnation. Because nobody keeps God’s law fully, therefore the law brings those under it to condemnation. Another way has to be found if we wish to be declared right and not condemned. To say that the law creates [AV “works”] Divine wrath upon men is another example of Paul using purposefully radical and controversial language to demonstrate the seriousness of sin and the utter folly of hiding behind legal righteousness. Law creates the possibility of “transgression”, a conscious crossing over the line. Sin is one thing; but transgression is what brings liability to receiving the wrath of God, because if we know His law and cross over it, then we are the more culpable. This difference between sin and transgression is at the root of a great Biblical theme- that knowledge brings responsibility. And this was particularly relevant and concerning, or it ought to have been, to a Jewish audience so keen to attain rightness with God through obedience to law.

4:16 *To the end the promise might be sure*- God’s promises are sure from His end, in that He will not break them. But the promised inheritance of the Kingdom would never be a very sure promise if it depended upon human acts of obedience to come true. But because

salvation is by our faith in God's grace, declaring us right quite apart from our works- therefore we are sure of entering that Kingdom, and in this sense it is grace which makes the promise sure. The certainty of our future hope and present salvation is therefore precisely in the fact that it doesn't depend upon our works. All the time we think it does, the promise of salvation will not appear to us to be at all "sure".

*To all the seed-* the fact salvation is by pure grace to sinners means that any person of whatever ethnic background may believe in it and accept it. The result of that is that there should be no spiritual difference between ethnic groups such as Jew and Gentile in Rome. And today, our common experience of utter grace, each of us accessing it by faith, should be the basis for a powerful unity.

*Faith of Abraham-* There is an intended ambiguity in the phrase "the faith of Abraham" (Rom. 4:16); this 'ambiguous genitive' can mean those who share "the (doctrinal) faith" , which Abraham also believed; or those who have the kind of belief which Abraham had. Like Abraham, we are justified by *the* faith in Christ; not faith in Christ, but more specifically *the* faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16). The use of the definite article surely suggests that it is our possession of the same doctrinal truths (the Faith) which Abraham had, which is what leads to faith in Christ and thereby our justification. The *life* Paul lived was by *the* Faith of Christ; not simply by faith, as a verb, which is how grammatically it should be expressed if this is what was meant; but by *the* Faith (Gal. 2:20).

*Father of us all-* see on Rom. 4:1.

4:17 *Before him [God] whom he believed-* continues the language of our standing "before God" in 3:19,20 and being condemned there for our sins, and yet also being declared righteous there by His grace and our faith in that grace. The first part of v. 17 is in brackets, correctly in my opinion. Abraham was declared the "father of us all" (4:16) before God, as he stood as it were in God's judgment presence and was justified, declared right- God then considered him as the father of us all, naming things [AV "calling"] which didn't exist as if they did. Abraham the ungodly was counted as Godly; we who were sinners, disobedient to the law, were counted as obedient; and thus God as it were saw Abraham before His presence not merely as Abraham, but as representative of so many others who would likewise believe in God's grace and be thereby justified.

*Calls those things which be not as though they were-* is exactly what Paul has been arguing all through his letter so far. God calls the

unrighteous righteous, counting righteousness to those who believe, who are themselves not righteous. "Calls" strictly means 'to name', and the reference would initially be to the way God called Abram as Abraham, as if he already was the father of the people of many nations whom God foresaw would believe in His promised grace just as Abraham had done. God saw us then as if we existed, in the same way as He sees us as righteous even though we are not. The idea of calling things which don't exist into existence also has suggestions of creation (Is. 41:4; 48:13). The new, spiritual creation is indeed a creation *ex nihilo*, an act of grace. Incomprehensible to the modern mind, the natural creation involved the creation of matter from out of God, and not out of any visible, concrete matter which already existed. The physical creation therefore looked forward to the grace of the new creation- creating people spiritually out of nothing, counting righteousness to them which they didn't have, treating them as persons whom they were not.

Because God is not limited by time, He speaks of things which do not now exist as if they do, because He knows that ultimately they will exist (Rom. 4:17). This explains why the Bible speaks as if Abraham is still alive although he is now dead; as if the believers are now saved in God's kingdom, although "he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Mt. 10:22); as if Israel were obedient to God's word (Ps. 132:4 cp. Ex. 19:5-6), when they will only be so in the future; as if Christ existed before His birth, although he evidently only existed physically after his birth of Mary.

Our comprising the Kingdom to some degree is understandable seeing that God speaks of "those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). Thus Abraham and those believers who have died are described as 'living unto God' in prospect, because He can foresee their resurrection (Lk. 20:38). It is to this that Rom. 6:11 refers: "Reckon yourselves (i.e. in prospect)... alive unto God through (having been resurrected with) Jesus" in baptism. In the same way as in prospect we should reckon ourselves resurrected to eternal life, unable to give service to sin any longer, so in the same way we are now in the Kingdom. Careful attention to the tenses in 1 Cor. 15:20 indicates the same logic; by His resurrection Christ has "become the firstfruits of them that slept"- not those 'who are sleeping', but "that slept", seeing that because of their Lord's resurrection they also are alive in prospect. Similarly if Christ had not risen "they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" (1 Cor.15:18), implying that now they are not perished. The practical meaning of all this is that we should live now in

the same joy and righteousness as if we were in the Kingdom. "The day (of the Kingdom) is at hand: let us therefore... walk honestly, as in the day" (Rom.13:12,13), i.e. as if we are now living in the Kingdom which is soon to come.

4:18 *Who against hope believed in hope* – see on Rom. 4:19. The first “hope” may be human hope- and Abraham as a sinner was in a hopeless situation. Yet he believed and thereby shared in God’s hopefulness for us, seeing himself as God saw him- as declared right. “Against” could equally be translated “beyond”. Beyond human hope, Abraham had hope. This is the essence of the Gospel- having no hope in our own strength, standing condemned and speechless before God, but believing in His hopefulness for us. His faith in this instance was that he would indeed become a father of many nations. He didn’t just believe that he was declared right with God, but that really and truly there would be people world-wide who would likewise believe and become his seed. In this sense he believed in God’s hope. We likewise need to share in the hopefulness of God for people rather than being negative, cynical and defeatist about people just because so many chose not to respond.

*Father of many nations*- Because of Sarah’s faith, “therefore sprang there... so many as the stars of the sky in multitude” (Heb. 11:11,12). Those promises to Abraham had their fulfillment, but conditional on Abraham and Sarah’s faith. Gen. 18:18-20 says that the fulfillment of the promises was conditional on Abraham teaching his children / seed the ways of God. Those promises / prophecies were “sure” in the sense that God’s side of it was. Rom. 4:18 likewise comments that Abraham became “the father of many nations” precisely because he *believed* in this hope. Yet the promise / prophecy that he would be a father of many nations could sound as if it would have happened anyway, whatever. But it was actually conditional upon Abraham’s faith. And he is our great example exactly because he had the possibility and option of *not* believing in the hope he had been offered.

4:19 *Not weak in faith*- s.w. “impotent”, Jn. 5:7; the word is usually used with the sense of sickness or weak health. Abraham was physically impotent, perhaps even seriously ill and weak at the time the promise was given- but not impotent or weak in faith. The idea of the Greek is that Abraham didn’t weaken in faith as he observed / considered his body. We showed in our introductory comments that the theological first half of Romans has many connections with the practical second half. Thus we meet this very same phrase “weak in faith” in Rom. 14:1,2- where we are told to accept those who are “weak

in faith". This connection would seem to be a tacit admission that not all in the ecclesia are going to rise up to the faith of Abraham, even though he is to be the father of us all, in that we share that same family characteristic of faith. Thus on one hand Paul sets Abraham before us as a vital, crucial pattern- not an option, a nice idea, but a role model whose faith must be followed, in whose faithful steps we are to walk. And yet he accepts that not all in Christ will rise up to his level of faith- and we are to accept them. The same word for "weak" is used in Rom. 5:6- whilst we were weak [AV "without strength"], Christ died for us. We therefore are to accept the weak, even as Christ died for us in our weakness. We share something of His cross in accepting those who are spiritually weaker than ourselves. Yet so many refuse to carry His cross in this matter, because their own pride stops them accepting those weaker in the faith than themselves.

*Considered not-* He didn't fix his mind upon (Gk.) the fact his body was dead (i.e. impotent) and unable to produce seed (Rom. 4:19). He wasn't obsessed with his state, yet he lived a life of faith that ultimately God's Kingdom would come, he rejoiced at the contemplation of Christ his Lord; and he filled his life with practical service. He wasn't obsessed with the fact that in his marital position he personally couldn't have children when it seemed this was what God wanted him to do; and this was very pleasing to God.

*Neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb-* so often we allow the apparent weakness of others to become a barrier to our faith. 'She'll never change... she just isn't capable of that'. But Abraham not only believed that *he* could do it, but that the apparent obstacle of another's weakness was also surmountable by the word of promise.

*An hundred years old-* Gen. 17:1 says he was 99, so he was in his 100<sup>th</sup> year.

4:19,20 There are some implied gaps within the record in Gen. 15:5,6: God brings Abraham outside, and asks him to number the stars [gap]; then He tells Abraham "So shall thy seed be" [gap]; and then, maybe 10 seconds or 10 hours afterwards, "Abraham believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness". Those 10 seconds or 10 hours or whatever the period was, are summarized by Paul as how Abraham "in hope believed against hope" (4:18). His no-hope struggled against his hope / faith, but in the end his faith in God's word of promise won out. "According to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be" implies to me that he kept reflecting on those words: "So shall thy seed be" (three words in Hebrew, *ko zehrah hawya*). And we too can too easily say that we believe the Bible is God's word, without realizing

that to just believe three inspired words can be enough to radically change our lives and lead us to eternity. I'm not sure that Abraham's ultimate belief of those three words *ko zehrah hawya* just took a few seconds. According to Paul, he "considered... his body"- he reflected on the fact he was impotent (see Gk. and RV). *Katanoeo*, "consider", means to "observe fully" (Rom. 4:19). He took full account of his impotent state, knowing it as only a man can know it about himself. And he likewise considered fully the deadness of his elderly wife's womb, recalling how her menstruation had stopped years ago... but all that deeply personal self-knowledge didn't weaken his faith; he didn't "waver", but in fact- the very opposite occurred. He "waxed strong through faith... being fully assured that what [God] had promised, He was able also to perform". As he considered his own physical weakness, and that of his wife, his faith "waxed" stronger (RV), he went through a process of becoming "fully assured", his faith was progressively built up ("waxed strong" is in the passive voice)... leading up to the moment of total faith that so thrilled the heart of God. And so it can happen with us- the very obstacles to faith, impotence in Abraham's case, are what actually leads to faith getting into that upward spiral that leads towards total certainty. Abraham's physical impotence did not make him "weak" [s.w. translated "impotent" in Jn. 5:3,7] in faith- it all worked out the opposite. For his physical impotence made him not-impotent in faith; the very height of the challenge led him to conclude that God would be true to His word, and he would indeed have a child. For when we are "weak" [s.w. "impotent"], then we are strong (2 Cor. 12:10). Thus the internal struggle of Abraham's mind led his faith to develop in those seconds or minutes or hours as he reflected upon the words "So shall your seed be". He "staggered not at the promise" (Rom. 4:20), he didn't separate himself away from (Gk.) those three Hebrew words translated "So shall your seed be", he didn't let his mind balk at them... and therefore and thereby he was made strong in faith ("waxed strong in faith" Rom. 4:20 RV). This process of his faith strengthening is picked up in the next verse: Abraham was "fully persuaded that what [God] had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21). There was a process of internal persuasion going on- leading to the moment of faith, which so thrilled God and was imputed to Abraham for righteousness. And of course Paul drives the point home- that we are to have the faith of Abraham. As he believed that life could come out of his dead body ("dead" in Rom. 4:19, with a passive participle, implies 'slain'), so *we* are to believe in the resurrection of the slain body of the Lord Jesus, and the real power of His new life to transform our dead lives (Rom. 4:23,24).

Gal. 3:5,14 puts it another way in saying that if we share the faith of Abraham at that time, we will receive "the promise of the spirit through faith", the enlivening of our sterile lives. And this takes quite some faith for us to take seriously on board; for as Abraham carefully considered the impotence of his physical body, so we can get a grim picture of the deadness of our fleshly lives. These ideas help us understand more clearly why the Lord chose to be baptized. He understood baptism as a symbol of his death (Lk. 12:50). Rom. 6:3-5 likewise makes the connection between baptism and crucifixion. The Lord knew that He would be crucified, and yet He lived out the essence of it in His own baptism.

4:20 *Staggered not*- Gk. *diakrino*, to judge. Abraham didn't judge God by doubting, analyzing, forensically investigating, the promise made-finding all the possible reasons why it might not be true for him. This continues the idea of Rom. 3:4- that man effectively puts God in the dock and prosecutes Him for false witness and unreal promises, the accusers being the doubts of God's grace deep within the human mind. Abraham didn't do this. The word occurs only one other time in Romans, in the practical section, in Rom. 14:23: "He that doubts [s.w. 'stagger'] is damned if he eat". If we are truly Abraham's children and don't doubt God's promises, we will have a strong conscience, not worrying that eating this or that or failing to keep some ritual will result in our losing God's grace.

*Was strong*- Gk. 'was / became strengthened' - by whom? By God? In this case we would see God's grace yet more apparent, in that Abraham was justified by his faith in God's grace, but God Himself partially empowered that faith. This would be an example of how faith is part of an upward spiritual spiral, the dynamic in which is God Himself- a theme with which Romans begins, when Paul talks about going "from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17). Exactly the same term is used about Paul after his conversion- he "increased the more in strength" and confounded Jewish opposition to the Gospel (Acts 9:22). As so often, Paul provides himself as a parade example of what he's preaching. Significantly, Paul elsewhere comments that it is Christ who strengthens him within his mind (Phil. 4:13 and context; other examples of the same word applied to Christ's strengthening of Paul are in 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:17; and Heb. 11:37 says that the faithful of old were "made strong" in their faith, by God). We are thrown up yet again against God's grace. We can be saved by grace if we believe in that grace, but the Lord is willing to even strengthen us in that necessary faith. See on 4:21 "fully persuaded", where again God is the

persuader of human faith. Abraham therefore gave the glory to God, because it was God who had strengthened his faith and the whole thing comes down to God's grace in every way, for which we can only glorify Him. Paul uses the same phrase for 'giving glory to God' as in Lk. 17:18, where it is a Gentile rather than the Jews who give glory to God for what He has done for them- and surely this is another of Paul's many allusions to the Gospel records.

Mt. 21:21 = Rom. 4:20. Paul saw Abraham as being like the man in the parable who had the faith to throw mountains into the sea.

4:21 *Fully persuaded*- by whom? Surely by God. This continues the theme of 'was strengthened' in 4:20 [see note there], that although God's saving grace is accessible to us by faith, He also plays a part in developing that faith. This of course lays the basis for Paul's later comment in Romans upon predestination as being an indicator of God's pure grace. For He doesn't just start talking about predestination without a context- he cites it as an example, or another window onto, God's grace.

We have earlier commented that the doctrinal section of Romans [chapters 1-8] has many connections with the latter, practical part of Romans; and we've demonstrated that several verses in Romans 4 contain phrases which recur in Romans 14. "Fully persuaded" occurs elsewhere in Romans only in Rom. 14:5, where Paul urges that each of us, like Abraham, should be "fully persuaded in [our] own mind" about the matter of Sabbath keeping. The implication isn't so much that each of us should just be certain that we are fully persuaded of our position- that would be to state an axiom needlessly- but surely the point of the allusion to Abraham's full persuasion in Rom. 4:21 is that if we have been fully persuaded of God's salvation being by pure grace and not works, then we will not be concerned about keeping days or indeed any other ritual in order to gain His acceptance. That same principle can be applied in our church lives, in forming our approach to matters of external ritual [e.g. head coverings for sisters, or dress codes at church meetings] which in our generation may be a live issue, as Sabbath keeping was for the Rome ecclesia of the first century.

*Able to perform*- it may seem obvious that anyone who believes in the God of the Bible will believe that God Almighty is truly almighty, and is capable of doing what He has promised. And yet when it comes to believing that He is able to save me despite my sins and regardless of my works- we all baulk. Abraham believed, that God was able to do what He had said. To save him, without works. The only other time the Greek phrase translated "able to perform" occurs is in Lk. 1:49, where



young Mary exalts that the God who is able has performed great things for her. Perhaps Paul is setting her up as our example. That barefoot and pregnant, illiterate young woman (a teenager, probably), who took God at His word. Paul maybe has the same sense in mind when he comments that the God who cannot lie has promised us eternal life (Tit. 1:2). John in characteristic bluntness puts it so clearly: "This is the promise that He has promised us: eternal life" (1 Jn. 2:25). To doubt that we shall receive it is effectively calling Him a liar. We are between a rock and a hard place. We must either face up to the wonder of our salvation, or do the unthinkable- call God a liar, one incapable of doing what He has said. Sarah likewise "judged Him faithful who had promised" (Heb. 11:11). There again we meet the idea of putting God in the dock. We judge Him- as either faithful, or unfaithful; able or unable; almighty or impotent, a god of nice ideas and fair words which have no cash value in the weakness and desperation of our human, earthly lives. The Greek translated "promise" can be used in the context of a legal assertion about oneself (although it isn't used within the NT in this way). God is in the dock, making the promise, the assertion about Himself, His very own self, that He will give us eternal life. And we judge Him- as speaking the Truth, the most ultimate truth of the cosmos, of history- or as lying under oath to us. Faced with a choice like that, we have no real choice but with Abraham and Sarah "judge Him faithful who has promised" (Heb. 11:11).

4:22 *Imputed*- this word occurs so many times in Romans 4. Abraham's faith that God would give him the promised blessing and salvation was counted to him as righteousness, with no reference to Abraham's works or sins. The word recurs in the practical section of Romans just once- in Rom. 14:14: "To him that counts anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean"- although there is nothing "unclean in itself". God counts us as clean, not unclean. The person who is always paranoid about this that or the other being unclean, the need to separate from this brother or that sister for their uncleanness, hasn't been filled with the positive spirit of our Father, who rejoices to count unclean persons as clean. This isn't in any way to blur the boundary between clean and unclean, sin and righteousness. Rather is it the logical connection between Rom. 4:21, speaking of God calling sinners as righteous; and Rom. 14:14, which warns that men have a tendency to count / impute things as unclean rather than clean. Cleanness or uncleanness is a matter of perception, seems to be Paul's message. For "there is nothing unclean in itself". Likewise sin and righteousness are matters of God's perception; for sometimes a man can do something which is counted a sin, other times the same act can be counted as righteousness. Yet God

is eager to count us as clean; and we should have that same positive, seeking, saving spirit.

*4:23 Not written for his sake alone-* Where was it written? In some unrecorded Scripture? In God's heavenly record book? Or is the allusion to the finality of the legal case now concluded, that 'it was written' in the sense of legally concluded, under the hammer, so to speak? The suggestion is that right now in this life, if we really believe God's offered salvation, or perhaps, *for so long* as we believe it- we are written down as declared right before His judgment. In this case, Paul is interpreting the comment in Gen. 15:6 "And it was imputed unto him for righteousness" as a writing in Heaven, the court secretary writing down the outcome of the case. The Jews taught that justification would only be at the future day of judgment (see D. Moo *Romans* 1-8, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1991) p. 293). Paul is teaching that in fact we can be justified, declared right with God, here and now; and we ought to be able to know and feel that.

*That it was imputed-* this appears to be a pointless repetition of the same phrase in the preceding 4:22. Paul keeps on and on repeating it to try to impress upon us the sheer wonder of it all- that we are counted righteous when we are not.

*4:24 But for us also-* in that Abraham was being consciously set up as our example; and the record of Abraham's justification by faith is purposefully designed, Paul seems to be inferring, to inspire us to a similar faith.

*Believe on Him that raised up Jesus-* our faith is that God will justify us by His grace. But as Paul will now go on to show (see on 5:1), that position of being declared right with God will be articulated in our being given eternal life. This means in practice that we will be resurrected as Jesus was, and given eternal life. So our belief in God is a belief in the God of resurrection, who resurrected Jesus our representative, in whom, through faith and baptism into His death and resurrection, we shall also be resurrected to eternal life.

*4:25 Handed over because of our trespasses* is an allusion to the LXX of Is. 53:12: "He was handed over because of their sins". The Gospel accounts of the crucifixion give special emphasis to the moment of the Lord being handed over to those who would crucify Him. Paul is going on to show the mechanics, as it were, of how God has chosen to operate. His scheme of justifying us isn't merely a case of Him saying 'So you are declared right by Me'. He can do as He wishes, but He prefers to work through some kind of mechanism. We are declared

right by God although we are sinners; which raises the obvious question: So what becomes of our sins? And so Paul explains that by talking about the crucial role of the death of Christ. Because He was of our nature, He is our representative. Although He never sinned, He died, yet He rose again to eternal life. Through connection with Him, we therefore can be counted as in Him, and thereby be given that eternal life through resurrection, regardless of our sins. In this sense, Jesus had to die and resurrect because of our sins.

*Raised for our justification* is also an allusion to the LXX of Isaiah 53, this time to Is. 53:11, which speaks of “the righteous servant” (Jesus) “justifying the righteous”. The repetition of the word “righteous” suggests that on account of the Lord’s death, and resurrection, His righteousness becomes ours, through this process of justification. But how and why, exactly, does Christ’s death and resurrection enable our justification? Paul has explained that faith in God brings justification before Him. Now Paul is explaining how and why this process operates. Jesus died and rose again to eternal life as our representative. If we believe into Him (which chapter 6 will define as involving our identification with His death and resurrection by baptism), then we too will live for ever as He does, as we will participate in His resurrection to eternal life. Our final justification, being declared in the right, will be at the day of judgment. We will be resurrected, judged, and declared righteous- and given eternal life, never again to sin and die. This is the end result of the status of ‘justified’ which we have now, as we stand in the dock facing God’s judgment.

## Notes

(1) C.K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last* (New York: Scribner’s, 1962) p. 31.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 5

Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; 2 through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and in which we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

6 For while we were yet weak, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous man! Perhaps for the good man some one would even dare to die. 8 But God commends His own love toward us, in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the anger of God through him. 10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 And not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

### *Adam and Christ*

12 So through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, for that all sinned. 13 For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law! 14 Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of him that was to come.

15 But not as the trespass, so also is the free gift. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 This gift is unlike the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment came because of one man to condemnation; but the free gift came out of many trespasses to justification. 17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned on account of the one man; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life on account of the one man, Jesus Christ.

18 So then. As through one act of sin the judgment came to all men to condemnation, even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came to all men to justification of life. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one man shall the many be made righteous.

20 Now the law was added to increase the trespass, but where sin

increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that as sin reigned with the result of death, even so might grace reign through righteousness with the result of eternal life- through Jesus Christ our Lord.

5:1 There's a noticeable change of style beginning at Rom. 5:1. Paul starts to talk about "we", as if he assumes that he has won the argument in chapters 1-4 and taken his readership with him- they along with him are now, as it were, believers in Christ. Instead of the focus on "justification" which there is in chapters 1-4, the end result of God's work for us is generally replaced with the word "life", i.e. eternal life, occurring 24 times in chapters 5-8. Chapters 5-8 of Romans form a definite section. The words "love", "justify", "glory", "peace", "hope", "tribulation", "save" and "endurance" all occur in Rom. 5:1-11 and also several times in Rom. 8:18-39. These passages form bookends [an 'inclusio' is the technical term] to the material sandwiched between them. Paul is going on from us standing before Divine judgment declared right, justified by our faith in God's promise of grace. That salvation will be and is articulated in terms of life, eternal life, life lived both now and in its fullness after we again stand before the final judgment seat of Christ.

*We have peace*- It's hard to avoid the conclusion that God has written His word in such a way as to leave some things intentionally ambiguous. He could just have given us a set of brief bullet points, written in an unambiguous manner. But instead He gave us the Bible. Given that most of His people over history have been illiterate, they simply couldn't have been able to understand His word in an academic, dissective, analytical sense. Take Rom. 5:1- it could read "Let us have peace" (subjunctive) or "We have peace" (indicative). The difference is merely the length of a vowel, and this would only have been apparent in *reading* it, as the difference wouldn't have been aurally discernible when the letter was publically read. Was the "land" meant to be understood as the whole earth, or just the land of Israel...?

*Peace* here refers to our being right with God, rather than a calmness in life generally. Such a thing isn't promised to Christians but rather the very opposite. "Peace with God" cannot be experienced if we are continually doubting whether or not we shall ultimately be saved. We should be able to say that if the Lord were to return right now, by grace, we believe that we shall surely be saved; for we are right here and now justified before God's judgment seat. Therefore we experience right now "peace with God".

*Through our Lord Jesus Christ*- previously Paul has pointed out that God has set us right with Him simply if we can believe that He would

do this. But increasingly, Paul points out that *how and why* this is- He does this on account of the work of the Lord Jesus.

*5:2 Access into this grace wherein we stand-* may be continuing the judgment image of chapters 3 and 4, in which we are left standing in the dock before the judgment of God, and by grace are declared right when in fact we are sinners. And we stand there before God's judgment, very much in grace. The language of 'access into' suggests that "this grace" is a situation, a 'place', a status, in which we are now permanently located. "Access into... wherein we stand" is a phrase used in classical Greek about entering a royal presence (Moo, *op cit.* p. 300 gives examples). So the idea is very much of our standing in the august judgment presence of God acceptable by status. This point needs to be more than intellectually noted; it must be our real and felt experience that we are not one moment in an acceptable status with God, and then next we slip out of it- through inattention, insensitivity, or downright selfish rebellion on our part. We are in a relationship, married as it were to Him, bearing His Name, and thereby in a permanent status. Perhaps we can be so foolish as to leave that status, but we certainly don't drift in and out of it insofar as we sin or avoid sinning in the course of daily life. The very nature of the "grace" status which we are in means that we are declared right, OK with God, in spite or and even in the face of our sins.

*Rejoice in hope-* standing before God justified means that in the judgment day to come at the Lord's return to earth, we will be accepted and given eternal life in God's Kingdom. We are to rejoice (Gk. 'boast') in that hope quite naturally- for Paul doesn't exhort us to rejoice in the hope, he simply states that given our position of grace, we, naturally, rejoice in hope. If we cannot say "Yes" to the question "Will you be accepted before the judgment seat of Christ?", then I fail to see that we can rejoice in hope. To rejoice in hope means that we have accepted God's judgment of us now- and His judgment is that we are acceptable to Him, that even now, "it's all OK". If we are to boast in this hope- and the Greek translated "rejoice" definitely means that- this would imply that we can't keep quiet about such good news. We simply have to share it with others.

*The glory of God-* our hope to participate in this glory, which is associated in Mt. 6:13 with the future Kingdom of God on earth, connects with what Paul has earlier reasoned in Rom. 3:23- that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We who have been declared right can now rejoice in the prospect of participating in that glory, that glorious eternal future, which we fell short of by our sins.

We commented under 3:23 that Paul is referring to writings such as the Apocalypse of Moses, which claimed that Adam had fallen short of God's glory in Eden, but the hope of the Messianic age would be Adam's restoration to the glory intended in Eden (Apoc. Moses 39.2-3). Adam is everyman- a theme now to be developed specifically here in Romans 5.

*5:3 Tribulations-* s.w. Rom. 2:9, where we read that "tribulation" will come upon the rejected, faithless sinner at the day of judgment. Paul no doubt had in mind "the tribulation" which the Olivet prophecy and other NT Scriptures predicted would come upon the faithful in the first century. But the connection with Rom. 2:9 suggests that he saw that in a sense, we are condemned for our sins now, and as he explains in Romans 6, we die to sin, in baptism we take fully the condemnation for sin, and we rise again as new people, like the Lord Jesus, who are not under condemnation. Indeed the same word for "tribulation" occurs in Rom. 8:35, where Paul exalts that tribulation, distress, persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril and the sword cannot separate us from Christ's loving acceptance; and most if not all of those terms are applied elsewhere in Scripture to the rejected at the day of judgment. The condemnation for sin- our sins- will not separate us from Christ's love, and we shall be saved all the same. If this idea of "tribulation" as part of the condemnation process for sinners is indeed somewhere in Paul's mind (for this is how the word is used in 2 Thess. 1:6; Rev. 2:22), he would be saying that as a result of experiencing in our lives the condemnation for sin, we come through enduring the process ["patience", *hupomone*] to 'pass the test' (Rom. 5:4, AV "experience" is a terribly poor translation), and through that we come to a sure hope in acceptance at the last day and a feeling unashamed (Rom. 5:5), despite knowing we are on one hand condemned sinners.

"Being therefore justified by faith, let us have peace... let us rejoice... let us also rejoice in our tribulations" (Rom. 5:1-3 RV). If we really feel justified due to righteousness being imputed to us, then this will give us a joyful perspective on all suffering. For the reality that we are counted righteous will mean that all tribulation "under the sun" is not so ultimately meaningful; and thus we will find all joy and peace through believing.

*5:4 Patience... experience... hope* – see on Rom. 5:3. "Experience" translates a Greek word elsewhere translated 'to put to the proof', and meaning 'to pass the test'. We are going through the future judgment process right now- by passing through "tribulation", living out the consequences for our sin, but in faith in God's acceptance of us- we

pass the test. The future day of judgment isn't our ultimate test or putting to the proof; our faithful acceptance of salvation by grace today, right now, is our crucial testing or proving.

*5:5 Makes not ashamed-* a significant theme in Paul and Peter (Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6).. The believer in Christ will not be ashamed at the last day judgment, with which "shame" is so often associated for the rejected (Dan. 12:2; Lk. 14:9; Jude 13; Rev. 16:15). If we have confident hope that we will not be rejected but will be saved at the last day, that we will not be ashamed then- therefore nothing in this life should make us feel ashamed, not even our own sins, for the shame of them is taken away by God's declaring us right.

*Because the love of God-* Gk. *hoti* isn't necessarily causative but it can be demonstrative. Paul may not therefore mean that we are unashamed *because* the love of God is in our hearts; he may mean that we are unashamed, as the final end result of God's justification process, we stand before Him uncondemned, not in shame as are the rejected sinners; and *therefore* the love of God becomes shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This latter option is how I interpret *hoti* here, because Paul has been building up all throughout the letter to the reason why we are unashamed at judgment- it is because we are declared legally right before God's judgment by God the judge of all, due to our faith in His grace which operates through Jesus. Nothing has so far been said about the Holy Spirit in our hearts being the basis for this unashamed position. Our standing before God justified, declared right, forgiven, accepted at judgment, rejoicing in sure hope of eternity in the glory of God's Kingdom- this leads to the love of God filling our hearts. His love for us elicits our love for Him, and it fills our hearts.

*Is shed abroad in our hearts-* Tit. 3:6 uses the same word to speak of how God's grace has been "shed abroad" abundantly upon us. The word is of course frequently used about the shedding of Christ's blood; because of God's colossal gift to us, of His Son, bringing about our justification if we believe in Him... then in due turn, the awareness of God's love is likewise shed into our hearts. Whether we have really believed and accepted the good news is answerable by whether or not we feel and know God's love to have been shed abroad, to have gushed out, into our hearts. Paul gives the hint several times in Romans 1-8 that this situation is not drifted into; the idea of gushing out or shedding suggests a one time moment when this happened. 'Justification', the being declared legally right, is always spoken of grammatically as if this is a one off defined event which happened to us at a moment in the past. This moment is defined by Paul in Romans 6 as baptism, when we



become “in Christ”. Note that he is writing to Roman Christians who had already been baptized and believed in Christ- rather than seeking to convert unbelievers. They may well not have felt any watershed moment at their conversion or baptism. But Paul’s whole point is that even though they may not have felt it emotionally, this is actually how it is in reality, and we can now appreciate it and feel the wonder of the status into which we entered, even if it was unappreciated by us at the time. It is this feature more perhaps than anything else which makes this letter so relevant to we today who read it, who like the Romans have already believed, been baptized- and yet likely fail to appreciate the huge implications of the position we have now entered.

*By the Holy Spirit which is given unto us-* the whole argument so far in Romans has said nothing about the Holy Spirit. Note the comments under “Because...” above. This isn’t teaching that the Holy Spirit zapped our hearts and therefore all these wonderful things are true. We are unashamed, at the end of the process outlined in Rom. 5:3-5, because we stand at judgment day even now uncondemned, not ashamed as the condemned are, because of our faith in God’s grace. This is how we come to be unashamed- not because the Holy Spirit zapped us. It is God’s grace, justification, which has been given unto us. We could read in an ellipsis here, as often required in reading Romans, and understand this phrase as referring to how the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts ‘by what the Holy Spirit has given unto us’. This would associate ‘the Holy Spirit’ with the power of God by which He has orchestrated and executed this entire wondrous plan of His.

Serious meditation upon the Lord's work ought to have this effect upon us. Can we really see his agony, his bloody sweat, without a thought for our response to it? It's impossible to passively behold it all. There is something practically compelling about it, almost in a mystical way. *Because* “Christ died for the ungodly”, because in the cross “the love of God” was commended to us, *therefore* “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5,6,8). As the smitten rock gave out water, so the smitten Saviour gave out the water of the Spirit. This link between the shedding of the Lord’s blood and the shedding of love in our hearts is surely because an understanding and relation to His sacrifice brings forth in the believer a response of love and spirituality. As the love of God was shown in the cross, so it will be reflected in the heart of he who truly knows and believes it.

5:6- see on Rom. 4:19.

Paul in Rom. 5:6-8 lays out a three point logical case for the supremacy of God's love. Each of those three verses ends with the Greek word "die", to stylistically emphasize the step logic.

*Without strength*- the Greek word is pronounced as-then-ace; "the ungodly" translates a Greek word pronounced as-eb-ace. Bearing in mind the generally illiterate nature of Paul's primary readership, such literary devices which assisted memorization of the text are common in the NT. Christ died for us before we had anything at all to commend us. He didn't await our faith or repentance and then die for us, but He died for us in order to inspire those very things. Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were "without strength", using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 = Rom. 5:6). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak ["without strength"] and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt. 26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane (the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak).

*In due time*- the Greek could imply 'at just the right time'. Perhaps God's wrath was set to destroy the earth by the time of Christ, but He came and successfully did His work at the right time. But perhaps the idea is more that Christ died for us "at that very time" when we were weak and ungodly. He died for us in the hope of what we could potentially become through exercising faith; and our sacrifices for others, not least in the work of preaching and nurturing, are made in the same spirit. They are made whilst the objects of our attention appear immature, non-existent or unbelieving.

*Christ died for*- All that is true of the Lord Jesus becomes in some sense, at some time, true of each of us who are in Him. It's true that nowhere in the Bible is the Lord Jesus actually called our "representative", but the idea is clearly there. I suggest it's especially clear in all the Bible passages which speak of Him acting *huper* us- what Dorothee Sölle called "the preposition of representation" (1). Arndt and Gingrich in their Greek-English Lexicon define *huper* in the genitive as meaning "'for', 'in behalf of', 'for the sake of' someone (2). When used in the sense of representation, *huper* is associated with

verbs like ‘request, pray, care, work, feel, suffer, die, support’”. So in the same way as the Lord representatively prays, died, cares, suffers, works “for” us, we are to do likewise, if He indeed is our representative and we His. Our prayers for another, our caring for them, is no longer a rushed salving of our conscience through some good deed. Instead 2 Cor. 5:15 becomes our motivation: “He died for (*huper*) all [of us], that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for (*huper*) them”. We are, in our turn, to go forth and be “ambassadors for (*huper*) Christ... we pray you in Christ’s stead (*huper* Christ), be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). Grasping Him as our representative means that we will be His representatives in this world, and not leave that to others or think that our relationship in Him is so internal we needn’t breathe nor show a word of it to others. As He suffered “the just for (*huper*) the unjust” (1 Pet. 3:18), our living, caring, praying for others is no longer done “for” those whom we consider good enough, worthy enough, sharing our religious convictions and theology. For whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died *huper* us (Rom. 5:6). And this representative death is to find an issue in our praying *huper* others (Acts 12:5; Rom. 10:1; 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11), just as He makes intercession *huper* us (Rom. 8:26,34). We are to spend and be spent *huper* others, after the pattern of the Lord in His final nakedness of death on the cross (2 Cor. 12:15). These must all be far more than fine ideas for us. These are the principles which we are to live by in hour by hour life. And they demand a huge amount, even the cross itself. For unto us is given “in the behalf of Christ [*huper* Christ], not only to [quietly, painlessly, theoretically] believe on Him, but also to suffer for (*huper*) his sake” (Phil. 1:29). In all this, then, we see that the Lord’s being our representative was not only at the time of His death; the fact He continues to be our representative makes Him our ongoing challenge.

*The ungodly*- connecting with how we read in Rom. 4:5 that by faith, the ungodly are declared right with God. And the context there suggests Abraham was along with us all in that category of “ungodly”. Elsewhere, “the ungodly” are those who specifically will be condemned at the day of judgment (1 Pet. 4:18; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:7; Jude 15). We stand in the dock before God’s judgment and are condemned. We aren’t just the passive, the rather lazy to respond to God- we are, every one of us, “the ungodly”, the condemned. But Christ died for *us*, so that we might be declared right, become de-condemned, have the verdict changed right around.

5:7 This verse feels like it's quoting some saying or verse from some other writing. The sense may be that for a righteous man [the Greek phrase is used in this part of Romans to refer to Jesus as the perfectly righteous one] it's hard to die *hyper* him ["scarcely"- Gk. 'with difficulty'], to save him- for he isn't in need of saving; but for a good man, humanly "good" rather than morally righteous, some would "dare" (Gk. 'be bold') to die. True as this observation may be, the whole point is that Christ died for us when we were "sinners"- neither morally righteous, nor humanly 'good guys' who might inspire their buddy to die for them.

5:8 *God commends His love*- the Greek translated "commend" means to set down beside, in contrast to, over against. And it's in the continuous tense. God keeps on doing this. But what is His love so continually laid down against? Surely against our sins and failures. But it keeps on being commended through the fact that Christ died for us, whilst we were still sinners. Christ died once only, and so the continual commendation of this fact is in that continually, we perceive the wonder of it all. Our unrighteousness commends God's righteousness (Rom. 3:8).

*While we were yet sinners*- shows the greatest example in the cosmos of taking the initiative, of seeking to save others when there is no appreciation from them *at the time* of what you are doing. This is an endless inspiration in child rearing, preaching and pastoral work.

Tragically, the simple words "Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8) have been grossly misunderstood as meaning that Christ died instead of us. There are a number of connections between Romans 5 and 1 Cor. 15 (e.g. v. 12 = 1 Cor. 15:21; v. 17 = 1 Cor. 15:22). "Christ died for *us*" (Rom. 5:8) is matched by "Christ died for our *sins*" (1 Cor. 15:3). His death was in order to make a way whereby we can gain forgiveness of our sins; it was in this sense that "Christ died for us". The word "for" does not necessarily mean 'instead of'; Christ died "for (because of) our sins", not 'instead of them. Because of this, Christ can "make intercession" for us (Heb. 7:25) - not 'instead of us. Neither does "for" mean 'instead of' in Heb. 10:12 and Gal. 1:4. If Christ died 'instead of us' there would be no need to carry His cross, as He bids us. And there would be no sense in being baptized into His death and resurrection, willingly identifying ourselves with Him as our victorious representative.

5:9 *Now justified by His blood*- if He died for us whilst we were unborn and before we had repented of our sins; if right now we are counted right before God's judgment seat; then we can confidently expect to

being saved from “the wrath” (Gk.), the condemnation at the last day. Note how Rom. 5:1 spoke of justification by our faith; here, by “His blood”. His blood shed for us only becomes powerful and of any value *if we believe*. It’s a tragedy that His sacrifice for us goes wasted unless we [and others] believe. “Much more then” seems to be rejoicing in playing some kind of logical game of extension, which continues in 5:10.

In the future, at the Lord's return, we will be saved from wrath (i.e. condemnation) through Christ (Rom. 5:9). Whilst this has already been achieved in a sense, it will be materially articulated in that day- in that we will feel and know ourselves to be worthy of God's wrath, but then be saved from it. We are all to some extent in the position of Zedekiah and the men of Judah, who was told that if they accepted God’s condemnation of them as just, and served the King of Babylon, then they would ultimately be saved; but if they refused to accept that condemnation, then they would be eternally destroyed (Jer. 21:9; 27:12). And the Babylonian invasion was, as we have shown elsewhere, a type of the final judgment.

We are justified by many things, all of which are in some way parallel with each other: the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9), grace and the redemption which there is in His blood (Rom. 3:24), our faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 2:16), the name of the Lord Jesus, the spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11), by our confession of sin (Ps. 51:4; Lk. 18:14). All these things revolve around the death of the Lord Jesus, the shedding of His blood. This becomes parallel with the name of Jesus, “Christ”- because the cross presents us with the very essence of the person of the Lord Jesus. But it is also parallel with the spirit or mind / essence of God. Because in that naked, bleeding, derided body and person, in that shed blood, there was the essence of all that God was to us, is to us, and ever shall be for us. It was the cross above all which revealed to us the essence of God Almighty. And it is the cross, the blood of Jesus, which elicits in us the confession of sin which is vital for our justification.

The idea of a Saviour dying for us (5:8) and God’s wrath being turned away by His blood is all very much the language of “noble death” found in the stories of the Maccabees, which Paul had been brought up on. The idea was that the Jewish martyrs in their struggle against the occupying power had shed their blood “to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty” against Israel (2 Macc. 7:37 – 38); and thereby reconciled God with His people. But Paul is deconstructing these ideas, fiercely popular as they were amongst first century Jews. Paul’s point is that the wrath of God is against all human sin, and that the Lord Jesus

through His willing death, rather than the Jewish heroes through their death in battle, had brought about reconciliation and the turning away of God's wrath. Note in passing how the Maccabees spoke of their martyrs having reconciled God, whereas Paul's emphasis is upon how God has reconciled *us*- the change was not of God but of His people.

5:10 *Reconciled*- in the argument so far, Paul has talked about justification, declaring us right in a legal sense. Now he talks about us being reconciled- as if the impartial judge becomes personally reconciled to us as we stand in the dock. G.E. Ladd has made the informed comment that the surrounding first century religions didn't speak of reconciliation, because they didn't offer nor even conceive of the personal relationship between God and man which Christianity does (3). The need for such personal reconciliation has been implied by Paul earlier, in talking of God's "wrath" against sin (Rom. 1:19-32; 2:5). So the legal declaring of us as right is going to have a more personal aspect between us and our judge; if we are now justified, His wrath is no more, and we become reconciled on a personal level. Note that Strong defines the Greek for "reconciled" as meaning 'to change mutually'. This raises the whole question as to whether God in some sense has changed as a result of His relationship with us, just as a person changes when they marry or have a child. Seeing that God "is Spirit" and isn't therefore static, it would seem to me that there is an element of growth associated with His present nature. Hence we read in the continuous tense of the Father growing to know the Son and vice versa (Mt. 11:27). This 'growth' or change within God Almighty as a result of the supreme God of the cosmos being reconciled to a few specks of dust and water on this tiny planet... is not only awesome of itself, but a testimony to the colossal consequences of the reconciling work of His Son. "Being reconciled" is clearly a state- for 2 Cor. 5:18 likewise rejoices that we have been reconciled to God in Christ, yet 2 Cor. 5:20 goes on to appeal to the Corinthians to therefore "be reconciled to God". This idea of living out in practice who we are by status is perhaps the essence of Paul's practical appeal throughout Romans.

*Saved by His life*- i.e. His resurrection, in that our personal salvation depends upon resurrection from the dead and being given eternal life. This is the significance of our baptism into His death and resurrection. His resurrection, His life, must become ours today.

We must beware lest our theories of the atonement obscure the connection between salvation and *life*- both His life and ours. Having

been reconciled to God by the death of Jesus, we are “saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10). This is not only a reference to His resurrection. When He died, He outbreathed His breath of life towards His people who stood beneath the cross. His death, and the manner of it, inspires us to live the life which He lived. And this is the eternal kind of life, the life we will eternally live in the Kingdom with Him. His death was not solely the merit that supplies forgiveness. The cross was His life the most fully displayed and triumphant, forever breaking the power of sin over our street-level human existence by what it inspires in us. Our lives, the ordinary minutes and hours of our days, become transformed by His death. For we cannot passively behold Him there, and not respond. We cannot merely mentally assent to correct doctrine about the atonement. It brings forth a life lived; which is exactly why correct understanding of it is so important. We are inspired to engage in His form of life, with all the disciplines of prayer, solitude, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation in the Father’s word which characterized our Lord’s existence. For His cross was the summation of the life He lived. We quite rightly teach new converts the need for attending meetings, giving of time and money to the Lord’s cause, doing good to others, Bible reading. But over and above all these things, response to the cross demands a life seriously modelled upon His life.

5:11 *Not only so-* it’s not all jam tomorrow, a hope of resurrection from the dead in the future. We joy right now, because through Christ “we have now received the atonement”, s.w. “reconciliation”, the reconciling spoken of in v. 10. The courtroom ‘declaring right’ or innocent goes much further- we become personally set right with the Judge Himself. The whole world has in a sense been reconciled to God, but we are those who have “received” that reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19).

5:12 *Therefore* – this word carries much meaning. It is picked up again in Rom. 5:18, the intervening verses being in parenthesis. It almost seems that Adam sinned in order that God’s grace might be the more powerfully revealed.

In the New Testament we find Paul writing, as a Jew, to both Jews and Gentiles who had converted to Christ, and yet were phased by the huge amount of apostate Jewish literature and ideas which was then floating around. For example, the book of Romans is full of allusions to the “Wisdom of Solomon”, alluding and quoting from it, and showing what was right and what was wrong in it. Wisdom 2:24 claimed: “Through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it”. And Paul alludes to this, and corrects it, by saying in Rom. 5:12: “By one man [Adam- not ‘the devil’] sin entered

into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned". This is one of many such examples. Jude does the same thing, quoting and alluding to the apostate Book of Enoch, correcting the wrong ideas, and at times quoting the ideas back against those who used them.

In the same way as Daniel, Isaiah, Ezra, Israel at the time of Achan (Josh. 7:1,11) etc. were reckoned as guilty but were not personally responsible for the sins of others, so the Lord Jesus was reckoned as a sinner on the cross; He was made sin for us, who knew no sin personally (2 Cor. 5:21). He carried our sins by His association with us, prefigured by the way in which Israel's sins were transferred to the animal; but He personally was not a sinner because of His association with us. The degree of our guilt by association is hard to measure, but in some sense we sinned "in Adam" (Rom. 5:12 AVmg.) In the context of Rom. 5, Paul is pointing an antithesis between imputed *sin* by association with Adam, and imputed *righteousness* by association with Christ. In response to the atonement we have experienced, should we not like our Lord be reaching out to touch the lepers, associating ourselves with the weak in order to bring them to salvation- rather than running away from them for fear of 'guilt by association'?

The difficulty we have in understanding our sinning somehow "in Adam" may be the result of our failure to appreciate the extent of corporate solidarity in Hebrew thinking. This has been documented at great depth in H.W. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (4). This corporate solidarity (even if "corporate *personality*" is a bridge too far) doesn't mean that we personally sinned with Adam or are directly culpable for his sin. Adam is everyman- the Hebrew "adam" means just that, man. The concern expressed by many as to why babies and the mentally unaccountable still die is a valid one, but I don't think it's solved by postulating that they sinned "in Adam". Paul is writing to Christians in Rome, and he is explaining why *they* die. The question of infants isn't in his purview here. Likewise when he talks about "death" in Romans, he seems to often have in view the second death, the permanent death to be meted out at the judgment seat to those condemned for their sins, rather than 'death' in the general sense. Such death, condemnation at the last day, passes upon us all, but all in Adam in this sense are also those who are now in Christ. It is this apparent paradox which can lead to the almost schizophrenic feelings for Christians which Paul explains in Romans 7. The apparent parallel drawn between those "in Adam" and those "in Christ" would suggest that those "in Adam" whom Paul has in view are not every human



being, but those now “in Christ” who have also been, and still are in a sense, “in Christ”.

Paul emphasized that it was by one male, Adam, that sin entered the world (Rom. 5:12)- in designed contrast to the contemporary Jewish idea that Eve was to be demonized as the *femme fatale*, the woman who brought sin into the world. Thus Ecclesiasticus 25:4: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die". Paul is alluding to this and insisting quite the opposite- that Adam, the male, was actually the one initially responsible. Paul can hardly be accused of being against women! Another example of Paul's conscious rebellion against the contemporary position of women is to be found in Rom. 5:12: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin". This is an intended rebuttal of Ecclesiasticus 25:24: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die". This allusion is one of many reasons for rejecting the Apocrypha as inspired. The idea that women were second class because Eve, not Adam, was the source of sin was widespread. Tertullian (*On Female Dress*, 1.1) wrote: "You [woman] are the first deserter of the Divine law... on account of your desert, that is, death, the Son of God had to die". And Paul is consciously countering that kind of thinking.

## **Adam: The First Sinner**

The classical view of the fall supposes that as Eve's teeth sunk into the fruit, the first sin was committed, and soon afterwards Adam followed suite, resulting in the curse falling upon humanity. What I want to discuss is whether the eating of the fruit was in fact the first sin. If it was, then Eve sinned first. Straight away, the Bible-minded believer comes up with a problem: the New Testament unmistakably highlights Adam as the first sinner; by *his* transgression sin entered the world (Rom. 5:12). So sin was not in the world before *his* transgression. The ground was cursed for the sake of *Adam's* sin (Gen. 3:17). This all suggests that Eve wasn't the first sinner. The fact Eve was deceived into sinning doesn't mean she didn't sin (1 Tim. 2:14). She was punished for her sin; and in any case, ignorance doesn't mean that sin doesn't count as sin (consider the need for offerings of ignorance under the Law). So, Eve sinned; but Adam was the first sinner, before *his* sin, sin had not entered the world. We must also remember that Eve was deceived by the snake, and on account of this was "(implicated / involved) in the transgression" (1 Tim. 2:14). "The transgression". Which transgression? Surely Adam's (Rom. 5:14); by listening to the snake she became implicated in Adam's sin. The implication is that "the transgression" was already there for her to become implicated in it by

listening to the serpent. This is the very opposite to the idea of *Adam* being implicated in *Eve's* sin.

So I want to suggest that in fact the eating of the fruit was not the first sin; it was the final physical consequence of a series of sins, spiritual weakness and sinful attitudes on Adam's part. They were mainly sins of omission rather than commission, and for this reason we tend to not notice them; just as we tend to treat our own sins of omission far less seriously than our sins of commission. What happened in Eden was that the garden was planted, Adam was placed in it, and commanded not to eat of the tree of knowledge. The animals are then brought before him for naming; then he is put into a deep sleep, and Eve is created. *Then* the very first command Adam and Eve jointly received was to have children, and go out into the whole earth (i.e. out of the Garden of Eden) and subdue it to themselves (Gen. 1:28). The implication is that this command was given as soon as Eve was created. There he was, lying down, with his wife beside him, "a help meet"; literally, 'an opposite one'. And they were commanded to produce seed, and then go out of the garden and subdue the earth. It would have been obvious to him from his observation of the animals that his wife was physiologically and emotionally designed for him to produce seed by. She was designed to be his 'opposite one', and there she was, lying next to him. Gen. 2:24 implies that he should have cleaved to her and become one flesh by reason of the very way in which she was created out of him. And yet he evidently did not have intercourse with her, seeing that they failed to produce children until after the fall. If he had consummated his marriage with her, presumably she would have produced children (this deals a death blow to the fantasies of Adam and Eve having an idyllic sexual relationship in Eden before the fall). Paul saw Eve at the time of her temptation as a virgin (2 Cor. 11:2,3). Instead, Adam put off obedience to the command to multiply. There seems an allusion to this in 1 Cor. 7:5, where Paul says that married couples should come together in intercourse "lest Satan (cp. the serpent) tempt you for your incontinency". Depending how closely one reads Scripture, there may be here the suggestion that Paul saw Adam's mistake in Eden as not 'coming together' with his wife.

But Adam said something to Eve (as they lay there?). He alone had been commanded not to eat the tree of knowledge. Yet when Eve speaks to the serpent, it is evident that Adam had told her about it, but not very deeply. She speaks of "the tree that is in the midst of the garden" rather than "the tree of knowledge". She had been told by Adam that they must not even touch it, even though this is not what

God had told Adam (Gen. 2:16,17 cp. 3:2,3). So we are left with the idea that Adam turned to Eve and as it were wagged his finger at her and said 'Now you see that tree over there in the middle, *don't you even touch it* or else there'll be trouble, O.K.'. She didn't *understand*, he didn't *explain* that it was forbidden because it was the tree of knowledge, and so she was deceived into eating it- unlike Adam, who understood what he was doing (1 Tim. 2:14) (1). Adam's emphasis was on not *committing* the sin of eating the fruit; he said nothing to her about the need to multiply and subdue the earth.

The next we know, Adam and Eve have separated, she is talking to the snake, apparently indifferent to the command to *subdue* the animals, to be their superiors, rather than listen to them as if they actually had superior knowledge. When the snake questioned: "Yea, *hath* God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree..." (Gen. 3:1), Eve was in a weak position because Adam hadn't fully told her what God had said. Hence she was deceived, but Adam wasn't.

So, *why* didn't Adam tell her more clearly what God had said? I would suggest that he was disillusioned with the wife God gave him; he didn't have intercourse with her as he had been asked, he separated from her so that she was alone with the snake. "The woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree..." (Gen. 3:12) seems to reflect more than a hint of resentment against Eve and God's provision of her.

Not only was Adam disillusioned with Eve, but he failed to really take God's word seriously. Romans 5 describes Adam's failure in a number of parallel ways: "transgression... sin... offence... *disobedience* (Rom. 5:19)". "Disobedience" translates a Greek word which is uncommon. Strong defines it as meaning 'inattention', coming from a root meaning 'to mishear'. It is the same word translated "neglect to hear" in Mt. 18:17. Adam's sin, his transgression, his offence was therefore not eating the fruit in itself; it was disobedience, neglecting to hear. That this neglecting to hear God's word seriously was at the root of his sin is perhaps reflected in God's judgment on him: "Because thou hast hearkened unto *the voice of thy wife...*" rather than *God's* voice (Gen. 3:17).

Adam's sin was therefore a neglecting to seriously hear God's word, a dissatisfaction with and effective rejection of his God-given wife, a selfish unwillingness to leave the garden of Eden and go out and subdue the earth (cp. our natural instincts), and a neglect of his duty to multiply children in God's image (cp. preaching and pastoral work). All these things were sins of omission; he may well have reasoned that he would get round to them later. All these wrong attitudes and sins of

omission, apparently unnoticed and uncondemned, led to the final folly of eating the fruit: the first sin of commission. And how many of our more public sins are prefaced by a similar process? Truly Adam's sin was the epitome of all our sins. Romans 5 points an antithesis between Adam and Christ. Adam's one act of disobedience which cursed us is set off against Christ's one act of righteousness which blessed us. Yet Christ's one act was not just His death; we are saved by His life too (Rom. 5:10). Christ lived a life of many acts of righteousness and refusal to omit any part of His duty, and crowned it with one public act of righteousness in His death. The implication is that Adam committed a series of disobediences which culminated in one public act of commission: he ate the fruit.

There are three lines of argument which confirm this picture of what happened in Eden which we have presented. Firstly, Adam and Eve were ashamed at their nakedness. Perhaps this was because they realized what they should have used their sexuality for. Eating the tree of knowledge gave them knowledge of good (i.e. they realized the good they should have done in having children) and also evil (the capacities of their sexual desire?). Adam first called his wife "woman", but after the fall he called her "Eve" because he recognized she was the mother of living ones (Gen. 3:20). By doing so he seems to be recognizing his failure of not reproducing through her as God had originally asked him. The way they immediately produce a child after the fall is surely an expression of their repentance.

Secondly, it seems that God punishes sin in a way which is appropriate to the sin. Consider how David so often asks God to take the wicked in their own snare- and how often this happens. The punishment of Adam and Eve was appropriate to the sins they committed. What Adam wasn't bothered to do, i.e. have intercourse with his woman, became the very thing which now every fallen man will sell his soul for. They ate the tree of *knowledge*, they *knew* they were naked, and then Adam *knew* Eve (Gen. 4:1); this chain of connection certainly suggests that sexual desire, whilst not wrong in itself, was part of the result of eating the tree. There is an artless poetic justice and appropriacy in this which seems simply Divine. What they couldn't be bothered to do became the very thing which has probably generated more sin and desire to do than anything else. Adam was to rule over Eve as a result of the fall- the very thing he wasn't bothered to do. Eve's punishment was that her desire was for her husband- perhaps suggesting that she too had no desire for Adam sexually, and therefore was willing to delay obedience to the command to multiply. They were both driven out of the garden-

perhaps reflecting how they should have left the garden in obedience to God's command to go out and subdue the natural creation to themselves. Because Adam wasn't bothered to do this, even when it was within his power, therefore nature was given a special power against man which he would never be able to overcome, and which would eventually defeat him (Gen. 3:17-19). This all shows the logic of obedience; we will be made to pay the price of obedience even if we disobey- therefore it is logical to obey.

Thirdly, there seems evidence that the eating of the fruit happened very soon after their creation. Eve hadn't seen the tree before the serpent pointed it out to her (Gen. 3:6); and consider that they could eat of all the trees, but not of the tree of knowledge. But what about the tree of life? This wasn't forbidden, and yet had they eaten of it, they would have lived for ever. We are told that this tree brings forth fruit every month (Rev. 22:2); so presumably it had not fruited, implying the fall was within the first month after creation.

The practical outcome of what happened in Eden is that we are to see in Adam's sin an epitome of our essential weaknesses. And how accurate it is. His failure was principally due to sins of omission, of delaying to do God's will because it didn't take his fancy. Time and again Biblical history demonstrates that sins of silence and omission are just as fatal as sins of public, physical commission (e.g. Gen. 20:16; 38:10). To omit to hate evil is the same as to commit it (Ps. 36:4). Because David omitted to enforce the Law's requirements concerning the transport of the tabernacle, a man died. His commission of good didn't outweigh his omission here (1 Chron. 15:13). The Jews were condemned by the Lord for building the sepulchres of the prophets without erecting a placard stating that their fathers had killed them. We have a debt to preach to the world; we are their debtors, and yet this isn't how we often see it (Rom. 1:14). Israel sinned not only by worshipping idols but by thereby omitting to worship God as He required (1 Sam. 8:8). Adam stayed in the garden rather than go out to subdue the earth. Our equivalent is our spiritual selfishness, our refusal to look outside of ourselves into the world of others. Because things like disinterest in preaching or inattention to subduing our animal instincts are sins of *omission* rather than commission, we too tend to overlook them. We effectively neglect to hear God's word, although like Adam we may make an appearance of half-heartedly teaching it to others. And even when we do this, like Adam we tend to focus on *avoidal of committing sin* rather than examining ourselves for the likelihood of *omission*, not least in our lack of spiritual *responsibility* for others. Because of his spiritual laziness,

Adam's sin led Eve into deception and thereby sin, and brought suffering on untold billions. His sin is the epitome of ours. So let us really realize: none of us sins or is righteous unto ourselves. There are colossal ramifications of our every sin and our every act of righteousness on others.

### Notes

(1) There are similarities in more conservative Christian groups; e.g. the father or husband who lays the law down about the need for wearing hats without *explaining* to his wife or daughter *why*.

## Romans and the *Wisdom of Solomon*

Seeing Romans 1-8 is Paul's inspired exposition of the nature of sin and the Gospel, it's surely surprising that he makes no mention of the words Satan or Devil, let alone 'fallen Angel'. He lays the blame for sin quite clearly upon us and our weakness in the face of internal temptation. And Paul speaks of the Genesis account of the fall of Adam and Eve as if he accepted it just as it is written – he makes no attempt to say that the serpent was a Lucifer or fallen Angel. In fact, closer analysis shows that Paul is consciously rebutting the contemporary Jewish ideas about these things as found in *The Wisdom of Solomon* and other writings. We must remember that in the first century, there was no canonized list of books comprising the "Old Testament" as we now know it. There was therefore a great need to deconstruct the uninspired Jewish writings which were then circulating – hence the many allusions to them in the inspired New Testament writings, in order to help the Jewish believers understand that these writings were uninspired and to be rejected.

The flood of apostate Jewish literature in the first century and just before it all have much to say about Adam's sin (e.g. the *Apocalypse of Baruch* and *Apocalypse of Abraham*), and I submit that Paul writes of Adam's sin in order to deconstruct these wrong interpretations. Wisdom 2:24 claimed: "Through the Devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it". This is actually the first reference to the idea that a being called 'the Devil' envied Adam and Eve and therefore this brought about their temptation and fall. Paul rebuts this by saying that "By one man [Adam – not 'the Devil'] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). This is evidently an allusion by Paul to this wrong idea – and he corrects it. The allusion becomes all the more legitimate when we appreciate that

actually Paul is alluding to the *Wisdom of Solomon* throughout his letter to the Romans. This book glorified the Jewish people, making them out to be righteous, blaming sin on the Devil and the Gentiles. By way of allusion to it, Paul shows how the Jews are de-emphasizing sin, not facing up to the fact that all of humanity are under the curse of sin and death, and all therefore need salvation in Christ. This same basic emphasis upon personal responsibility, not blaming others for our sins, not seeing ourselves as pure and everyone else as the problem, is just as relevant today – surrounded as we are by false theologies that make us out to be basically pure, shifting all blame onto a ‘Devil’ of their own fabrication. It should be noted that this way of alluding to contemporary writings and correcting them is common throughout Scripture – I’ve elsewhere given examples of where Jude and Peter do this in relation to the Book of Enoch, and how Genesis 1–3 does this with the views of creation and origins which were common at the time the book of Genesis was compiled.

Wisdom of Solomon 13–14 criticizes the Gentiles for idolatry and sexual immorality. And Paul criticizes the Gentiles for just the same things in Rom. 1:19–27 – in language which clearly alludes to the Wisdom of Solomon. It’s as if Paul is reviewing the Wisdom of Solomon and placing a tick by what is right (e.g., that Gentiles are indeed guilty of idolatry and immorality), and a cross by what is wrong in the book. E.P. Sanders has observed: “Romans 1:18–32 is very close to the Wisdom of Solomon, a Jewish book written in Egypt. Paul’s reference to ‘images representing... birds, animals or reptiles’ (Rom. 1:23) points to... Egypt. Birds, animals and reptiles were idolized in Egypt, but not commonly in the rest of the Graeco–Roman world” <sup>(1)</sup>. The point of the reference to these things would therefore simply be because Paul is alluding to, almost quoting, the Wisdom of Solomon.

### **Paul’s Other Allusions to the Wisdom of Solomon**

Having spoken of how “the destroyer” destroyed the Egyptian firstborn, Wisdom 18 goes on to speak of how this same “destroyer” tried to kill Israel in the wilderness, but the evil “destroyer” was stopped by Moses: “For then the blameless man made haste, and stood forth to defend them; and bringing the shield of his proper ministry, even prayer, and the propitiation of incense, set himself against the wrath, and so brought the calamity to an end, declaring that he was thy servant. So he overcame the destroyer, not with strength of body, nor force of arms, but with a word subdued him that punished, alleging the oaths and covenants made with the fathers (Wisdom 18:21,22). Paul in 1 Cor. 10 alludes to this – showing that “the destroyer” was sent by



God to punish Israel's sins. The author of Wisdom speaks as if "the destroyer" is some evil being victimizing Israel – and Paul appears to correct that, showing that it was the same "Destroyer" Angel who protected Israel in Egypt who later slew the wicked amongst them. Wisdom 19 makes out that all sins of Israel in the wilderness were committed by Gentiles travelling with them – but Paul's account of Israel's history in 1 Cor. 10 makes it clear that *Israel* sinned and were punished.

It should be noted in passing that 1 Cor. 10:1–4 also alludes to the Jewish legend that the rock which gave water in Num. 21:16–18 somehow followed along behind the people of Israel in the wilderness to provide them with water. Paul is not at all shy to allude to or quote Jewish legends, regardless of their factual truth, in order to make a point [as well as to deconstruct them]. God Himself is not so primitive as to seek to 'cover Himself' as it were by only alluding to true factual history in His word; He so wishes dialogue with people that He appears quite happy for His word to refer to their mistaken ideas, in order to enter into dialogue and engagement with them in terms which they are comfortable with. Another example of allusion to Jewish legend is in Rev. 2:17, where the Lord Jesus speaks of giving His people "of the hidden manna" – referring to the myth that Jeremiah had hidden a golden jar of manna in the Holy of Holies at the destruction of the temple in 586 BC, which then ascended to Heaven and is to return with Messiah. Jesus doesn't correct that myth – He as it were runs with it and uses it as a symbol to describe the reward He will bring. He adds no footnote to the effect 'Now do understand, this is myth, that jar never really ascended to Heaven nor will it come floating back through the skies one day'. Perhaps this is why the New Testament often quotes the Septuagint text, even where it incorrectly renders the Hebrew original – because God is not so paranoid as to feel bound to only deal in the language of strictly literal truths. If first century people were familiar with the Septuagint, even if it is a poor translation of the Hebrew original in places – well OK, God was willing to run with that *in order to engage with people in their language*. And this approach is very helpful in seeking to understand some of the Biblical references to incorrect ideas about Satan and demons.

It seems to me that Paul's allusion to wrong Jewish ideas in order to deconstruct them is actually a hallmark of his inspired writing. Ecclesiasticus is another such Jewish writing which he targets in Romans; Rom. 4:1–8 labours the point that Abraham was declared righteous by faith and not by the Law, which was given after



Abraham's time; the covenant promises to Abraham were an expression of grace, and the 'work' of circumcision was done *after* receiving them. All this appears to be in purposeful allusion to the words of Eccles. 44:21: "Abraham kept the law of the Most High, and was taken into covenant with Him".

### Note

(1) E.P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1996) p. 113.

## Allusions From Paul's Letter to The Romans to The Wisdom of Solomon

The Wisdom of Solomon	Romans	Comment
Wisdom 4:5 The imperfect branches shall be broken off, their fruit unprofitable, not ripe to eat, yea, meet for nothing [concerning the Gentiles and those in Israel who sinned].	Romans w11:17–20	Israel as an entire nation were the broken off branches; Gentile believers through faith in Christ could become ingrafted branches.
Wisdom 1:13 For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living.	Romans 1:32; Romans 5,7	Death is "the judgment of God" – death does come from God. It doesn't come from "the Devil". It was God in Genesis who 'made' death. Death comes from our sin, that's Paul's repeated message – death isn't something made by the 'Devil' just for the wicked.
Wisdom 1:14 For he created all things, that they might have their being: and the generations of the world were healthful; and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor the kingdom of death upon the earth: [in the context of the earth / land of Israel]	Romans 1,5,7	Paul makes many allusions to these words. He shows that all humanity, including Israel, the dwellers upon the earth / land of Israel, are subject to sin and death. Paul argues against the position that God made man good but the Devil messed things up –

		rather does he place the blame upon individual human sin.
Wisdom 8:20 I was a witty child, and had a good spirit. Yea rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled.	Romans 3,7	As a result of Adam's sin, our bodies aren't "undefiled" – we will die, we are born with death sentences in us. "There is none good" (Rom. 3:12); "in my flesh dwells no good thing" (Rom. 7:18)
Wisdom 10:15 She delivered the righteous people and blameless seed from the nation that oppressed them.	Romans 9–11	Israel were <i>not</i> blameless; "there is none righteous, not one" (Rom. 3:10).
Wisdom 12:10 But executing thy judgments upon them by little and little, thou gavest them place of repentance	Romans 2:4	" Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). Paul's argument is that it is God's grace in not immediately punishing us as we deserve which should lead us to repentance.
Wisdom 12 raves against the Canaanite nations in the land, saying how wicked they were and stressing Israel's righteousness – e.g. Wisdom 12:11 For it was a cursed seed from the beginning; neither didst thou for fear of any man give them pardon for those	Romans 1,2,9–11	Paul uses the very same language about the wickedness of Israel

things wherein they sinned.

Wisdom 12:12 For who shall say, What hast thou done? or who shall withstand thy judgment? or who shall accuse thee for the nations that perish, whom thou made? or who shall come to stand against thee, to be revenged for the unrighteous men?

Romans  
8:30–39;  
9:19

*Wisdom* marvels at how God judged the wicked Canaanites. But Paul reapplies this language to marvel at God’s mercy in saving the faithful remnant of Israel by grace. Paul’s answer to “Who shall accuse thee [Israel]?” is that only those in Christ have now no accuser (Rom. 8:34).

Wisdom 12:13 uses the phrase “condemned at the day of the righteous judgment of God” about the condemnation of the Canaanite tribes.

Romans  
2:5

Paul stresses that *Israel* will be condemned at the “day of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5)

Wisdom 12:22 Therefore, whereas thou dost chasten us, thou scourgest our enemies a thousand times more, to the intent that, when we judge, we should carefully think of thy goodness, and when we ourselves are judged, we should look for mercy.

Romans  
2:1–4;  
11:28;  
14:4

Paul says that Israel are the “enemies” (Rom. 11:28); and that judging is outlawed for those who are themselves sinners. Paul’s case is that we receive mercy at the judgment because we have shown mercy rather than judgment to others.

Wisdom 13:1 Surely vain are all men by nature, who are ignorant of God, and could not out of the good things that are seen know him that is.

Romans  
1,10

*Wisdom*’s implication is that the Gentiles are vain by nature, but Israel aren’t, because they aren’t ignorant of God, and see Him reflected in the “good things” of His creation. Paul contradicts this. He says that *all* humanity is “vain... by nature”; Israel are “ignorant of God” (Rom.

Wisdom 12:26 But they that would not be reformed by that correction, wherein he dallied with them, shall feel a judgment worthy of God.

Wisdom 12:27 For, look, for what things they grudged, when they were punished, that is, for them whom they thought to be gods; now being punished in them, when they saw it, they acknowledged him to be the true God, whom before they denied to know: and therefore came extreme damnation upon them.

Wisdom 13:5–8: For by the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionably the maker of them is seen. But yet for this they are the less to be blamed: for they peradventure err, seeking God, and desirous to find him. For being conversant in his works they search him diligently, and believe their sight: because the

Romans 1

10:3); and it is believers in Christ who perceive God from the things which He has made. Indeed, it is Israel who are now “without excuse” because they refuse to see “the goodness of God” [cp. “good things”] in the things which He has created (Rom. 1:20–30).

It is *Israel* and all who continue in sin who are worthy of judgment (Rom. 1:32). It was *Israel* who changed the true God into what they claimed to be gods (Rom. 1:20–26).

Romans 1,2

It is Gentile Christians who ‘found’ God (Rom. 10:20). It was they who were led by the beauty of God’s creation to be obedient to Him in truth (Rom. 2:14,15). It was Israel who failed to ‘clearly see’ the truth of God from the things which He created (Rom. 1:20).

things are beautiful that are seen. Howbeit neither are they to be pardoned.

Wisdom 14:8 But that which is made with hands is cursed, as well it, as he that made it: he, because he made it; and it, because, being corruptible, it was called god.

Wisdom 14:9 For the ungodly and his ungodliness are both alike hateful unto God.

Wisdom 14:31 For it is not the power of them by whom they swear: but it is the just vengeance of sinners, that punisheth always the offence of the ungodly.

Wisdom 15:2 For if we [Israel] sin, we are thine, knowing thy power: but we will not sin, knowing that we are counted thine.

Wisdom 15:3 For to know thee is perfect

Romans  
1:23

It was Israel who changed the glory of the true God into images made by their hands and called them gods (Rom. 1:23)

Romans  
4:5; 5:6

Paul argues that Christ died for the ungodly before they knew Him (Rom. 5:6); God justifies the ungodly not by their works but by their faith (Rom. 4:5)

Romans 5

Paul argues that the offence of man is met by God's grace in Christ, and not dealt with by God through taking out vengeance against sinners. It was the "offence" of Adam which was used by God's grace to forge a path to human salvation (Rom. 5:15–20). As "the offence" abounded, so therefore did God's grace (Rom. 5:20).

Romans 3

Paul argues that we *all* sin – it's not a case of 'we don't sin, because we are God's people' (Rom. 3:23). And knowledge isn't the basis for immortality, rather this is the gift of God by grace (Rom. 6:23). Paul

righteousness: yea, to know thy power is the root of immortality.

leaves us in no doubt that there's no question of "if we sin"; for we are all desperate sinners, Jew and Gentile alike (Rom. 3:23). And our sin really does separate us from God and from His Son; we are "none of His" if we sin (Rom. 8:9 – cp. "we are thine"). We are not automatically "His... even if we sin". Paul speaks of how both Jew and Gentile are equally under sin; whereas *Wisdom* claims that there's a difference: "While therefore thou dost chasten us, thou scourgest our enemies [i.e. the Gentiles] ten thousand times more" (12:22).

Wisdom 15:7 For the potter, tempering soft earth, fashioneth every vessel with much labour for our service: yea, of the same clay he maketh both the vessels that serve for clean uses, and likewise also all such as serve to the contrary: but what is the use of either sort, the potter himself is the judge.

Romans 9:21–30

*Wisdom* mocks the potter for making idols – Paul shows that God is the potter and Israel the clay, and they will be discarded like an idol. For they became like that which they worshipped. Paul uses the same language as *Wisdom* here – he speaks of how the Divine potter uses "the same clay to make different types of vessels.

Wisdom 15 often laments that the Gentiles worship the created more than the

Romans 1 and 2

Romans 1 and 2 make the point, using this same language, that Israel as

creator		well as the Gentiles are guilty of worshipping the created more than creator
Wisdom 18:8 For wherewith thou didst punish our adversaries, by the same thou didst glorify us, whom thou hadst called.	cp. Romans 8:30	The “us” who have been “called” and are to be “glorified” are those in Christ – not those merely born Jews.
Wisdom 18:13 For whereas they would not believe anything by reason of the enchantments; upon the destruction of the firstborn, they acknowledged this people to be the sons of God.	cp. Romans 8:14	The true “sons of God” are those in Christ, the Son of God; for not those who merely call themselves “Israel” are the children of God, as <i>Wisdom</i> wrongly argues (Rom. 9:6)
As for the ungodly, wrath came upon them without mercy unto the end: for he knew before what they would do... For the destiny, whereof they were worthy, drew them unto this end, and made them forget the things that had already happened, that they might fulfill the punishment which was wanting to their torments” (Wisdom 19:1,4)		What <i>Wisdom</i> says about the Gentile world and Egypt, Paul applies to Israel in their sinfulness. And he stresses many times that the result of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), not “torments” in the way the Jews understood them. “Wrath... without mercy” is a phrase Paul uses about the coming condemnation of those Jews who refused to accept Christ (Rom. 1:18; 2:5,8). Paul uses the idea of foreknowledge which occurs here in <i>Wisdom</i> , but uses it in Romans 9 and 11 to show that foreknowledge is part of the grace of God’s predestination of His true people to salvation. It is the Jews who reject

Christ who are “worthy” of death (Rom. 1:32) – not the Gentile world. No wonder the Jews so hated Paul!

5:13 *Until the law sin was in the world... death reigned from Adam to Moses* (v. 14)- this could be Paul’s way of countering the objection that his teaching that it was the Law of Moses which brought condemnation (Rom. 4:15) wrongly implied that there could have been no death before the Law.

*Not imputed*- i.e. we do not have to appear at the day of judgment and answer for our sin if we didn’t know God’s Law, and we broke it in ignorance?

5:14 *Nevertheless death reigned*- Paul is demonstrating that the whole world is under sin, even those who don’t know God’s law. They die because they themselves sin, albeit in ignorance, and because of their relation to Adam. He’s building up the picture of every single human being as having a desperate need for forgiveness and finding the answer in Jesus- who therefore is the Saviour designed and intended for all people, not just Jews.

*Him that was to come*- a phrase the Jewish writings used about Moses, but which Paul tellingly reapplies to the Lord Jesus (5). Paul’s letter is densely packed with allusions to Jewish writings- and this explains some of the apparently awkward grammatical constructions and some of the otherwise strange phrases, often using words and concepts which don’t occur in the rest of Paul’s writings. Instead of spilling ink trying to exactly understand some of the phrases in Romans- and this letter has produced more tautuous, unhelpful, highly abstracted commentary than any other- it may be wiser to assume that those difficult passages are in fact allusions to extant Jewish writings or thinking contemporary with Paul, which at present we are unaware of.

5:15 *The offence... the free gift*- begins an extended comparison and contrast between the results of Adam’s sin and disobedience, and the grace [s.w. “free gift”] given as a result of Christ’s obedience. This is all in demonstration of the comment in 5:14 that Adam- or more specifically, “Adam’s transgression”- was a type of the Lord Jesus. The type works not only by similarity but by inverse contrasts. By doing so, we see how God rejoices in showing grace, almost playing intellectual games to demonstrate how much greater and more abundant is His



grace than the power of sin. And this is done in order to persuade us, the doubting readership, of the simple reality- that His grace is for real, and we really will be and are saved and secure in Christ.

*Through... one, many be dead-* the point of similarity here is that just one person can affect many. We may doubt that the obedience of one man, the Lord Jesus, 2000 years ago, can really have much to do with you and me today. That it all happened, I don't think we seriously doubt any more than we doubt standard historical facts. But a man hanging on a stake of wood on a Friday afternoon, on a day in April, just outside a Middle Eastern city... can He really do anything for all of us here today? We may never articulate it, say it in so many words. But that is at least our unspoken, unverballed, unformulated, under the bedcovers nagging doubt, the bane of our deepest spiritual psychology, the fear of our soul, the cloud that comes betwixt as we look up at the steely silence of the skies, or gaze at the ceiling rose as we lay upon our bed. Paul tackles that doubt (and Romans 1-8 is really a tackling of human doubts about God's grace) by quoting the example of Adam. Through 'just' one, death and suffering affected many. If Adam is proof enough of 'the power of one' - then how much more is Jesus?

*Has abounded-* the Greek means to superabound, to be lavished, to be poured out in over abundance. The "gift" which so abounds is surely a reference to the language of Mt. 25:29, where at the final judgment, he that has shall be given to yet more, "in abundance" [s.w.]. Yet our receipt of that grace in this life is a foretaste of that superabundance we are yet to receive. Superabundant generosity characterizes God. We note that when the Lord multiplied the loaves and fishes, there superabounded 12 full baskets and then seven full baskets (Mt. 14:20; 15:37). Why the apparent over creation of food? For what purpose was there such waste? Why is the same strange word for superabundance used both times? And why is it used in *three of the four Gospels* when this incident is recorded (Lk. 9:17; Jn. 6:12,13; Mt. 14:20; 15:37)? Surely to give us the impression of the lavishing of God's gift, His grace, when He provides for His children. We have experienced the same from Him, and should be like this towards others. Paul often uses the word in 2 Corinthians in appealing for generosity to poorer brethren; he speaks of how God's grace has superabounded, and how we also ought to superabound in kindness and generosity to others (2 Cor. 9:8). We will eternally know the truth and reality of all this, because we will not only be given eternal life, but life "more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). We must ask ourselves to what extent we show that same quality of super abundant grace to others.

5:16 *The judgment*- the result of the legal case, the final verdict. This is contrasted with “the gift”, as if the judge hands down the verdict but then proffers us the gift of being declared right. The verdict can mean at times the actual execution of the punishment (as in Rom. 2:2,3; 3:8; 1 Cor. 11:29,34). In this sense, we were actually condemned- not threatened with it and let off.

*Unto justification- dikaioma*, s.w. “righteousness”. The free gift of salvation apart from our works actually inspires righteousness- performed in gratitude for salvation, rather than in order to attain salvation. Or we could still read the word as referring to a decree which counts us as right, reversing that of condemnation.

The contrast is between the one man who brought the verdict of condemnation upon many, by one sin [for Adam is everyman]- and the one man, Jesus, who brought the verdict of being declared right for many people who had committed many sins. The paradox is that ‘just’ one sin lead to the condemnation of mankind, but our many sins lead to us being declared right- by grace. The reasoning here indirectly suggests that Christ was also “a man” as Adam- and certainly not a god.

5:17 *Death reigned... shall reign in life*- again highlights the superabundance of the grace received. By Adam’s sin, we became reigned over by death; by Christ, we sinners, we who are like Adam, not only become free from death and shall live eternally, but we shall “reign”, as rulers in God’s future Kingdom (Lk. 19:19; Rev. 5:10). Note the contrast so far in these verses is between Adam and Christ, and between Adam’s sin and... Christ. We expect the connection to be between Adam’s sin and Christ’s righteousness and obedience. This is the connection made later, but for now, we simply read of Christ as the counterpart to both Adam and Adam’s sin. It wasn’t so much one act of obedience which countered Adam’s one sin; rather was it a life lived, a character developed, a person, rather than a single act of obedience, as perhaps implied by the legalism of Judaism, whereby one sin could be cancelled out by an act of obedience. The reality however is that Adam’s one sin was no mere casual infringement which had no significant consequence- ‘just’ one sin leads to all the death and suffering which Adam’s sin brought. Our sins are to be understood in the same way. Adam must have held his head in his hands as he stood somewhere eastward in Eden, and sobbed to the effect “My God, what have I done...”, and from tear filmed eyes looked out upon a creation starting to buckle and wrinkle. If we accept Paul’s point that Adam is everyman [5:12], that whilst we suffer because of what he did, this is

because we would have done the same if in his shoes... then we will feel the same for our falls, our slips, our rebellions, our sins.

*Abundance of grace*- For the Macedonians “the abundance of their joy... abounded unto the riches of their liberality” (2 Cor. 8:2). Their joy for what the Lord had done for them, for the “abundance” [s.w.] of His grace and giving to them (Rom. 5:17), led to their giving to the poor.

Throughout Romans 5, Paul makes a seamless connection between the reign of God's grace now, and our future reigning in the literal Kingdom of God to be established materially upon earth at the Lord's return: Grace reigns *unto* eternal life, i.e. the result of the reign of grace now is eternal life in the future (Rom. 5:21)... and thus "the ones receiving the abundance of the grace and of the free gift of the righteousness in life *will* reign through the one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). Elsewhere, Paul clearly understands the idea of future reigning as a reference to our ruling in the future Kingdom of God. This is a very real and wonderful hope which we have, and is indeed part of the Gospel. "Israel" means something like 'God rules' (Gen. 32:22-28); His people are those over whom He rules. We therefore are under His Kingdom now, if we accept Christ as King over our lives.

Rom. 5:17,21 draws a parallel between Adam's sin and ours. His tragedy, his desperation, as he looked at his body, at his wife, with new vision; as his wide eyes wandered in tragedy around the garden: all who fall are in that position, eagerly reaching out to the clothing of the slain lamb.

5:18 This verse could be ended with an exclamation mark and be read as a summary, exclaimed in joy and wonder, of the preceding argument.

*Justification of life*- could be a legal term concerning how a person condemned to death has received “life” through being declared right.

Perhaps we feel that our preaching somehow lacks a sense of power and compulsion of others. Try explicitly telling them about the cross. The apostles recounted the fact of the cross and on this basis appealed for people to be baptized into that death and resurrection. There is an impelling power, an imperative, in the wonder and shame of it all. Joseph saw the Lord's dead body and was compelled to offer for that body to be laid where *his* dead body should have laid. In essence, he lived out the message of baptism. He wanted to identify his body with that of the Lord. He realized that the man Christ Jesus was truly his representative. And so he wanted to identify with Him. And properly

presented, this will be the power of response to the preaching of the cross today. "Through one act of righteousness [the cross] the free gift came unto all men to justification of life" (Rom. 5:18)- yet "all men" only receive that justification if they hear this good news and believe it. This is why we must take the Gospel "unto all men" (surely an allusion to the great commission)- so that, in that sense, the wondrous cross of Christ will have been the more 'worthwhile'. Through our preaching, yet more of those "all men" who were potentially enabled to live for ever will indeed do so. This is why the Acts record so frequently connects the preaching of the cross with men's belief. Negatively, men do not believe if they reject the "report" of the crucifixion (Jn. 12:38,39).

5:19 *Offence*- Adam's sin of commission (i.e. eating the fruit) may well have been a result of his sins of omitting to go forth out of the centre of the garden and multiply. By one man's inattention (Rom. 5:19 Gk.) sin came into the world.

*Made sinners*- Gk. 'to appoint, ordain'. It's not that we as innocent people [which we are not anyway] were turned into sinners because someone else sinned, far away and long ago. Rather were "all men"- and Paul uses this term to emphasize how Jew and Gentile are in the same position- put into the category of Adam, of sinners, of guilty, of flesh. But the good news is that there can be a category change- if we can be "made sinners" we can likewise be made righteous.

*One man's obedience*- a reference to the crucifixion, or to a life of obedience? Significantly, Paul writes in Romans of baptism as being "obedience" (Rom. 1:5; 6:16,17; 15:18; 16:26, also Acts 6:7). It's as if by obeying the command to die with Him by baptism into His death, we are associating with His actual obedience to death in the cross. The Lord spoke of having been given a specific "command" by the Father to die on the cross (Jn. 10:18), which would encourage us to interpret His "obedience" here as His obedience to death on the cross.

5:20 *Entered*- s.w. only Gal. 2:4, where the Judaizers 'sneaked in' to the church. Why exactly Paul uses such a word isn't altogether clear to me, nor to any of the many expositors I've read.

*That the offence may abound*- in the context, "the offence" [singular] refers to the specific sin of Adam- "the offence of the one man" (5:18). The Law was intended on one hand to bring life (Rom. 7:10); it was "holy, just and good". But the effect of it in practice was to accentuate sin, and this result of human failure was also somehow under the overall hand of God. He on the one hand cannot be held guilty of

leading men into sin by creating the concept of Divine law; for that Law which He gave was ordained to bring life. Yet He worked with and through human weakness, so that in the bigger picture, the result was that the Law convicted men of their sin *so that* God's grace could superabound, abound yet more than sin abounded. God uses sin, and doesn't just turn away from human failure in disgust; and in this we see a huge lesson for ourselves, we who are confronted on all sides by serious human failure.

Paul knew the 'abounding' aspect of the Father, when he wrote of how God does exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think (Eph. 3:20). How many times have we found that we prayed for one thing, and God gave us something so very much better? I see a kind of similarity with the way that God brought in the Law "that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly" (Rom. 5:20). God set up a situation in order that in due time, He could lavish His grace the more. One almost wonders whether this is one of the reasons why God allowed the whole concept of sin to exist at all. After all, the God of boundless possibilities surely had ways to achieve His ends without having to allow a concept like sin in the first place. Seeing there is no personal Satan, the intellectual origin of the concept of sin surely lies with God. And perhaps He chose this simply as a way of being better able to express His amazing grace and love to sinners. Having lambasted Israel for their sins and described in detail their coming judgment, God then makes a strange comment, apparently out of context with what He has just been saying: "And therefore will Yahweh wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for Yahweh is a God of justice; blessed are all they that wait for him" (Is. 30:18). God appears to be saying that He delays His actions, that He brings judgment, that He sets Himself *so* far above us- just so that He can get to show yet more mercy to us. Perhaps Joseph was manifesting God in the way he worked out that slow and detailed scheme of dealing with his sinful brethren... it has always seemed to me that he drew out the process just so that he could lead up to a climax of pouring out his maximum grace to them. Whilst the way seems long, "blessed are all they that wait for him". God is even spoken of as concluding (Gk. 'shutting up the eyes') of Israel in the sin of unbelief, "that he might have mercy" upon both them and the Gentiles (Rom. 11:32).

5:21 *Sin has reigned unto death-* or, Gk., *in death*. We have changed masters and also changed our Kings. Our status has changed, but we must still try to live out that status change in practice- hence "let not sin

therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it” (Rom. 6:12). Grace reigns as King right now, in that Christ reigns- and thereby we are right now in the sphere of His Kingdom.

*So might grace reign through righteousness*- in that God’s grace operates through the ‘mechanism’ of God and Christ’s righteousness being counted to us, so that we are counted as righteous, justified. And this comes to its ultimate term in physical, literal terms in our being given eternal life at the final judgment.

Grace, and the forgiveness it brings, reigns as a King (Rom. 5:21), in the sense that the real belief that by grace we are and will be saved, will bring forth a changed life (Tit. 2:11,12). The wonder of grace will mean that our lives become focused upon Jesus, the one who enabled that grace. Grace will be the leading and guiding principle in our lives, comprised as they are of a long string of thoughts and actions. And as with every truly focused life, literally *all* other things become therefore and thereby of secondary value. The pathway of persistent, focused prayer, the power of the hope of glory in the Kingdom, regular repentance... day by day our desires are redirected towards the things of God.

You cannot have abstract diabolism; the evil desires that are in a man’s heart cannot exist separately from a man; therefore ‘the Devil’ is personified. Sin is often personified as a ruler (e.g. Rom. 5:21; 6:6,17; 7:13–14). It is understandable, therefore, that the ‘Devil’ is also personified, seeing that ‘the Devil’ also refers to sin. In the same way, Paul speaks of us having two beings, as it were, within our flesh (Rom. 7:15–21): the man of the flesh, ‘the Devil’, fights with the man of the spirit. Yet it is evident that there are not two literal, personal beings fighting within us.

Paul makes a seamless connection between the reign of God's grace now, and our future reigning in the literal Kingdom of God to be established materially upon earth at the Lord's return: Grace reigns *unto* eternal life, i.e. the result of the reign of grace now is eternal life in the future (Rom. 5:21)... and thus "the ones receiving the abundance of the grace and of the free gift of the righteousness in [this] life *will* reign through the one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). The idea is that if grace reigns in our lives, then we will reign in the future Kingdom.

## Notes

(1) Dorothee Sölle, *Christ The Representative* (London: S.C.M., 1967) p. 69.

- (2) W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon Of The New Testament* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1957).
- (3) G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993 ed.) pp. 450-456.
- (4) H.W. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).
- (5) For documentation see Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966) pp. 80,81

## ROMANS CHAPTER 6

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? 2 God forbid! We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live in it? 3 Or are you ignorant of the fact that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him through a baptism into his death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection. 6 Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin. 7 For he that has died is set free from sin. 8 But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. 9 Knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no more has dominion over him. 10 For the death that he died, he died to sin once, but the life that he lives, he lives to God. 11 Even so count yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

### *A change of masters- from sin to Christ*

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey the lusts of it. 13 Neither present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you- for you are not under law, but under grace.

15 What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law but under grace? God forbid! 16 Do you not know, that to whom you present yourselves as slaves to obedience, his slaves you are whom you obey? Whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God, that whereas you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching which was delivered to you. 18 And being made free from sin, you became slaves to righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your human nature; but as you presented your limbs as slaves of uncleanness and iniquity, now present your limbs as slaves of righteousness unto holiness.

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness. 21 What fruit had you at that time in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the result of those things is death. 22 But now being made free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit unto holiness- and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



## **The Implications Of Baptism**

One of the reasons for baptism is perhaps so that we realize that we can't just drift into relationship with God; there must be a concrete point at which we decide for Him and His Son. The whole thing is so counter-instinctive, as Naaman discovered- to get wet, with all the awkwardness of it being so public, to be exposed and vulnerable to the view of others, to be dipped under water by another person... it's not exactly painless and effortless. Commonly enough, the New Testament speaks of baptism as a calling upon the Name of the Lord. This must be understood against its Hebrew background- *qara' beshem Yahweh*, which originally referred to approaching God in sacrifice (Gen. 12:7,8; Ps. 116:4,17). God placed His Name upon places in order to make them suitable places for sacrifice to be offered to Him (Dt. 12:4-7,21; Jer. 7:12). Baptism was thus seen as a sacrificial commitment to Yahweh in solemn covenant.

Further, in the first century, such baptisms were required of Gentiles who wished to become proselyte Jews and thus enter "Israel". For orthodox Jews to submit to baptism demanded a lot- for it implied they were not by birth part of the true Israel as they had once proudly thought. The Jews thought of Israel in the very terms which Paul applies to Jesus: "We Thy people whom Thou hast honoured and hast called the Firstborn and Only-Begotten, Near and Beloved One" (1). The New Testament uses these titles to describe the Lord Jesus Christ- and we must be baptized into Him in order to be in His Name and titles. The Lord Jesus was thus portrayed as Israel idealized and personified, all that Israel the suffering servant should have been; thus only by baptism into Christ of Jew and Gentile could they become part of the true seed of Abraham, the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The act of baptism into Christ is no less radical for us in our contexts today than it was for first century Jews. All we once mentally held dear, we have to give up.

### **Our Relationship With God**

Being baptized into the Name has quite some implications. In Hebrew thought, you called your name upon that which was your personal property- hence a wife took on the name of her husband because he placed it upon her. By baptism into the Name of the Father and His Son, we become their personal property, their woman, upon whom they have unique claims and obligations. Baptism in this sense is a kind of marriage contract with none less than the God of the universe. We can't

drift into relationship with God; God has designed the whole experience of baptism so that we once and for all make a choice, to be with Him and not this world, to be in Christ and covered in Him, rather than wandering in the rags of our own righteousness and occasional half-hearted stabs at real spirituality.

### **Motivation To Powerful Preaching**

There is no doubt that the cross and baptism into that death was central to the preaching message of the early brethren. According to the Bible, baptism is essential to salvation; yet we can't draw hoops around God and limit His salvation ultimately. The completeness and reality of the redemption achieved is expressed in Hebrews with a sense of finality, and we ought to not let that slip from our presentation of the Gospel either. There in the cross, the justice and mercy of God are brought together in the ultimate way. There in the cross is the appeal. Some of the early missionaries reported how they could never get any response to their message until they explained the cross; and so, with our true doctrinal understanding of it, it is my belief that the cross is what has the power of conversion. A man cannot face it and not have a deep impression of the absoluteness of the issues involved in faith and unbelief, in choosing to accept or reject the work of the struggling, sweating, gasping Man who hung on the stake. It truly is a question of believe or perish. Baptism into that death and resurrection is essential for salvation. Of course we must not bully or intimidate people into faith, but on the other hand, a preaching of the cross cannot help but have something compulsive and urgent and passionate about it. For we appeal to men on God's behalf to accept the work of the cross as efficacious for them. In this sense baptism is essential to salvation *from our perspective*. It can be that much of our preaching somehow fails in urgency and entreaty. We seem to be in places too expository, or too attractive with the peripherals, seeking to please men... or be offering good advice, very good advice indeed, background Bible knowledge, how to read the Bible effectively... all of which may be all well and good, but we should be preaching good news, not good advice. The message of the cross is of a grace and real salvation which is almost too good to believe. It isn't Bible background or archaeology or potshots at interpreting Bible prophecy. It is the Man who had our nature hanging there perfect, full of love, a light in this dark world... and as far as we perceive the wonder of it all, as far as this breaks in upon us, so far we will hold it forth to this world. If we think there could be other paths to salvation, then we wouldn't preach Christ as we do. The zeal of the early brethren to witness for Him was because, as they explained, there

is no other name under Heaven whereby we may be saved. People do not drift into covenant relationship with God; they have to consciously chose, and God has instituted baptism as a means to that end; to force a man or woman to a conscious decision and crossing of boundaries. And this is why we preach towards baptism, with an eye on future conversion, knowing that baptism is essential to salvation.

Lk. 3:12 records how there "came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?". There is a parallel between desiring baptism and realizing that they must *do* something concretely in their lives. The baptism process brings us into the realm of God's gracious forgiveness and redemption, and into living contact with the real Christ. There is no way we can be passive to this and do nothing about it.

### Notes

(1) *The Apocalypse Of Ezra* 6.55-58 (London: S.P.C.K., 1917 ed.) p. 47.

6:1 *Shall we continue in sin...?* - Paul says he had been slanderously accused of teaching this (Rom. 3:8). He's here not only answering that false charge, but more positively, analyzing what our response should be to the great grace in which we now stand. In doing so, he expounds in more detail how we come to that position of being "in Christ", what "the obedience of faith" means in practice. And he's quite clear that this faith in Christ is expressed in the act of baptism.

Paul didn't just decide to write about baptism in Romans 6; the classic exposition of baptism which we find there is within a context. And it's not an appeal for people to be baptized- it's written to baptized believers, appealing for them to live out in practice the "in Christ" status which they had been given as a result of their baptisms. If we really feel the result of our baptism, we will not "continue in sin". Martin Luther used to overcome temptation by taking a chalk and writing *baptizatus sum*- 'I am baptized'. And therefore we simply cannot continue in servitude to sin. As Karl Barth put it in his needle-sharp analysis of baptism's implications: "Baptism recalls me to the service of witness, since it recalls me to daily repentance" (1). It should be noted that allusions to baptism in Paul's letters are in passages where Paul is trying to correct misunderstandings about unity and way of life (Rom. 6; 8:12-17; Gal. 3:27-4:6; 1 Cor. 1-4, 12). The early brethren had a tendency to forget the implications of baptism. And so it is with us all today. Entering the body of Christ by baptism means that our sins are in a sense against our own brethren, our spiritual body, as well as against

the Lord personally. Like the prodigal, we realize we sin against Heaven and men.

6:2 *Live therein*- the idea is of living in the sphere of sin, identifying ourselves with being “in Adam” rather than the sphere of “in Christ”. Romans 6 is talking about being in one of two spheres- in the flesh, and in the Spirit; in Adam, or in Christ; continuing in condemnation, or rejoicing in our justified status in Christ. It is actually impossible for us to ‘live in sin’ for a moment, because we are no longer “in” that sphere or position.

Baptism is a change of masters- but we are still bondslaves, not of sin, but of God. The implications of this figure may not be immediately apparent to the modern mind. We are totally committed to the Master- this is who we are, bondslaves. In Gen. 44:9, being dead is paralleled with being a slave; and there appears a parallel between being a bonds slave and dying in Gen. 44:9,17. Indeed, Romans 6 draws the same parallel- death to sin is part of being a slave of Christ. The very fact we are baptized means we should not continue in sin, seeing we are dead to it (Rom. 6:2). This is one of the most basic implications of a first principle which we live in ignorance of most of our days.

6:3 *Know you not...?* – a common appeal of Paul’s in his letters (Rom. 7:1; 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1; 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:13). His earnest desire was that his readership would appreciate the real import of what they knew in theory.

Galatians was one of Paul’s earlier letters. In it, he speaks of his own baptism: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live” (Gal. 2:19-21). Years later he writes to the Romans about *their* baptisms, in exactly the same language: “All of us who have been baptized... our old self was crucified with him... the life he lives he lives to God” (Rom. 6:1-10). He clearly seeks to forge an identity between his readers and himself; their baptisms were [and are] as radical as his in their import. Note how in many of his letters, especially Galatians and Corinthians, he switches so easily between “you” and “we”, as if to drive home the fact that there was to be no perception of distance between him the writer and us the readers.

6:4 *By baptism*- Gk. *dia* baptism. It is through baptism, on account of it, that we are “in Christ” and associated with the saving death of the Lord Jesus. This is how, mechanically, as it were, we become “in Christ”. The use of *dia* here demonstrates the colossal importance of baptism.

“Therefore we *are* buried with him by baptism into death... knowing this, that our old man *is* crucified with him” (Rom 6:4,6). Every time someone is baptized, the Lord as it were goes through His death for them again. And yet baptism is an ongoing process, of dying daily. We are in Christ, connected every moment with the life and living out of His cross. We *are* dying with Him, our old man *is* crucified with Him because His death is an ongoing one. “It is Christ that died... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?... As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Rom 8:34-36). According to Isaiah 53, He on the cross was the sheep for the slaughter; but all in Him are *all day long* counted as sharing His death, as we live out the same self-control, the same spirit of love and self-giving for others, regardless of their response...

*Raised... by the glory of the Father*- doesn’t mean that some bright light as it were hauled the body of Jesus out of the grave. The glory of God is essentially His character and attributes; when Moses asked to see God’s glory, He heard the essential character of God proclaimed. Christ was raised from the dead *dia*, for the sake of, this glory. He perfectly revealed it in a life and personality which was totally like God’s, omitting no aspect of righteousness and not committing any sin. He gave His life for us, to become our full representative; and therefore it was appropriate that He be raised again, for the wages of sin is death, but He had done no sin. His same perfection is counted to us, if we believe in Him and into Him through “the obedience of faith” in baptism. And it is on this basis that we too shall rise again. Paul mentions this aspect of the Lord’s resurrection to explain to us something more about *how and why* immersion into His death and resurrection can lead to *our* resurrection. We must consider that His resurrection is in fact going to be ours exactly because His righteousness is counted to us, and therefore *dia* that, for the sake of it, we too shall be raised to life eternal.

The theory of Him only ‘acting out’ reaches its nadir when we come- as each Christian must- to personally contemplate the meaning of the dead body of Jesus. That lifeless corpse, in contrast with the immortal God who cannot die, was surely the ultimate testament to Christ’s total humanity. God did not die for three days. The Lord Jesus did. His subsequent resurrection doesn’t in any way detract from the fact that He was really dead for three days. Indeed, His resurrection would also have been a cheap sham if He had actually not been really dead, with all that death means. We too, in our natural fear of death (cp. Heb. 2:15), come to that dead body and wish to identify ourselves with it, so

that we might share in His resurrection. Baptism is a baptism into His death (Rom. 6:3-5). It's more than some act of vague identification with the dead and resurrected Jesus. We are "buried with him", literally 'co-buried' (Gk. *syn-thaptein*) with Him, inserted into His death, sharing the same grave. If His death was not really death, then baptism loses its meaning, and we are left still searching for another Saviour with whom we can identify in order to rise out of the grave. Jesus Himself was baptized in order to emphasize our identity with Him: "Now when *all* the people were baptized, and Jesus *also* had been baptized..." (Lk. 3:21).

Our experience of grace means "that we should serve in *newness* of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6). We don't *have* to serve God in the sense that He grants us salvation by pure grace, not by works. The blessing of the Lord has nothing added to it by human toil (Prov. 10:22 RVmg.). But just because we don't *have* to do it, we do. This is the power of grace; it doesn't force us to monotonous service, but should be a wellspring of fresh motivation, to do perhaps the same things with an ever fresh spirit. The pure *wonder* of it all needs to be felt- that *for nothing but pure faith* the Lord will grant us eternal redemption for the sake of the Lord's death and resurrection. Which is why Rom. 6:4 says that because of this, and our appropriation of it in baptism, we therefore live in *newness* of life, a quality of life that is ever new. Through His death, a new and living way is opened (Heb. 10:20). We share the ever fresh life which the Lord lived from His resurrection. It does us good to try to imagine that scene- the Son of God, coming out of the grave at daybreak. He would have seen the lights of Jerusalem shimmering away in the distance, a few kms. away, as everyone woke up and went back to work, the first day after the long holiday. Getting the children ready, caring for the animals... it was back to the same old scene. But as they did so, the Son of God was rising to newness of life, standing alone in the fresh morning air, with a life that was ever new, with a joy and dynamism that was to know no end... His feelings are beyond us, but all the same, distorted by our nature, by our spiritual dysfunction, into *our* lives His life breaks through.

6:5 *Planted together*- the image appears to be of two seeds growing up together out of the ground. To parallel Christ with us in this way is arresting; that we, so far behind Him, our Master, King and hero- should actually be seeds and tender plants growing up next to Him. The suggestion could be that Christ is still growing, His life is a newness of life, an ever fresh experience, a growth, which goes on eternally; and

we are growing together with Him. And that growth has started even now. The initial planting under the earth is symbolized by going under the water of baptism.

*Likeness of his death*- the reference could be to baptism itself as the likeness of His death. But perhaps the idea more essentially is that our death to sin is a copy, a “likeness”, of Christ’s death to sin (6:10). It’s an elevating thought- that we are seeking to copy His death in our daily death to sin. Not only through our rejecting of temptation, but our recognition that we are in a state of being dead to sin and its demands, because we are counted right before God by our faith in His grace. “Likeness” is used in the LXX in the frequent warnings not to make an image or likeness of any god, let alone Yahweh (Ex. 20:4; Dt. 4:16-25; Ps. 106:20; Is. 40:18,19). The reason for this prohibition becomes clearer in the New Testament; the ultimate likeness of God is in His Son, and we are to create the likeness of His Son not as a mere physical icon, but within the very structure of our human personality and character. In this we as it were die with Christ (6:8)- not just in the dirt and heat of battling and resisting temptation to sin, but in that we have identified ourselves with Him there, we are in the sphere of Christ rather than Adam. What we do with our thoughts, our spare time, what our aims and ambitions are in life, where our heart is- is within the Christ sphere rather than the Adam sphere, the spirit rather than the flesh. We are in the “likeness” of Christ’s death by baptism, and He is in the “likeness of [our] sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3)- thereby showing the mutuality between Him and us, and how representation and response to it is two-way. He is like us, and we therefore seek to become like Him.

God forbid that for us, the cross should be a mere art form that we admire from afar. We are to be intimately connected with the spirit of the Lord as He hung there. In baptism, we are to be ‘incorporated with him in a death like his’ (Rom. 6:5). The Greek word *symphytoi* speaks of a symphony, in which we and the Lord in His time of dying are united together. Likewise Rom. 8:29 and Phil. 3:21 speak of being ‘fused into the mould of his death’. He, as He was there, is to be our mould. The strange ability of the cross to elicit powerful response in practice is one way in which the blood of Christ sanctifies us. His sacrifice not only brings forgiveness for past sins, it is the inspiration to a sanctified future life.

6:6 *Knowing this*- see on Rom. 6:3. As in 6:9, “knowing” these things means more than factual knowledge; Paul is driving home the practical implications.

*Old man-* the contrast between the old man and the new man is similar to that which Paul draws in 1 Cor. 15:45 between the “first man”, Adam, and the “last” man, Christ. Therefore I suggest that the “old man” here is a reference to our status in Adam; by baptism we pass from that status to that of the “new man”, Christ. Eph. 4:22-24 exhorts baptized believers to put off the old man and put on the new man- i.e. to live out in practice the change in status which occurred in baptism. “The new man” comprises Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:10,11)- connecting with how Gal. 3:27-29 explains that baptism into Christ likewise gives us a status of “in Christ” which thereby obviates any difference between Jew and Gentile. If “the old man” refers to our status in Adam which has now ended, been crucified, then we need no longer be phased by the fact that no baptized believer manages to totally avoid sinning; none of us have put to death the old manner of life in totality. All our days we seek to respond to the change of status which has occurred, living appropriate to that change.

*Crucified with Christ-* the very pinnacle of the Lord’s achievement, which we tend to gape at from an awed distance reflecting that ‘I would not, could not, possibly, have done that’, is counted to us insofar as we are in Christ. “Is crucified” is a translation which misses the point- the Greek speaks of this as a one time act which we did with Christ, rather than any ongoing identity with the crucifixion through our sufferings over the course of our life. That one time point of identity was surely baptism, when we were counted as in Christ, changed status from Adam to Christ, and His crucifixion was counted to us as if we had died there. This interpretation is in context with Paul’s argument in Romans; he’s not merely saying that our sufferings in fighting sin bring us identity with Christ’s crucifixion, or that thereby we know something of the spirit of the crucified Christ. For we are so, so far behind Him. And our paltry efforts fall far short, and certainly would not entitle us to a resurrection. By our being counted as dead, even crucified, with Christ, because we are seen as “in” Him, we will be thereby also resurrected with Him in that we will share in His resurrection life just as we were identified with His death. Indeed, all that is true of Him becomes true of us. We died with Him (6:8), were crucified with Him (6:6), buried with Him (6:4), raised with Him (Col. 2:12; 3:1); are seated with Him in Heaven (Eph. 2:16), are simply “with” Christ in life today (Rom. 8:17,29), and so will eternally be “with the Lord” Jesus (1 Thess. 4:17).

*Body of sin... destroyed-* at the day of judgment? Paul speaks of how the life / living of Jesus is now manifested in our “mortal flesh” (2 Cor.



4:11). So we still have “mortal flesh” now. It will only literally be no more at the Lord’s return. This could require the next clause to be translated “that from then onwards [i.e. after the day of judgment] we shall no longer serve sin”. However, this phrase could be returning back to this life- with the idea being that because at the day of judgment our body of sin will be destroyed, and this was guaranteed by our baptism into Christ, we therefore shouldn’t serve sin, in having sin as our master. We are no longer in that sphere, under that domination- but instead under the domination of Christ and within His sphere. Note the difference between the “old man” being crucified and the “body of sin” being therefore, henceforth, destroyed. The old way of life [which is how Paul uses “the old man” in Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9] is dead, we have changed status, living as “the new man”, Christ. This will come to its physical manifestation in the destruction of our physical body and the gift of the new body at the day of judgment.

6:7 *He that is dead is freed from sin*- is virtually quoting Rabbinic writings. However in the Talmud there is the statement that “when a man is dead he is freed from keeping the law” (*B. Shabbat*, 151 B). Paul provocatively replaces “law” with “sin”. Not that God’s law is sinful in itself, but he has been emphasizing that the Law is associated with sin because it as it were magnifies sin and leads to the conscious crossing over of a Divine line which results in sin being imputed to man. However, “freed” here translates the usual word for “justified” or acquitted. A slave can no longer serve a master after the death of the slave. And this is how God counts us.

6:8 *If we be dead*- Gk. ‘if we died’, in baptism into Christ’s death. Paul is writing to baptized believers; his thought is therefore ‘Since we died with Him’.

*We believe that we shall also live with Him*- yet the fact someone has been baptized doesn’t necessarily mean that they do at this point believe that they will live with Christ. Paul surely means that if we really accept the reality of what happened at baptism, this must influence our faith now- that we shall therefore live with Him eternally in the future, and we therefore shall live with Him and in Him, within the sphere of His life, right now. The logic here is powerful, intense, and cutting. It can’t be squirmed out of. If we really were baptized into His death- then we [almost] have to believe that we will also live with Him, because He didn’t stay dead but rose to life. The power of baptism, therefore, is that it reminds us subsequently in our lives of the simple fact that therefore, as Christ died and lives, so I too “shall”, I really will, “live with Him”.

6:9 *Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead...*- “we believe that we shall live with Him” (6:8) because we know that Christ was raised from the dead. To believe that He rose from the dead is therefore no painless intellectual matter. If He rose, and if I really died with Him, then I shall for sure live with Him. Because He is me and I am Him; He in me and I in Him. This is what Paul is saying, amidst our own doubts and fears about our moral failures trying to shout him down.

*No more dominion*- if death and sin have no more dominion over Christ, they have no dominion over us, and therefore we are to live as if sin has no dominion over us (6:14).

6:10 *Died unto sin once*- this apparently obvious fact is added to develop the argument that because He totally isn't under the power of sin and death any more, we who are in Him are likewise free from it, totally and utterly- by status. And seeing His death isn't ongoing, our freedom from sin should likewise be ongoing.

*Lives unto God*- the fact that even now, the Son of God lives “unto God”, to His glory, for His sake, unto Him... is a sure proof that He isn't “God” in any Trinitarian sense. But just as His life is constantly and in every dimension “for God”, so we also should be living unto God now (6:11)- not a hobby, a part time religion, but a devotion to His sphere in every aspect of our existence.

The life that He lived and now lives, and the death that He died, become ours (Rom. 6:10 RV). We identified with that life, that death, at baptism. But it's an ongoing thing. We live in *newness* of life. The life in Christ is not a stagnant pond, but rather living water, spring water, bubbling fresh from the spring. The Lord Jesus died and rose as our representative. Therefore we live out His life, His death, His rising again to new life; and so as we sing, “into *my* life *your* power breaks through, living Lord”. And this is what we give out to others- for “he that believeth in me, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of springing water” for others (Jn. 4:10; 7:38). We can experience the newness of life of Christ right now. His life is now made manifest in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:11), insofar as we seek to live our lives governed by the golden rule: ‘What would Jesus do...?’. The life that He had and now lives is the essence of the Kingdom life.

Throughout the New Testament, there is a clear link between the preaching of the cross, and men and women being converted. There is a power of conversion in the image and message of Christ crucified as our representative. Man cannot remain passive before this. Baptism is an appropriation of His death and resurrection to ourselves. This is why

the response to the preaching of the cross in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was baptism. And the response doesn't stop there; it continues, in the living of the life of the risen Jesus in our lives after baptism: "For the death that he died, he died unto sin... the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Even so reckon ye also yourselves to dead unto sin but alive unto God [because you are] in Christ [by baptism into Him]" (Rom. 6:10,11 RV). The death Christ died for us, the life He lives, are all imperatives to us now.

6:11- see on Rom. 2:26; 6:10.

*Reckon you also yourselves* – uses the common Greek word for “impute”. As God imputes Christ’s righteousness to us, we are to count ourselves, perceive ourselves, feel ourselves, as really like that. Hence the emphasis- “you also yourselves”, we, us, are to see ourselves as God sees us, rather than merely accepting that He wishes to see us as He chooses to see us. His opinion of us in the ultimate reality for us- and we are to share that view.

Paul’s emphasis is not so much that baptized believers will be resurrected when Christ returns, true as this is and important within his overall argument; but rather that having been raised with Christ, the new resurrection life of Jesus breaks through into our lives right now. Elsewhere Paul likewise talks of our participating in glory right now (2 Cor. 3:16), whereas the ultimate glory is yet to come and the transformation of our bodies (Phil. 3:21).

6:12 *Let not sin reign* - We are to live out in practice the status we have in Christ. “Sin shall not reign over you” (6:14); but we must therefore make an effort to not let sin reign. Likewise in Rom. 8:9,12: “You are not in the flesh... do not live according to the flesh”.

*Mortal body*- having said that “the body of sin” is to be destroyed (6:6) and that we are to live in the sphere of Christ rather than Adam, we have changed masters and should live and feel like that, Paul reminds us that our body is still mortal- reminding us that we are still awaiting the change of body which is to come at the final judgment when Christ returns.

*Lusts thereof*- there are within the human body the natural passions / desires to sin, “the passion of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). They aren’t sinful in themselves- for the Lord Jesus was sinless and yet had our same “mortal body”. But the fact they are the source of sin and are within our bodies explains why there is such a strong connection between sin and our bodies, leading to expressions such as “the body of sin” (6:6) and

“sinful flesh” (8:3). But this isn’t to say that the body is itself sinful or that it’s somehow a sin to be human.

6:13 *Instruments*- s.w. armour, weapon (Jn. 18:3; 2 Cor. 6:7; 10:4). We are called to fight, to serve in the army- of either sin or Christ. No passivity or wavering between the positions is therefore possible. We have changed sides. See on 6:23.

*Yield yourselves*- Gk. ‘present yourselves’. The aorist tense could suggest a one time presenting of ourselves- at baptism? And if we didn’t appreciate at the time of our baptism that this is what we were doing, we can do it now. Maybe that explains the otherwise difficult to translate tense usage here.

6:14- see on Rom. 6:12.

*Shall not have dominion*- yet we still sin. But Paul is again talking about our changed status- sin is not now our Lord, our master; instead, Jesus is. *Kurieuo* (“have dominion”) is clearly intended to contrast with *Kurios*, the usual Greek word translated “Lord” with reference to the Lord Jesus. See on Rom. 6:9. The Lord Jesus rose again *so that* He might be our Lord, s.w. “dominion”, over us His people (Rom. 14:9). “Shall not” can be translated as “Sin will not have dominion” (ESV)- so that it’s not a demand that we stop allowing sin to dominate, but rather an exaltation that the “sin” sphere of things will not in the end have dominion in our lives, because we are in Christ.

*For you are not under the Law*- would’ve been more radical to Jewish readers and listeners than we may appreciate; for Judaism’s big issue has always been that the Law is required in order to curb or restrain sin, and that societies without the Law are more sinful than those influenced by it. But here Paul is saying that if we forget about the Jewish Law and live as believers justified by pure grace, this will have more practical power in delivering a man from sin’s dominion than any attempt at obedience to a legal code. “Under” was appropriate to slaves ‘under’ a master. We are ‘under’ grace as our master rather than law. The strength of sin is the law (1 Cor. 15:56); if the law isn’t our master, then sin likewise isn’t our master, and therefore sin will not ultimately dominate us.

6:15 See notes on “under...” at 6:14. If we are under grace rather than law, then we will not be counted by God as sinning. We declared right, justified. Paul may mean there that we are not *counted as* continual sinners [even though we believers do keep on sinning, sadly], because we are under grace as a master rather than law. Or he may mean that those truly under grace don’t keep on sinning, because the wonder of

their position inspires them not to. This contrasts sharply with the Judaistic view that it is the Law which curbs sin. Paul is arguing the very opposite: that leaving the sphere of Law and coming under grace will actually curb sin.

6:16 *Yield... to obey*- see on 6:13. The obedience would seem to be a one time obedience- in baptism- an obedience to a form of doctrine delivered to them (6:17). "The obedience of faith" which Paul spoke of in Rom. 1:5 he now interprets as baptism. Note the parallel between faith and obedience in Rom. 10:16.

Paul expected other believers to share his familiarity with the words of Christ. There's an example in Rom. 6:16: " Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are... whether of sin... or of obedience?". This is alluding to Mt. 6:24 concerning not serving two masters. Paul is surely saying: 'Come on, this is Matthew 6, you can't serve two masters! That principle ought to be firmly lodged in your heart!'. In terms of Paul's argument about which status or sphere we are in, his point is simple: you can only be in one sphere or the other, either under law or grace, sin or obedience. It's therefore impossible to continue sinning, in God's view [and it's His view of the matter which is the only thing worth anything]- because we are either justified in Christ, or not justified and condemned sinners. The tree brings forth either good or bad fruit (Mt. 7:18)- in that we are "in" either the good tree or the bad one. Paul deploys this argument to answer the objection that we may as well continue sinning- he's saying not merely that we ought not to do that, but rather that ultimately we *cannot* do that, because we are either under sin or under obedience. Notice that he personifies "obedience" as a slave owner, to whom we now belong. The two slave masters in view here are called "sin" and "obedience". We are clearly to identify "obedience" with the Lord Jesus. And Paul has just written about the singular and spectacular "obedience" of Jesus in dying for us on the cross (see on Rom. 5:19). This act made Jesus to be Lord and Master for us. We are obedient to His obedience, as it were. Which is the whole idea of baptism- we are buried together with Him, we die with Him, His death becomes ours, and thus His obedience unto death is ours.

*Obedience unto righteousness*- the end result of our serving "obedience", i.e. the Lord Jesus, is righteousness. But Paul's argument has been that all our righteousness is as filthy rags, and righteousness has to be imputed to us. The end result of being under "obedience", in Christ, is that righteousness is imputed to us, we are declared righteous, justified, as we stand before the final judgment. Lack of attention to

Paul's argument and the meaning attached to the terms being used in Romans can lead the casual reader of this verse to think that by acts of obedience we become righteous- and that is the very opposite of what Paul has been teaching all along.

6:17 *That form of teaching to which you were handed over-* must be interpreted in the context of Paul's insistent theme that we have changed masters, changed status. "Handed over" could be an allusion to handing over a slave from one master to another- the form of teaching would therefore refer to the form or mould to which we are exposed under our new master, the Lord Jesus. In this case it would refer to post baptismal rather than pre baptismal teaching. Alternatively he may be referring to the fact that the teaching or doctrine of Christ had been delivered or handed over to them from Christ Himself (s.w. 1 Cor. 11:2,13; 15:3). However, it should be noted that Paul says that the baptized believer is handed over to the doctrine / teaching of Christ- and not the teaching to the believer. Perhaps the contrast is with Rom. 2:20, where we read of the "form of knowledge and of truth in the law [of Moses]". We have been handed over to the form or mould of teaching which is in Christ rather than Moses.

Paul's writing that he thanks God for their change of status was maybe to encourage his readers to understand the degree to which in very deed they had changed status- because they seemed to doubt it, as we too tend to.

We are frequently spoken of as being slaves of God. At baptism, we changed masters (Rom. 6). Yet the implications of being a bond-slave are tremendous. We are not our own. We have been bought with a price. And we cannot serve two masters. There's a powerful, powerful logic here. We are either slaves of ourselves, or slaves of God. Ultimate freedom to do 'what we want' is actually not possible. So we may as well take the path of slavery to the Father and Son. Unless we firmly accept this, life will become motion without meaning, activity without direction, events without reason.

The doctrines we believed at baptism were a 'mould of doctrine' (Rom. 6:17 Gk.)- they define the person we turn into. The calling of the Gospel is ongoing- it's not that we hear the call, respond to it, and the call in that sense ceases. There is a set of doctrines which Eph. 4:4-6 calls "the one faith"; which Rom. 6:17 calls "that form of doctrine" to be believed before baptism; "the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13).

"Repent ye and believe the Gospel" (Mk. 1:15) might seem to be in the wrong order- for surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance.

And so it does. But the point is, life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place. Thus Rom. 6 teaches that we were once servants of sin... and we expect the sentence to conclude: 'But now you are servants of righteousness'. But it doesn't. We were once servants of sin but now we have obeyed the form of doctrine delivered to us... and are *therefore* servants of righteousness. The service of righteousness is a result of accepting "that form of doctrine", perhaps referring to an early catechism or statement of faith taught to baptismal candidates, summarizing the power of the Gospel.

"Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (Jn. 8:34), but those in Christ are counted as not being the servants of sin, but of Christ (Rom. 6:17). The connection with Jn. 8:34 makes this tantamount to saying that they are reckoned as not committing sin.

6:17,18- An allusion to 1 Sam. 17:8,9?

6:18 *Made free from sin*- would imply a manumission, a payment of a price by some gracious person to free a person from slavery. Note that the image isn't of one slave master buying a slave from another master. It's of genuine freedom being bought for the slave, by grace. But "being then made free", because of this, the freed slave decides to become a slave of the gracious Saviour who paid for their release. Being a slave of Christ is therefore described in 6:19 as a freewill yielding of our bodies, every part of them, to His service. 1 Enoch 5:7,8 and other Jewish writings spoke of 'freedom from sin' coming in the Messianic Kingdom and the destruction of Satan; but Paul applies that phrase to the experience of the Christian believer *now* - see on 1 Cor. 10:11. [J. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments from Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) pp. 248-259. The same phrase occurs with the same meaning in the Testament of Levi 14.1.]

*You became*- the change of status is so great that there can be no real question about who in practice we should serve. By status we are the servants of righteousness- but that is not to say that we don't at times in our humanity serve sin in practice. We have yet to become in practice who we are in status.

6:19 *The infirmity of your flesh*- in Paul's case, being all things to all men meant that at times He sacrificed highest principle in order to get through to men; he didn't just baldly state doctrinal truth and leave his hearers with the problem of whether to accept it. He really sought to persuade men. He magnified his ministry of preaching to the Gentiles, he emphasized the possibility of Gentile salvation, "If by any means I

may provoke to emulation [‘incite to rivalry’] them which are my flesh [the Jews], and might save some of them” (Rom. 11:13,14). This hardly seems a very appropriate method, under the spotlight of highest principle. But it was a method Paul used. Likewise he badgers the Corinthians into giving money for the poor saints in Jerusalem on the basis that he has boasted to others of how much they would give (2 Cor. 9:2), and these boasts had provoked others to be generous; so now, they had better live up to their promise and give the cash. If somebody promised to give money to charity and then didn’t do so, we wouldn’t pressurize them to give. And we wouldn’t really encourage one ecclesia to give money on the basis of telling them that another ecclesia had promised to be very generous, so they ought to be too. Yet these apparently human methods were used by Paul. He spoke “in human terms” to the Romans, “because of the infirmity of your flesh” (Rom. 6:19 NIV); he so wanted to make his point understood. And when he told husbands to love their wives, he uses another rather human reason: that because your wife is “one flesh” with you, by loving her you are loving yourself. ‘And’, he reasons, ‘you wouldn’t hate yourself, would you, so – love your wife!’. The cynic could reasonably say that this is pure selfishness (Eph. 5:29); and Paul seems to recognize that the higher level of understanding is that a husband should love his wife purely because he is manifesting the love of Christ to an often indifferent and unappreciative ecclesia (5:32,33). And yet Paul plainly uses the lower level argument too. It is possible to discern an element of human appeal in some Biblical statements. Thus the Spirit encourages husbands to love their wives as themselves, because effectively they are loving themselves if they do this (Eph. 5:29). Yet we are also warned that a characteristic of the last days will be a selfish loving of *ourselves*. Paul speaks of how he puts things “in human terms” (Rom. 6:19 NIV); e.g. he suggests that fear of the judgment alone ought to at least make us sit up and take our spiritual life seriously (2 Cor. 5:11), even though the tenor of Scripture elsewhere is that this shouldn’t be our motivator.

We should note that Paul is almost apologizing for his metaphors, as if he had put something too crudely. His metaphors are ‘humanly’ quite acceptable- from the courtroom, slavery etc. Given the height and wonder of the grace we are considering, any metaphor, any similitude, any language- is inadequate and even borders on the inappropriate. And note that Paul is writing all these things, both the metaphors and the apology for them, under Divine inspiration.



The changeover from the downward spiral to the upward spiral ought to have begun at baptism; but as with some of the Roman believers in the first century, a believer can slip back into the downward spiral: "Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness" (Rom. 6:19 NIV). The life of sexual impurity is an "ever increasing" downwards path; the endless quest for new relationships and sexual novelty doesn't need to be described. It is significant that having "left the natural use of the woman" (Rom. 1:27), male homosexuals are described by Paul as descending on an "ever increasing" path of perversion; they rarely remain where they are, in moral terms.

Rom. 6:19 speaks of how the ever increasing downward spiral of obedience to sin is turned round at baptism, so that we begin an upward spiral of obedience to righteousness. God does good unto those that are good, but leads those who turn aside even further astray (Ps. 125:4,5). Those who are "[born] of God" are able to hear and understand God's words (Jn. 8:47)- and baptism is surely how we are born of God (Jn. 3:3-5). This seems to open up the possibility of yet higher growth once we are baptized- it's all an upward spiral, like any functional relationship.

Rom. 6:19-23 makes the contrast between how serving sin leads to ever increasing sin, whilst serving Christ results in ever increasing righteousness. We are all too aware of the upward (downward!) spiral of sin- we well know the feeling of losing our spiritual grip for an hour, day or week, and sensing how sin is ever increasing its hold over us. But by our union with Christ in baptism it is quite possible, indeed intended, that we should get into an upward spiral of obedience, in which one spiritual victory leads to another.

6:20 *Free from righteousness*- Gk. 'not a slave of'. Again Paul is labouring the point that one cannot serve two masters. And he does so in a way which makes us think: 'That's stating the obvious! Why are you repeatedly stating the obvious?'. He does this because it's not obvious to us that we really are servants of "righteousness" rather than "sin". We wonder whether we are really counted as righteous or not. Note here that the names of the two slave masters are "sin" and "righteousness"- in Rom. 6:16 they were "sin" and "obedience". We are slaves of Christ, He is our righteousness, and it is counted to us; so "righteousness" is an appropriate title for Him, "the Lord our righteousness".

6:21 *What fruit...*? There was no fruit in slavery; it was existence, rather than a life lived.

*Now ashamed*- shame is associated with condemnation at the final judgment. We recognize we are condemned sinners, and feel the shame for that. The verse could be punctuated: “What fruit did you have then? That of which you are now ashamed”. This is the great paradox in the Christian experience- feeling condemned for sin, and yet believing in our new status, that we are declared right before the judgment seat of God.

6:22 *Become servants*- see on 6:18. We were made free from slavery, rather than being bought by a slave master from our previous owner. But we chose to become His slaves out of gratitude for His grace. The same Greek is found in 1 Cor. 9:19: “I have *made myself a slave* to all, that I might gain the more”. The idea is that made ourselves servants / slaves, having been made free from our old master. The two slave masters are now called “sin” and “God”.

*You have your fruit*- but Paul’s whole intention of writing to the Roman church and ministering to them was so that they would bear fruit (Rom. 1:13 cp. 15:28). If we truly understand that we are no longer in “sin” but the servants of God, in His sphere of things and His acceptance, then we will bear fruit in practice, it simply has to be like that, it’s inevitable. The idea of bearing fruit is connected in the context to baptism into Christ. Jn. 12:24 records the Lord likening His death to a seed falling into the ground, going as it were into a grave under the soil, but rising again and bearing fruit. Again- all that is true of the Lord Jesus is true of us who are in Him. Paul has been saying that we were planted together with Him (6:5), buried with Him, rose with Him- and as He is the plant that bears fruit, so are we. We therefore aren’t being exhorted to bear fruit, so much as being told that we have our fruit- for we are in Him. And naturally, this means we will try to live in practice as we are by status. But by status, we do now have our fruit- His fruit- and the end of all this will at the final judgment be “everlasting life”.

6:23 *Wages*- used specifically of pay given to soldiers (Lk. 3:14; 1 Cor. 9:7; and every usage in the LXX is in this connection- 1 Esdra 4:56; 1 Macc. 3:28; 14:32). This would continue the military analogy which was used in Rom. 6:13- of presenting our limbs as armour, weapons [Gk.], to King Sin. See also the military term in Rom. 7:8.

The *wages* of sin and the *gift* of God are here contrasted. “God” and “sin” are the names of the two slave masters in 6:22. We noted under 6:22 *you have your fruit* that the everlasting life will be the end result

of our service, given at the day of judgment at Christ's return. It may be that we are intended to visualize the wages of sin being paid at the same time. In any case, all believers, all servants of God, will die in any case. This isn't the wages of sin. Surely the "death" that is in view here in 6:23 is the second death at the day of judgment.

Asaph laments how the wicked seem to be so prosperous, and then remembers that one day God will awake. More than this, he comes to see that "they... *shall* perish: thou *hast* destroyed them... how are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they *are* utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:27,19). The wages of sin *is* death (Rom. 6:23)- not 'it will be death at the judgment', it *is* right now the response God makes to sin. Because God is without time, the judgment has effectively happened to them. We are come to "God the judge of all"- even now (Heb. 12:23).

*In Jesus Christ*- remember that the context of this whole section in Romans is that of becoming *in* Christ by baptism *into* Him. This is what associates us with the gift of eternal life.

Our natural man, the devil, is a personification of sin. He cannot be reformed; he can only be destroyed by death. "The wages of the sin: death" (Rom. 6:23 Diaglott) seems to suggest that Rom. 6:23 is not saying that we die for each specific sin we commit (you can only die for one sin anyway, because we only have one life); rather is it saying that the end of the natural man, "sin", the devil within us, is death. Therefore we must associate ourselves with the man Christ Jesus, both in baptism and in our way of life, so that the personification of Christ within us will be clothed with a glorious bodily form at his return.

## Notes

(1) Karl Barth, *Dogmatics In Outline* (London: S.C.M., 1972 ed.) p. 151.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 7

Or are you ignorant brothers (for I speak to men who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man for as long as he lives? 2 For the woman that has a husband is bound by law to the husband while he lives; but if the husband dies, she is discharged from the law of the husband. 3 So then if, while the husband lives, she be joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she is joined to another man. 4 Therefore my brothers, you also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; so that you should be joined to another, to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit to God. 5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were through the law, worked in our limbs to bring forth fruit to death. 6 But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter.

7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid! However, I had not known sin, except through the law. For I had not known coveting, except the law had said: You shall not covet. 8 But sin, grabbing an opportunity through the commandment, worked in me all manner of coveting. For apart from the law, sin is dead and powerless. 9 And I once was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. 10 And the commandment, which was intended to life, this I found to be to death. 11 For sin, grabbing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it- slew me.

12 Thus the law is holy and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. 13 Did then that which is good become death to me? God forbid! But sin was shown to be sin, by the way it worked death in me through that which is good; and thus through the commandment, sin became shown as indeed exceedingly sinful.

### ***Paul's struggle with sin***

14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold unto sin. 15 For why I do what I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I intend, but instead I do what I hate. 16 But if do what I would rather not do, then I agree that the law is good. 17 So now it is not I that do it, but the sin which dwells in me. 18 For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For the will to do good is present with me; but to actually do what is good is not present. 19 For the good which I would like to do I do not do, but the evil which I would not do, that I practice. 20 But if do what I would not wish to do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me.

21 So I find then a principle, that evil is present, although I wish to do

good. 22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; 23 but I see a different law in my limbs, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my limbs. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

7:1 *Are you ignorant-* continues the appeal to the baptized believers in Rome to not be ignorant of the implications of the things which they have believed and signed up for by baptism into Christ. See on Rom. 6:3.

*To them that know the Law-* could suggest that this section is addressed to those within the ecclesia in Rome who knew the Law, i.e. who were Jews. There were Gentiles in the church (Rom. 1:5-7,13-15) for whom that phrase wouldn't be appropriate. Chapter 7 could therefore be considered as an appeal to the Jewish subgroup within the Roman church. The language of '*becoming* dead to the law' in 7:4 would only be appropriate to those who had once lived under it, i.e. Jews.

*As long as he lives-* an allusion to common Rabbinical teaching that the only Jew exempted from keeping the Law is a dead Jew. Paul has been arguing in chapter 6 that we really did die in baptism. Therefore, we are dead- and the Jews themselves taught that a dead man didn't need to keep the Law.

Romans 6 (about sin)	Romans 7 (about the Law)
"Sin shall not have (anymore) dominion over you: for you are not under the Law" (:14)	"The Law has dominion over a man... as long as he lives" (:1)
"Dead indeed unto sin" (:11)	"She is loosed from the Law" (:2)
"Being then made free from sin" (:18)	"She is free from that Law" (:3)
"As those that are alive from the dead... you have your fruit unto holiness" (:13,22), having left sin.	"You should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (:4), having left the Law.
"Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin (as a result of sin having	"When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members... but now we are

dominion over you)” (:13,14)

“Therefore... we also should walk  
in newness of life” (:4)

delivered from the law” (:5,6)

“We should serve in newness of  
spirit, and not in the oldness of the  
letter” of the Law (:6)

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*7:2 If the husband be dead*- it’s tempting to interpret this as a reference to the death of Christ ending the Law. But that interpretation runs into problems in 7:3, for there the woman- the body of believers- is married to “another man”. See note on 7:4. Or it could be that Paul is seeking to make the simple point that the death of one person can free another person from a law / legal obligation; which is what happened in the death of Christ.

*7:3 Be married*- not the usual Greek word for marriage. *Ginomai* has a wide range of meaning; the idea may be of her sharing with, being with, another husband at the same time as she is married to her first husband. Rather than making any specific point about marriage (see on 7:4), Paul may be showing that it’s not possible for a woman to have two husbands at the same time- “man” as in “another man” is the same Greek word translated “husband”. This is being said in the context of seeking to persuade us how impossible it is for us to be in covenant relationship with the two spheres or positions [of law and grace, condemnation and justification] at one and the same time. This is both a comfort and a challenge to us.

*She shall be called*- the Greek is usually used about a Divine statement, i.e. she will be called *by God*.

*7:4 Wherefore...*- connects back to 7:1. The point being made in 7:2,3 is that death means a person is free from keeping the Law. Paul isn’t here teaching about the nature of marriage nor the conditions under which he considered remarriage could occur; his theme is that death frees us from the Law. And more precisely, it was by the death of another that the woman had been freed from a law- that law no longer applied to her, not because she had died, but because another had died. This is the significance of the death of Christ in freeing us from the Law.

*Dead to the law by the body of Christ*- is to be interpreted in the light of Col. 2:14, which also in a baptism context speaks of the Law being nailed to the cross. But it was the body of Christ which was nailed to the cross. If we are baptized into His body by baptism, nailed and crucified with Him, then the Law is dead to us too.

*Married to another*- the metaphor is mixed and almost impossible to consistently interpret- demonstrating if nothing else that logical consistency wasn't of paramount importance to the Bible writers nor to the God who inspired their words.

*Bring forth fruit unto God* - We are now freed from the Law, and are free to marry Christ and bring forth fruit, children, unto God. The fruit of the Spirit is what will last beyond the span of our lifetimes, just as the desire for us to have significance beyond the grave is part of the motivating factor in the desire to have children. The Greek for 'bring forth fruit' occurs four of its eight times in the New Testament in the parable of the sower. The good seed of the Gospel is to bring forth fruit in us. Yet this doesn't mean that Bible reading somehow brings forth fruit; it is our active intercourse and union with the Lord Jesus as a person which brings forth the fruit.

There is a frequent association of sin (the Devil) and the Mosaic Law throughout Romans (this is not to say that the law is itself sinful – it led to sin only due to human weakness). A clear example of this is found in Romans 6 talking about us dying to sin and living to righteousness, whilst Romans 7 speaks in the same language about the Law; thus “he that is dead is free from sin... you (are) *dead indeed unto sin*” (Rom. 6:7,11) cp. “You also are become *dead to the Law*” (Rom. 7:4). Other relevant examples are tabulated above on Rom. 7:1.

In the parable of the sower, the seed is surely Jesus (Jn. 12:24)- our eternal destiny is decided upon our response to Him and His teaching. We are bidden believe in or into Jesus. Belief involves the heart; it doesn't mean to merely give mental assent to some propositions. It must in the end involve believing in a person, with all the feelings and emotions this involves. We are married unto the Lord Jesus, in order that we might bring forth fruit unto God (Rom. 7:4). All spiritual fruit is therefore an offspring, an outcome, of a living, daily relationship with the Lord Jesus. This is how crucial it is to know Him.

7:5 *When we were in the flesh*- in the sphere of the flesh. The NIV “sinful nature” is a poor translation; no change of nature occurred when we were baptized. Rather did we cross over from one status to another, from flesh to Spirit. We still possess the same “mortal flesh” as we did before conversion.

*The emotions of sins*- the Greek word translated “emotions” is usually rendered “sufferings”. Sinful passions are their own suffering. The word is only used again in Romans 8:18, speaking of how “the *sufferings* [s.w. “emotions”] of this present time are not worthy to be

compared with the glory that shall be revealed". The sufferings of this life are, for us, the sufferings related to sin.

7:6 *We are delivered from the law*- "delivered" is the same Greek word translated "loosed" in 7:2: the woman is loosed from the law of her husband. The suggestion is that Paul's audience had been married to the Law and now remarried to Christ because the Law had as it were died. This confirms our suggestion [see on 7:8] that Romans 7 is aimed at Jews who had once been associated with the Law but were now in Christ. The death of the Law is made parallel with the death of Christ, in that He nailed it to the cross, in the sense that He embodied the Law by perfectly obeying and fulfilling it. The intention of the Law was that if fully obeyed, it would lead to a perfect man- the Lord Jesus. In this sense it was "ordained to life". In this sense "the Law" and the person of Christ can be legitimately presented in parallel as they are by Paul here.

*Spirit... letter*- are likewise contrasted in Rom. 2:29 and 2 Cor. 3:6.

It can be that we perceive even our service of God as the same old scene- the same round of daily Bible reading (although, why not try reading from another version or in another language?), the same cycle of church meetings and Bible schools. The same faces, the same issues. But our experience of grace means "that we should serve in *newness* of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6). We don't *have* to serve God in the sense that He grants us salvation by pure grace, not by works. But just because we don't *have* to do it, we do. This is the power of grace; it doesn't force us to monotonous service, but should be a wellspring of fresh motivation, to do perhaps the same things with an ever fresh spirit. The pure *wonder* of it all needs to be felt- that *for nothing but pure faith* the Lord will grant us eternal redemption for the sake of the Lord's death and resurrection. Which is why Rom. 6:4 says that because of this, and our appropriation of it in baptism, we therefore live in *newness* of life, a quality of life that is ever new. Through His death, a new and living way is opened (Heb. 10:20). We share the ever fresh life which the Lord lived from His resurrection. It does us good to try to imagine that scene- the Son of God, coming out of the grave at daybreak. He would have seen the lights of Jerusalem shimmering away in the distance, a few kms. away, as everyone woke up and went back to work, the first day after the long holiday. Getting the children ready, caring for the animals... it was back to the same old scene. But as they did so, the Son of God was rising to newness of life, standing alone in the fresh morning air, with a life that was ever new, with a joy and dynamism that was to know no end... His feelings are beyond us,



but all the same, distorted by our nature, by our spiritual dysfunction, into *our* lives *His* life breaks through.

7:7 *Covet*- Philo and other Jewish writings taught that covetousness was the origin of every sin. James 1:15 may allude to this idea by saying that covetousness [s.w.; AV "desire"] gives birth to sin.

Although sin exists amongst people who don't know God's law, we come to "know" sin by the Law. The Greek *ginosko* translated "know" has a wide range of meaning; the idea could be that Paul had not known sin in the sense of not being responsible to Divine judgment for it- until he knew the Law.

Clearly perception of sinfulness grew in Paul after his conversion. He considered himself blameless in keeping the law (Phil. 3:6); and yet chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:16). He realized that sin is to do with attitudes rather than committed or omitted actions. I'd paraphrase Paul's personal reminiscence in Rom. 7:7-10 like this: "As a youngster, I had no real idea of sin. I did what I wanted, thought whatever I liked. But then in my early teens, the concept of God's commandments hit me. The command not to covet really came home to me. I struggled through my teens and twenties with a mad desire for women forbidden to me (AV, conveniently archaic, has "all manner of concupiscence"). And slowly I found in an ongoing sense (Gk.), I grew to see, that the laws I had to keep were killing me, they would be my death in the end". Paul's progressive realization of the nature of sin is reflected in Romans 7:18,21,23. He speaks there of how he came to *know* that nothing good was in him; he *found* a law of sinful tendency at work in him; he came to *see* another law apart from God's law at work in his life. This process of knowing, finding and seeing his own sinfulness continued throughout his life. His way of escape from this moral and intellectual dilemma was through accepting the grace of the Lord Jesus at his conversion. In one of his earliest letters, Paul stresses that he felt like the least of the apostles, he honestly felt they were all better than he was (1 Cor. 15:9). However, he reminisces that in his earlier self-assurance, he had once considered himself as not inferior to "the very chiefest apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5). Some years later, he wrote to the Ephesians that he felt "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). This was no Uriah Heep, fawning humility. He really felt that he was the worst, the weakest, of all the thousands of believers scattered around the shores of the Mediterranean at that time. As he faced his death, he wrote to Timothy that he was "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), the worst sinner in the world, and that Christ's grace to him should therefore serve as an inspiration to every other believer, *in that* none

had sinned as grievously as he had done. It could well be that this is one of Paul's many allusions back to the Gospels- for surely he had in mid the way the publican smote upon his breast, asking God to be merciful "to me *the sinner*" (Lk. 18:13 RVmg.). "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" is rooted in the Lord's words that He came to call sinners and to seek and save the lost (Mt. 9:13; 18:11; 1 Tim. 1:15).

*7:8 Taking occasion-* a military term, referring a base camp. This continues the image of sin as a military leader (see on Rom. 6:23).

*Wrought in me-* in direct opposition to the common Jewish idea that the Law curbed sin. Indeed the Talmud in b. Qidd. 30b claimed that God said at Sinai: "I created the evil desire but I also created the Torah as its antidote; if you occupy yourselves with the Torah, you will not be delivered into its hand" (1). Paul is arguing from experience- both Israel's over the years and his own- that the reverse is true. The very existence of commandment tends to lead to that commandment being broken, as every parent soon learns (or re-learns) in the parenting process.

*All manner of concupiscence-* in gripping autobiography, Paul relates the innocent days when (as a child) he lived without the knowledge of law and therefore sin. But then, the concept of commandments registered with him; and this "wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (Rom. 7:8). "Concupiscence" is a conveniently archaic word for lust; and in the thinking and writing of Paul, the Greek *epithumia* is invariably used in a sexual context. See on 2 Cor. 12:7.

*Without the Law, sin was dead-* connects with the fact that through baptism into Christ, we are "dead indeed unto sin" (Rom. 6:11). Sin depends upon the law for strength; but the Law died with Jesus; He fulfilled it perfectly, He achieved the intention, for Him, the Law was indeed ordained to life (Rom. 7:10). If the law is really dead, then sin is powerless- for those who are in Christ, who fulfilled the Law. It's almost too good news; that the end of law means the end of the power of sin. This was all especially radical for Jewish ears. The 'death' of the Law is a strong concept- and it challenges not only Sabbath keepers, but all of us who think that surely obedience to Divine law must have some role to play in our salvation.

A case can be made, especially from Rom. 7:8-10, that the whole of Rom. 7:7-25 is Paul talking about Israel- we have shown in notes on Rom. 7:1 that Paul is speaking in this section specifically to Jews. In this case, Paul would have so identified himself with Israel that he

speaks in the first person, as if he personally ‘is’ them. He so loved his people that he saw all Israel’s history personified as it were in himself. Another approach to bear in mind is that it was quite possible in first century literature to use *ego*, the first person singular, as a literary or rhetorical device without any reference to the author’s personal situation. Thus it could be argued that the “And if I...” phrases in 1 Cor. 13:1-3 are an example of this, rather than Paul talking about himself (2).

The way in which Adam is to be seen as everyman is exemplified by how Paul speaks of his own spiritual life and failure in terms of Adam’s encounter with sin in the form of the serpent. Note the allusions to Adam’s fall in Rom. 7:8–11: “But sin [cp. The snake], seizing an opportunity in the commandment [singular – there was only one commandment in Eden], produced in me all kinds of covetousness [the essence of the temptation to eat the fruit]... I [as Adam] was once alive apart from the law [Adam was the only person to ever truly exist for a time without any law], but when the commandment [singular – to not eat the fruit] came, sin sprang to life and I died [as Adam], and the very commandment that [seemed to] promise[d] life [cp. The hope of eating of the tree of life] proved to be death to me. For sin [cp. the snake] seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me [s.w. 2 Cor. 11:3 about the serpent deceiving Eve] and through it killed me”. Note how Rom. 7:7–13, with all the Adam allusions, speaks in the past tense; but in the autobiographical section which follows in Rom. 7:14–25, Paul uses the present tense – as if to suggest that both Paul and by extension all of us live out the essence of Adam’s failure. He was everyman, and his salvation through the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus, can be everyman’s salvation if he so chooses. But in our context we note the pointed – and it is pointed – omission by Paul of any reference to a Satan figure.

7:9,10 appear to be alluding to God giving the Law to Israel. See on 7:8. In this case, Paul is speaking of himself in solidarity with Israel; for it could never be really said that a Jewish child was once without the Law. Indeed, first century Judaism emphasized this point- that Jewish children are under the Law (3). Throughout Romans 1-8, Paul is provocatively seeking to answer potential Jewish objections and strengthen the case of Christ’s Gospel against them. We have pointed out many examples of how he alludes to and deconstructs contemporary Jewish writings and opinions, sometimes at the cost of writing in a way which is apparently obtuse and difficult for Gentile readers to understand. And yet he now openly identifies himself with

his beloved people. This, surely, is our pattern in seeking to persuade others- to identify with them, rather than merely lecture them. It almost seems that in the same way as Adam is set up as everyman, so Paul wishes himself personally to be seen as every Jew. The way he elsewhere describes himself as a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” with impeccable Jewishness would confirm this (Phil. 3:5). See on Rom. 7:11.

*7:9 Alive without the Law-* Paul presumably refers to his earliest childhood or babyhood, when he wasn’t accountable to the Law.

*When the commandment came-* a reference to Paul’s Bar-Mitzvah, or his attaining the age of responsibility to God.

*Sin revived-* the only other time the word is used in Romans is in Rom. 14:9, where we read of the Lord’s resurrection as Him ‘reviving’. Clearly the personified ‘sin’ here is being set up as the very antithesis to the Lord Jesus.

*And I died-* a reference to being in the dock before God, tried and condemned as a sinner. So certain is that sentence of ultimate death that it was as if Paul had died. This interpretation is, I suggest, in keeping with the previous metaphors in Romans with regard to death. So instead of tending to life and blessing, and curbing sin, the Law instead accented sin and led to the condemnation of death.

*7:10 Unto life-* this presumably implies that perfect keeping of the law would have resulted in a person living the life of God, the kind of life which will be lived in the eternal life (which might also be implied in Lev. 18:5 cp. Rom. 10:5; Ps. 19:7-10; Ez. 20:11; Lk. 20:28). Death for such a person would therefore be necessary because of their relation with Adam, but would in another sense be unjust, in that they had not sinned. The perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus therefore required His resurrection. His eternal life wasn’t given to Him by grace, but He was entitled to it by obedience. He had no pre-existent eternal life; He was given eternal life because of His obedience. And His life is counted to us who are “in Him” by grace. See on Rom. 7:12.

*Found-* s.w. Rom. 7:18,21. Paul obviously examined his life and therefore can speak of what he had found / discovered about himself. This level of self-knowledge is surely our pattern... for the unexamined life isn’t life but mere existence.

*7:11 Deceived me... slew me-* alluding to Gen. 3:13: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate”. The allusion is to Adam and Eve in Eden. In chapter 5 (and see on Rom. 3:23), Paul has repeatedly taught that Adam is everyman. And now he includes himself in this, by applying the

language of the failure in Eden to himself. Likewise his finding the commandment ordained to life becoming the means of death (7:10,13) may reference Gen. 2:16,17. Yet whilst Adam is indeed everyman to Paul, Adam was perceived as Israel in much Rabbinic writing; and Paul saw himself as the personification and epitome of Israel (see on Rom. 7:9,10). The Greek translated “deceived” really means to seduce. How did sin seduce Paul through or by means of the Law of Moses? Surely in the sense that Paul fell for the temptation to justify himself by means of obedience to that Law. But because he didn’t keep the Law perfectly, he was therefore condemned to death, and in a sense, received the sentence- and in that sense sin by means of the Law “slew” Paul. The only other time the word for ‘deceived / seduced’ occurs in Romans is in the practical section, which in this case again alludes to this doctrinal section: “[the Judaizers] by fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple”, as the serpent deceived Eve (2 Cor. 11:3 s.w.). Just as Paul deceived himself, fell to the seductive idea that we can be justified by works of obedience to the Law, so the Judaizers were teaching the same. By so doing, they were sin personified- they were doing the work of “sin”- using the attraction of obedience to a legal code to seduce believers into a position where they were in fact going to be condemned to death- because under that sphere, there can be no justification, no declaring right, for those who have in even one sense infringed Divine law. It’s all a complicated yet powerful way of saying that we simply must not and cannot be in the sphere of relying upon works; which means we have to just accept the gift of salvation by grace, much as all within us cries out against it.

7:12 Paul hastens here to emphasize that the Law itself isn’t sinful or wrong in itself; it is indeed “holy, just and good” (a common Jewish description of their Law); but the knowledge of any legal code creates accountability for sin. Only in that is there the connection between the Law and sin. The Law was “ordained to life”, and I have suggested under 7:10 that this could mean that perfect obedience to the Law would have led to living the life of God, to moral perfection. The Law could not of itself give eternal life, in that it could not undo the mortality which was to pass upon all Adam’s descendants. The Law sought to inculcate a culture of kindness toward others and devotion to God. Significantly, the Lord Jesus is described in the same words- the Holy and Just One (Acts 3:14), as if He was such on account of the way His obedience to the Law developed such a character.

7:13 *Was then that which is good made death...?*- there was no actual change in the Law, in that it didn’t once offer life and then changed to

offer death. The Law was of itself holy, just and good- but it was used [by God?] to make sin “appear” as sin, to accent and highlight sin for what it is; and through man’s failure to keep the Law, sin was indeed shown to be an exceedingly great sinner (this is how the Greek behind “might become exceeding sinful” can be translated”). I find it significant that in Paul’s sustained personification of sin in these passages, he never once uses the terms “devil” or “satan”. He clearly saw the problem as human sin, which he personifies because one cannot have abstract “sin”, in that according to the Bible, sin is committed by and within the minds of personal beings, and in no other realm or dimension. It’s appropriate therefore that sin be personified.

We must doggedly hold on to the interconnections of thought within Paul’s argument in Romans. Chapters 1-5 convict all of sin, demonstrating that works can in no way save us. Chapter 6 then outlines how we can be saved; through association with Christ through baptism and a life “in Christ”, which will result in God seeing us in the exalted way He does. Chapter 7 basically goes on to say ‘But, of course, you’ll still sin, even though chapter 6 has explained how God doesn’t look at that side of you if you truly try to live “in Christ”’. Paul says many things about his life in Rom. 7 which seem to consciously connect with his description of life before baptism in Chapter 6 (e.g. 7:13 = 6:23; 7:14 = 6:17; 7:23 = 6:12,13; 7:24 = 6:6; 7:25 = 6:16,17). The reason for this is that after baptism, we have two people within us; the man of the flesh, who totally dominated our pre-baptismal life, is still within us; but (as Chapter 7 so graphically shows) he is now in mortal conflict with the man of the Spirit, with whom we identify our real selves. Chapter 8 then goes on to encourage us that despite this conflict, sin is dead in Christ, and if we are in Him, then this is really how God sees us. Therefore Rom. 8 stresses that our state of mind is so crucial; if we are led of the Spirit-man, then we are assured of salvation at that point in time. Rom. 9-11 then appeals specifically to Israel to accept the glorious truth of all this, and then Chapters 12-16 show the practical response we should all make. Recognizing the existence of the new and old men within him, Paul can speak in Rom. 7 as if he is two different people; “I myself serve the law of God”, but “my flesh” serves sin. Likewise David asked God not to hide His face from him, David *personally*, (Ps. 27:9; 69:17; 102:2; 143:7), but to hide His face from David’s *sins* (Ps. 51:9). And one wonders whether the way the records of the Lord’s temptations are written implies some similar recognition by the Spirit of the two ‘men’ within the Lord.

7:14 *I am carnal* - but “in Christ” he was not carnal (1 Cor. 3:1 s.w.). Again he has in mind states, positions, spheres. “Carnal” is literally ‘fleshly’. He points up the contrast between the flesh and Spirit. We cannot get into the ‘Spirit’ sphere by obeying the Law, even though the Law is “spiritual”, given by and of the Holy Spirit. The way to get into the sphere or status of the Spirit isn’t by obedience to a spiritual Law, because we keep failing to be obedient. We enter the sphere of the Spirit by baptism into Christ, “the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). He is “the Spirit” in that He embodies the Spirit of God- and therefore this is His title in Rom. 8:26. And Romans 8 will argue further that it is by our acceptance of our new status by grace, believing that we really are “in Christ” and justified by God’s grace, that the Spirit will work in our lives; so that we are indeed in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

*Sold under sin*- as if he was a slave to the “sin” master. This is how the word is used in Mt. 18:25 and many times in its LXX usage. Yet in chapter 6 he has exalted that in Christ, we died to the power of sin (6:2) and are not under sin (6:18,22). So what does Paul mean? He may mean that he *had been* sold under sin; maybe using a literary rhetorical device which is relevant to the unredeemed Jews rather than himself personally; maybe he is at this point totally identified with Israel and is personifying Israel under the Law without Christ; or is it that he is admitting his personal failure to walk the talk he has outlined so eloquently in chapter 6; or is he recognizing that although we have changed status and masters with our real self, the inward man who delights in God’s law (7:22), we are still human and that human side of us still sins? My own suggestion is that Paul is here quoting a phrase from Rabbinic writings, although it would seem that the source has been lost to us. This would be in keeping with his style throughout Romans 1-8. He would then be using the Jewish writings themselves to demonstrate the misery of the human position without Christ; and this would fit in with the way at times in Romans 7:7-25 he appears to be consciously personifying Israel.

7:15 *I allow not*- Gk. to know, recognize, perceive, approve. The word has a wide range of meaning, so interpretation cannot be too forcefully pressed here, but the idea may be that Paul is sharing his impression that the sinful things he does, he performs almost unawares, almost unconsciously, and he may be alluding to the image of slavery- mindless obedience, actions performed as automatisms. This is not to justify nor minimize human sin, but to rather make the point that it is performed within the context of being a slave to sin; and by status, we have changed masters. Note that Paul concludes this section by saying

that in his mind he serves as a slave the law of God, whilst with his flesh he is still the slave of sin (Rom. 7:25). Yet all the same, we are ultimately “in Christ”, with no condemnation possible, because we serve Him (Rom. 8:1).

*What I would-* “would” means ‘to will’, and occurs frequently in this section (Rom. 7:15,16,18,19,20,21). Paul is saying that what he wills to do, he simply lacks the will to do; he laments the weakness of his will in being obedient. The interlude about the election of Israel in Romans 9-11 practically exemplifies the theology of Romans 1-8; and this theme of Paul’s weak will is commented upon in Rom. 9:16: “So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy”. It’s not that salvation is only for he or she who somehow finds within themselves some steel will against sin. It is not of him that wills, but of God’s grace. Were it a question of steel will, it would be a matter of works; but due to our change of status, it isn’t a matter of steel, but rather of God’s grace and our acceptance of it. In fact, Rom. 9:18 goes further, and states that it’s not a question of *our* will but of God’s will. Some He has mercy upon, as He wills; others He hardens, as He wills. And we in Christ are for sure those whom He has ‘willed’ to have mercy upon. And as exemplified by the choice of unspiritual Jacob over nice guy, man of the world Esau- that Divine will in election simply doesn’t depend upon works. Otherwise it wouldn’t be grace; indeed, the whole concept of predestination and Divine calling regardless of works is raised by Paul to demonstrate the principle- that it’s not by works or lack of them that we are acceptable to God.

*What I hate, that I do-* this contrasts with the triumphant passages in Romans 6 which speak of our change of status from being under sin to being under Christ. That contrast is surely intentional. We could say that Paul is now in chapter 7 talking of our practical experience, of how things are on the ground. They’re bad; sin is strong and we are weak. But he emphasizes this in such a graphic manner in order to point up the wonder of the fact that all this notwithstanding, we are by *status* justified, declared right before God, have left the sphere of the flesh and are in that of the Spirit. The reality of present failure makes our changed status all the more wonderful. Perhaps another comfort from all this is that if we truly *hate* sin (cp. Rev. 2:6) rather than love every moment of it, then we are somehow on the right track and are in fact like Paul within the sphere of the Spirit in our hearts.

7:15-25 Paul’s autobiographical passage in Romans 7, where he describes his sinfulness and the results of it, is actually expressed in terms of Adam’s fall in Eden. So many phrases which he uses are lifted



out of the LXX of Genesis 3. The evident examples are: "I would never have known what it is to covet, if the Law had not said, You must not covet [cp. Eve coveting the fruit]... when the command came... sin [cp. the serpent] beguiled me... to kill me... sin resulted in death for me by making use of this good thing... who will rescue me now from the body of death?". Adam is presented to us as 'every man'; and so Paul applies this to himself, and yet through the allusion to 'every man' in Adam, he sets himself up also as our example.

7:16 *I consent*- Gk. 'to speak together with'. The very fact we struggle against sin, we have a will not to disobey the Law, is in fact speaking together with the Law, agreeing that it is good. Whilst in the primary context Paul is writing to Jewish Christians with the Mosaic Law in view, the principles are the same for any Divine law at any time. The comfort is that if we feel we 'would not' sin / break the Law but end up doing so, then actually, we are speaking in unison with the Law, we are not actually in disagreement with it.

7:17 *No more I that do it*- the same Greek as in Rom. 6:9, where "no more" means 'not any longer', as in Rom. 7:20. For those in Christ, like Paul, our sins are no longer done by us but are considered as committed by the old man, the Adam, the status, sphere and person we are no longer identified with. We are to understand our sins as somehow separate from the real me, the 'me' with whom we finally identify. 'It's no longer me, but sin who sins' seems to be the idea... as if Paul is dissociating himself from himself; and that's a position which surely all true believers can identify with.

*Sin that dwells within me*- an allusion to the Jewish concept of the *yetser ha ra*, the inclination to evil. The Rabbis taught that this can be curbed by the Law. But Paul is saying that the Law actually empowers this inclination, and the victory is through God's gracious counting of us as right in Christ. See on 7:19 *the good that I would*- a reference to the supposed good inclination in man, the *yetser ha tob*. The very idea of sin dwelling within me suggests that "sin" and "me" are different categories, even if they are related.

7:18 *For I know*- the idea could be 'I have come to realize'. Do we analyze our own sinfulness as deeply as Paul did? See on Rom. 7:7.

*To will is present*- surely an allusion to the disciples in Gethsemane, with willing spirits but weak flesh (Mt. 26:41). They were in the wrong, their weakness in stark contrast to the watchful, sweating Lord Jesus as He struggled against sin. And Paul invites us to feel the same. The Greek for "present" occurs only here and in Rom. 7:21. It means

literally ‘to lie near’ and could have in mind the language of Gen. 4:7, where sinful Cain was encouraged that a sin offering lay near him, outside the door, ready for him to confess his sin over and sacrifice.

*But how to perform-* Paul confessed to an inability to translate his will into action. Yet in 7:25 he will soon rejoice that he had found the answer in Christ, which we have consistently interpreted as a reference to our being “in Christ” by status in Him. The Greek for “perform” occurs later in Romans, where Paul glories of the many things “which Christ has *wrought* [s.w. ‘perform’] by me” (Rom. 15:18). For that not to be a statement of pride nor trust in the works which Paul has so often exposed as valueless before God, we must understand Paul as totally committed to the idea of Christ working or performing through him. He has finally found “how to perform” the works he had so wished to- by believing totally in his “in Christ” status, feeling the extent to which he was now at one with Christ, and thereby sensing the extent to which Christ was working His works through him, the works he would love to have performed whilst under the Law, but found himself simply not strong willed enough to perform.

*That which is good-* in the context must surely refer to the Jewish Law which was the “good [thing]” (Rom. 7:12,13,16). There was no “good thing” within Paul’s flesh, no natural tendency to fulfill that Law; and so he found no way to totally obey that Law as he had so desperately wanted to in his youth.

When Paul laments that he cannot find “how to perform that which is good”, he is speaking about the Law of Moses. For the context of Romans 7 repeatedly defines the Mosaic Law as that which is “holy, just and good... the law is [the] good [thing]”, the law of God in which Paul delighted (Rom. 7:12,16,22). The “no good thing” which dwelt within Paul was therefore a description of his inability to keep the Mosaic Law, rather than any reference to human nature- for the “good thing” has just been defined as the Mosaic Law (Rom. 7:18). But all this was to create the lead in to the realization that now in Christ, there is now no condemnation.

7:19 *the good that I would-* a reference to the supposed good inclination in man, the *yetser ha tob*, which the Rabbis said was strengthened by the Law (see on 7:17). Paul seems to be saying that this good inclination is a myth, or if it exists, it has little cash value in the battle against temptation. The way of escape is through God’s grace in Christ. W.D. Davies demonstrates beyond cavil that Paul in this section of Romans is constantly alluding to and critiquing the Rabbinic ideas of the *yetser ha tob* and the *yetser ha ra* (4). “The good” must

connect with the same word being used in Rom. 7:12,13 to describe the Law of Moses as “good”. Paul so wished to be perfectly obedient to the Law- but found it impossible.

*The evil... I do-* the same words are to be found in Paul’s warning that Divine condemnation, “tribulation and anguish”, awaits every man who ‘does evil’ (Rom. 2:9). Paul was so aware that his sin did in fact merit the term “evil”, and condemnation before God’s judgment. The more we appreciate the extent and implications of our sin, the deeper will be our sense of relief and glory at the wonderful way we are ‘declared right’ by God.

*7:20 No more I that do it-* see on Rom. 7:17. He sees fit to repeat the teaching of v. 17, so important is this- that we are not to identify our real self with our sinful side.

*7:21 Find then a law-* “law” often in the context refers to the Law of Moses. Paul may mean ‘I find then with respect to the Law’. He could conceivably be using “law” merely in the sense of “principle”.

*Evil is present-* the same word has just been used in 7:18, where the desire to do good is likewise “present” or lying next to Paul. The impression is of the two desires, to do good and to do evil, are lying next to Paul; he must decide which one to take up, but he almost automatically seems to pick up the “evil”.

*7:22 I delight in the Law-* hating the evil, delighting in God’s law, yet finding oneself doing exactly what we don’t wish to do... all this is exactly the experience of believers in Christ today. We really are in Paul’s position, and have every reason to share in his later positivism- for it is based on the fact that we don’t do the works we need to, yet we are saved by grace.

Paul had an amazing commitment to unity in the brotherhood. One could say that it was this which led him to his death, and certainly to political self-destruction in the politics of the early church. For his desire to unite Jewish and Gentile Christians was humanly speaking a loser- the Jewish converts simply would not give up their allegiance to the synagogue, with all the political and economic benefits this involved; nor would they really accept Gentiles. And Gentiles were never going to accept Jewish observances, indeed Paul knew this to be spiritually wrong. I submit that the whole epistle to the Romans is an exposition of the Gospel which has Jewish-Gentile unity as its underlying burden. This becomes apparent in the opening chapters. This to me is the key to understanding Romans 7. There Paul opens his heart and speaks frankly of his own inner conflicts. He says that he

delights in [keeping] the law of God, yet he has a principle within him which seeks to make him captive to the law of sin (Rom. 7:22). I suggest he may be referring to his love, as an ex-Pharisee, of the Law of Moses, but this leads him to desire to keep the whole Law, including the *halakah* [the ordinances of the Rabbis]. He speaks of his struggle to both ignore the Jewish laws, and yet keep them. He concludes that he cannot keep them adequately, and so he surrenders to justification by faith in Christ alone. I read Paul as saying that he initially accepted justification in Christ, but then after his conversion he went through a period of seeking to keep the Law, and "sin revived". And so he strongly concluded that he must throw himself solely upon Christ's grace.

1 Pet. 3:4 speaks of the spiritual man within us as "the hidden man of the heart... a meek and quiet spirit". This confirms that this "man" is the personification of a spirit, or attitude of mind. Thus our real spiritual person is "hidden". The world therefore cannot understand us, or be truly close to the believer who has the spiritual man utmost in their heart. The Gospel itself is a "mystery" ('something hidden'), yet this hidden mystery is the dynamic power in our "hidden man" of the Spirit. All that is hidden will be openly revealed in the Kingdom (Mt. 10:26). The inward man of Rom. 7:22 is what is so important; yet the LXX in Lev. 3:14-16 uses the same word to describe the fat surrounding the intestines, which God appeared to so value in the sacrifices. It was not that He wanted that fat in itself; but rather He saw that fat as representing a man's essential spirituality, that which is developed close to the heart, unseen by others, but revealed after death.

7:23 *I see*- Gk. to behold, view. Paul is speaking as it were from outside of himself, or more accurately, from outside of the hopeless sinner whose behaviour and weakness he so laments. This device serves to indicate the degree to which he chose to be identified not with that 'person', but with the man Christ Jesus to whom in his mind, in his deepest heart, he belonged and ultimately identified with. Looking at our position this way, it becomes apparent that what I would term 'ultimate identity' is the ultimate question of our whole existence- who in our hearts do we identify with, wish to be with, love rather than hate? Christ, or sin? We see in this whole passage the very clear answer in the case of Paul. I can say at this time, it's clear in my own case. And I know it is in that of so many believers.

*Another law...* - Paul speaks of a battle between two laws. A battle is usually unto death, but in this case, Paul is taken captive, and captives taken in battle [if they were spared] always entered slavery. So Paul

implies he is in slavery- at least, in the flesh. The ‘law’ is perhaps that of 7:21- the principle that whenever he would do good, there is another reasoning which appears next to [“present” AV] that desire to do good. And this principle invariably wins. But we are tempted to see an association between that law / principle and the Law of Moses. For the very same word is used, and if Paul simply meant ‘principle’, he could have used such a word in Greek.

*Warring*- a related word is used in James 4:1, about lusts warring in our bodies. The existence of such warring isn’t wrong in itself, it’s part of being human; it’s which side wins the battle which counts; and even moreso, which side we in our deepest hearts identify ourselves with.

7:24 *Wretched*- the Greek word is elsewhere used about the feelings of the rejected before God’s judgment (James 5:1; Rev. 3:17), likewise in the LXX (Is. 47:11; Mic. 2:4; Joel 1:15; Zeph. 1:15). Paul feels as if he is even now standing before the judgment seat of God, and is condemned- yet suddenly he rejoices that he is in fact amazingly saved by Christ. This is the very theme of the earlier sections of Romans- that we are suddenly declared right, justified, as we stand condemned in the dock before God. This lends weight to the suggestion that Romans 7 is indeed autobiographical of Paul, declaring the process of his own conversion, yet telling the story, as it were, in terms which present him as personifying every Jew under the Law.

*Deliver me* – the same word occurs in Romans in the excursus about Israel in Rom. 11:26- where Christ is “the deliverer” who comes to deliver hopelessly sinful Israel, whom Paul embodies in this section in Romans 7.

*Body of this death*- yet Paul has argued at the beginning of Romans 7 and elsewhere that just as the body of the Lord Jesus died on the cross, so every believer has already died with Christ. And yet clearly Paul still feels trapped within the body, with all the temptations which are part of being human.

Romans 7 and 8 are so opposed to each on surface level reading. At the end of Romans 7, Paul is lamenting ‘Oh wretched man that I am!’. At the end of Romans 8, he is rejoicing in the utter certainty of salvation, apparently lost for words [even under inspiration] to gasp out the wonder of it all. So huge is the difference of spirit that expositor after expositor has concluded that this must all be read biographically- as if in Romans 7 Paul is speaking of his life before conversion, and goes on in Romans 8 to describe his life afterwards. But Greek tenses [unlike Hebrew ones] are precise. The tenses in Romans 7 make that a very

strained reading. Paul is saying that he *right now* feels utterly frustrated by his constant doing that which he doesn't want to do, his apparent inability to do good, and his wretchedness. I submit that the two chapters dovetail together. It was only through the appreciation of personal sin which we meet in Romans 7 that Paul could reason through to the paean of praise and confidence which he reaches by the end of Romans 8.

The Bible has so much to say about death, depicting us as having a "body of death" (Rom. 7:24). And yet humanity generally doesn't want to seriously consider death. Yet death is the moment of final truth, which makes all men and women ultimately equal, destroying all the categories into which we place people during our or their lives. If we regularly read and accept the Bible's message, death, with all its intensity and revelation of truth and the ultimate nature of human issues, is something which is constantly before us, something we realistically face and know, not only in sickness or at funerals. And the realness, the intensity, the truth... which comes from this will be apparent in our lives.

*7:25 Through Jesus Christ*- in the sense that we can become "in Christ" and all that is true of Him becomes true of us.

*With the mind I myself*- the classic statement of personal identity, the climax of the whole exclamation of relief, the answer to all the spiritual frustration and anguish of this chapter. He himself, his real self. Identified with being a slave of God; but his flesh continued to serve sin.

## Notes

(1) See E.E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979) Vol. 2 pp. 425-428.

(2) Other possible examples from the NT and from throughout contemporary writings are given in R.H. Gundry, *The Old is Better: New Testament Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) pp. 229,230 and J. Lambrecht, *The Wretched "I" and Its Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) pp. 73-91.

(3) See S. Safrai and M. Stern, eds., *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) Vol. 2 p. 771.

(4) W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1948) pp. 19-27.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 8

There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for a sin offering, condemned sin, in the flesh. 4 That the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

5 For they that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind of the flesh is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. 8 And they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. 10 And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies- through His Spirit that dwells in you.

12 So then brothers, we are debtors- but not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. 13 For if you live after the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you shall live.

### ***The wonder of being God's children***

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are children of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit, that we are children of God. 17 And if children, then heirs- heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. If so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him.

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation awaits the revealing of the God's children. 20 For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as children and the

redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope were we saved; but hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, then we with patience wait for it.

### ***Amazing encouragement***

26 And in like manner the Spirit also helps our infirmity. For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 And he that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose- all things work together for good. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many other children. 30 And whom He foreordained, those He also called, and whom He called, these He also justified, and who He justified, these He also glorified.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He that spared not His own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not also with him freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's chosen ones? It is God that justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus that died, yes rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God; who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Even as it is written: For your sake we are killed all the day long, we were deemed sheep for the slaughter. 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

8:1 *No condemnation* – referring back to the idea of Rom.

5:16,18, which are the only other places in the NT where the word occurs. We have been declared right before God's judgment; there is now no condemnation any more. Even though in Rom. 7:24 Paul has been saying he feels the wretchedness of condemnation as a sinner (see note there).

*Who walk not after the flesh*- too easily the wonderful promise that there is no condemnation for those in Christ can become muted by this apparent rider, that we must walk after the Spirit



and not after the flesh. Yet Paul has been lamenting throughout the preceding chapter 7 that he walks after the flesh. His argument throughout the letter so far has been that although we continue committing sin, by status we are in Christ. The condemnation, the adverse verdict, has been removed. We are justified, declared righteous. And this is because we are located “in Christ”. Paul is surely aware of the apparent contradictions and tensions within his argument- so he’s surely foreseeing our objection, that we still walk after the flesh. And he states that we who are in Christ Jesus do not walk after the flesh. It’s not a condition- as if to say ‘There is no condemnation for us who are in Christ *if* we walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh’. For this would make salvation contingent upon our ‘walking’, our works- and his whole argument has been that salvation is by grace and not works. Those who walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh is therefore a description of, rather than an exhortation to, those who are in Christ. His Spirituality is counted to them. By status we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, and this is confirmed by the Spirit dwelling in us (Rom. 8:9). Rom. 7:5 likewise speaks of our being “in the flesh” as something in the past, our previous status. Another possibility is that “walk after” here describes not to a total way of life, but rather a following after, an inclination towards, rather than a final arriving at the destination. And that again fits in so precisely with our position as believers in Christ today- as Paul has been saying in Romans 7, we incline after, follow after, dearly aspire to, the things of the Spirit; even if we don’t attain them as we would wish.

8:2 Paul starts to speak here in chapter 8 about the Spirit. He has explained that we are declared right by God, even as we stand in the dock condemned; he has said that we must believe this, and that faith in this rather than any works is what makes it true for us. He has then started to explore the mechanics of how it all works out- that we believe “into Christ” by baptism into Him, whereby we are counted as Him; and so we have changed spheres, positions, identities, from “sin” to “Christ”. He has observed that this doesn’t mean that we don’t sin, and he laments

the power of sin within him, always eager to point out the Law has strengthened sin rather than helped us overcome it, and that therefore grace is the all important basis of our salvation. He characterizes the two positions or spheres in various terms, and in chapter 7 he starts speaking of them as “flesh” and “spirit”. He observes that there is in himself a struggle between the two, but his real self definitely identifies himself with the Spirit rather than the flesh. Being in the Spirit is the same as being “in Christ”, and “the Spirit” is a title of Christ in Rom. 8:26,27. Romans 8 now proceeds to explore the function of “the Spirit” in more depth.

*The spirit of life in Christ has set me free-* The spirit of life in Christ sets us free from sin (Rom. 8:2); but Gal. 5:1 simply says that “Christ” has set us free [the same Greek phrase] from sin. The Man Christ Jesus is His “spirit of life”; the man and His way of life were in perfect congruence. They always were; for in Him the word was made flesh. Rom. 6:18,22 explain simply that we are “made free from sin” by baptism into Christ. Here we are given more detail; we were made free from the principle of sin and death, the law which Paul had observed at work within him in chapter 7, that our sinful desires are stronger than our spiritual intentions, and therefore “in the flesh” we are condemned to death. Our slavery to this principle has been overcome by “the spirit of life in Christ”. Rom. 6:18,22 says that we were simply freed from sin by becoming “in Christ” by baptism and belief into Him. Rom. 8:2 is saying that this operates, is effectual, by “the spirit of life in Christ”. This could mean that the spirit of life which was in the Lord Jesus Christ as a person- the perfection of spirit or character which was His, which was like God- is counted to us by our status “in Christ”. It could also, or alternatively, mean that this status we have is as it were mechanically made effective by the work of the Spirit, which sanctifies us before God. It’s not so much that the Spirit enters our hearts and makes us righteous, for in chapter 7 Paul has been lamenting how we still sin and are in one sense still enslaved to sin. Rather it could be that “the Spirit” works in our lives to make us sanctified before God, rather than in the realities of daily life. The

“sanctification of the Spirit” which we read of elsewhere in the NT (e.g. 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 10:29; 1 Pet. 1:2) would therefore refer to *how* God counts us as righteous, as in Christ, with a spirit like His. In this sense Christ is made unto us sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). It’s by the working of the Spirit. We can on one hand simply accept that God counts us as righteous, as Christ, because we are “in Him”. But probing further as to how, mechanically as it were, this is the case- the answer is, ‘Through the work of the Spirit sanctifying us, making us holy in His sight’.

Paul’s writings are packed with allusions to the Jewish ideas about the “ages” ending in the Messianic Kingdom and the destruction of Satan. Paul was correcting their interpretations – by saying that the “ages” had ended in Christ’s death, and the things the Jewish writings claimed for the future Messianic Kingdom were in fact already possible for those in Christ. Thus when 1 Enoch 5:7,8 speaks of ‘freedom from sin’ coming then, Paul applies that phrase to the experience of the Christian believer *now* (Rom. 6:18–22; 8:2).

*Law of sin*- as lamented in Rom. 7:23,25. The law of sin there refers to the principle of sin within us that keeps on beating us, winning the struggle against our weak spirituality. But *even this* has been overcome because of the status we have “in Christ” and by the work of the Spirit this involves.

The New Testament develops the theme of ‘living in the spirit’. We can often understand ‘spirit’ in the NT to mean the dominant desire, the way of life, the essential intention, the ambience of a man’s life. The idea of life in the Spirit is often placed in opposition to that of living under a legal code. We are asked to live a way of life, rather than mere obedience to a certain number of specific propositions. And yet whilst we are free from legal codes, we aren’t free to do as we like. We are under “the law of the spirit” (Rom. 8:2), “the law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). The law of Christ isn’t only His specific teaching, but the person of the real, historical Jesus. This is the standard of appeal which should

mould the spirit of our lives. We must live “according to Christ” (Rom. 15:5; Col. 2:8), and the character of Jesus is the basis of Paul’s appeals to us to live a spiritual life (Rom. 15:3,7,8; 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:2,25; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Thess. 1:6).

8:3 *The law*- i.e. obedience to the Law.

*Could not do*- s.w. in Romans only at Rom. 15:1: “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the *weak*”, those who ‘can not’. The connections between the doctrinal and practical sections of Romans are so frequent that this link too is surely intended. The “weak” Paul had in mind were therefore the Jewish believers who still trusted in the Law; patience with the legalistic, acceptance of those whose faith in Christ’s grace is weak, bearing with the ungracious, is really the test of our Christ-likeness. For He does this with us so very often.

*Weak*- s.w. Mt. 25:36 “sick”. Our attitude to the weak / spiritually sick is our attitude to Christ personally- because amazingly, they especially represent Him. “Weak through the flesh” is surely alluding to the essence of what Paul has been writing in Romans 7- that our flesh is so weak. The implication is that our weakness is related to an attitude that keeping the Law would lead to justification. And this in turn confirms my suggestion that Romans 7 is a section specifically written to first century Jewish converts who had once been under the Law of Moses. The same word occurs in Rom. 5:6- when we were “without strength”, weak, Christ died for us. Our weakness, our spiritual weakness, is therefore no barrier to God’s love and Christ’s devotion to us. Amazing, but true.

*God sending*- the connection with Phil. 2:7,8 suggests this ‘sending’ was specifically in the crucifixion. Likewise God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die on the cross (Jn. 3:16).

*In the likeness of sinful flesh* seems to be parallel with “in the

likeness of men” and “in fashion as a man” (Phil. 2:7,8). “Sinful flesh” refers therefore to ‘sinful humanity’, rather than implying that we are sinful and offensive to God simply by reason of being human beings. The spotless lamb of God had full human nature, He looked like a man because He was a man, and therefore He looked just like the same men who regularly perform sinful actions. Whatever we say about ‘human nature’, we say about the Lord Jesus- for He bore our ‘nature’ and yet was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. It’s actually very hard to Biblically define what we mean by ‘human nature’; it’s not some intrinsic piece of ‘sin’ that somehow is metaphysically ingrained into us, upon which the wrath of God abides. So I prefer to speak rather of ‘the human condition’ to avoid this impression. In passing, let’s get it clear that Rom. 8:3 doesn’t speak of something called ‘sin-in-the-flesh’. Students as varied as John Carter and Harry Whittaker [in *The Very Devil*] have faithfully pointed out that this is neither grammatically nor contextually correct. The Lord Jesus condemned sin; and where and how did He condemn it? In “the flesh”, in that He too lived within the nexus of pressures and influences of this sinful world. He appeared just another man, so much so that when He stood up and indirectly proclaimed Himself Messiah, those who knew Him were amazed; because He had appeared so very ordinary. Truly He was in “the likeness of sinful flesh”, yet without personal sin. See on 2 Cor. 7:1.

It could even be argued from Rom. 8:3 (“in the likeness of sinful flesh”) that the Lord Jesus appeared to be a normal sinful human being, although He was not a sinner (see on Jn. 2:5,10). This would explain the amazement of the townspeople who knew Him, when He indirectly declared Himself to be Messiah. Grammatically, “it is not the noun “flesh” but the adjective “sinful” that demands the addition of “likeness”” (1). He appeared as a sinner, without being one. Of course we can conveniently misunderstand this, to justify our involvement with sinful things and appearing just like the surrounding world, in order to convert them. But all the same, it was exactly because the Lord Jesus appeared so normal, so closely part of sinful humanity, that He

was and is our Saviour and compelling example. I have elsewhere argued that Rom. 8:3 is alluding specifically to the Lord's death, where He was treated as a sinner, strung up upon a tree like all those cursed by sinful behaviour, although in His case He was innocent. Rom. 8:3 speaks of the Lord Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" in order to achieve our redemption. The Greek word translated "likeness" elsewhere is used to express identity and correspondence- not mere external 'appearance' (consider its usage in Rom. 1:23; 5:14; 6:5; Phil. 2:7). Scholars, even Trinitarian ones, are generally in agreement on this point. Two examples, both from Trinitarian writers commenting upon this word in Rom. 8:3: "Paul consistently used "likeness" to denote appropriate correspondence or congruity. Thus Paul affirmed Jesus' radical conformity to and solidarity with our sinful flesh (*sarx*)" (2). "The sense of the word (likeness) in Rom. 8:3 by no means marks a distinction or a difference between Christ and sinful flesh. If Christ comes *en homoioimati* of sinful flesh, he comes as the full expression of that sinful flesh. He manifests it for what it is" (3). The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self... in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'.

"For what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin" (Rom. 8:3) – cp. Gal. 4:4–5, "Made of a woman, made under the Law (cp. "sinful flesh") to redeem them that were under the Law". The drive of Paul's argument in its primary context was that having been baptized, they should leave the Law, as that was connected with the sin from which baptism saved them – it introduced them to salvation by pure grace in Jesus. The Hebrew writer had the connection in mind when he wrote of "*carnal* ordinances" (Heb. 9:10; 7:16). To be

justified by the Law was to be “made perfect by the flesh”, so close is the connection between Law and flesh (Gal. 3:2,3). “We (who have left the Law)... have no confidence in the flesh (i.e. the Law). Though I might also have confidence in the flesh...” (Phil. 3:3–4), and then Paul goes on to list all the things which gave him high standing in the eyes of the Law and the Jewish system. These things he associates with “the flesh”. See on Col. 2:14.

*Likeness-* s.w. Rom. 6:5, we are planted together in the “likeness” of Christ’s death. His being made like us is to be responded to by our being made like Him, starting in a baptism into His likeness.

*Sinful flesh-* these two words have just been used together by Paul in Rom. 7:25 [also Rom. 7:5], in lamenting how in our ‘flesh’ status, we seem to so easily serve sin as our master. The Lord Jesus had our nature, the same struggle against a tendency to unspirituality, egged on by living in a social environment where sin is everywhere and ever present.

*For sin-* The Greek *peri hamartias* “is the Septuagint’s technical term for the sin offering” (4). It should be better rendered as “for a sin offering”.

*Condemned sin-* as a judicial action, the passing of sentence, s.w. Mk. 14:64 “they all condemned Him to be worthy of death”. This is how and why there is no condemnation for those in Christ (8:1). In the earlier chapters of Romans, Paul likened us as standing ashamed and condemned in the dock before the judgment seat of God; but then declared right, justified, by grace. And if we believe in that grace, it shall be true for us at the final judgment. But here the image changes slightly- for it is “sin”, not just ourselves personally, which was condemned on the cross by the fact that Christ died there as a human who never yielded to sin. Remember that someone or something can be “condemned” by someone else in the sense that that person shows the condemned party to be in the wrong in comparison with their

behavior, e.g. Noah condemning the world around him (Mt. 12:41,42; Lk. 11:31,32; Heb. 11:7). It was perhaps in this sense that the Lord condemned sin by His sinlessness and obedience unto death. The context of this phrase “condemned sin” in 8:3 is to be found in 8:1- there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ”, and Paul is explaining why- because not only have they been declared right, but as “in Christ”, all that is true of Him becomes true of us. He was not only uncondemned by sin, but He went onto the offensive- and condemned sin.

8:4 *Righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us*- Paul explores how in fact we have been declared righteous, justified in a legal sense. All that is true of Christ becomes true of those who are in Him. He perfectly fulfilled the Law, and I have suggested earlier that this in a sense entitled Him not to have to die. No longer was Adam literally everyman; there was one Man, the Lord Jesus, who did not sin like Adam did. The righteousness or “requirement” of the Law was ultimately love, love unto death, even the death of the cross. Both “love” and Christ’s death on the cross are elsewhere stated to be the fulfillment of the Law (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14). We who have broken the Law are counted as in Christ, and therefore we are counted as having fulfilled it to its’ ultimate term- love unto the death of the cross. The passive verb form of “might be fulfilled” suggests that we are reading here about something being done for or in us; the fact it is fulfilled “in us” rather than *by* us confirms that we aren’t reading here some exhortation to do the righteousness of the Law, but rather a statement about what has been fulfilled in us- by the representative death of Christ for us and our identification with it. Thus we are changed by status from being condemned lawbreakers to being counted as having ultimately fulfilled it. In a clearly parallel passage in terms of thought, 2 Cor. 5:21 says that God made Christ “sin” for us “that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”. The Law was fulfilled in the perfect character of the Lord Jesus and finally in His death. Baptism into death means that we are counted as having died with Him- and therefore we too fulfilled the Law to perfection.



*Who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit*- cannot mean, given the context, that our righteous 'walk' fulfills the Law- for we stand condemned by it. Rather is this again a reference to the two spheres of life- flesh and Spirit, Adam or Christ, out of Christ or in Christ, condemned or justified. We are to "walk", to practically live, in the sphere of the Spirit. I am inclined to interpret the idea of "walk after" as meaning 'to be occupied with', as the Greek is indeed elsewhere translated in the AV. If our orientation is around the Spirit and not the flesh, then we are demonstrating that indeed our change of status has been for real. Because we are "in Christ", the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us insofar as it was fulfilled in Christ and has been counted to us.

Paul states that because of the Lord's death "as an offering for sin", thereby the 'commandment ["requirement" RVmg.] of the Law is fulfilled in us' (Rom. 8:3,4). But in the practical part of that same letter, Paul defines the requirement / commandment of the Law to be one thing- simply "love" (Rom. 13:10). Love as God understands it is that we keep or fulfill His commandments (1 Jn. 5:3). What, then, is the connection? How could the Lord's death on the cross lead to the fulfillment *in us* of the Law's commandment / requirement of love? Quite simply, because it is now impossible for a man to be passive before the cross, and not to be inspired by Him there towards a life of genuine love. Paul isn't simply making some mechanistic, theological statement- that the cross fulfilled the Law, because it fulfilled all the types etc. It fulfilled the Law in that the Law intended to teach *love*; and the cross and dying of the Lord Jesus is now the means by which we can powerfully be inspired to the life of love which fulfils the entire Law.

**8:5** *Do mind*- this is the crucial definition of whether we are in the Spirit status or that of the flesh. The definition of 'minding' the things of God or of the flesh is therefore important. The Lord Jesus rebuked Peter for 'savouring' the things of men rather than

God (Mt. 16:23); Phil. 4:10 translates the word as ‘to care for’, Col. 3:2 as ‘affection’. Being spiritually minded isn’t therefore a question of not sinning- for Romans 7 has made it clear enough that believers do continue sinning after baptism and yet can still confidently rejoice in hope of the final redemption. It’s rather a question of wanting spiritual things, loving them, savouring them, having them in our heart, just as Paul could say that in his heart he loved and rejoiced in God’s law, although in practice he continued sinning. This I believe is where most believers stand. So loving, admiring and delighting in spiritual things, but feeling bad because their flesh still so easily gives way to temptation. That failure isn’t excusable, for Paul began Romans by pointing out that the perfect, sinless Lord Jesus all the same lived in our flesh.

*After the Spirit-* as in “after the flesh”, the Greek word *kata* is used. This really means in this kind of context ‘to be concerned with, to be around, in the sphere of’. This is exactly the idea we have been trying to express- we are to be concerned with, have in our hearts, the Spirit rather than the flesh.

8:6 *Carnally minded... spiritually minded-* the definition of ‘walking after’ the flesh or spirit spoken of in 8:5. If we are in the sphere or realm of the Spirit, of Christ, then we will think about those things in our hearts. If we have believed, known to be true and felt the truth of those things which Paul has so far explained- we will have these things uttermost in our hearts, be enveloped by them. I take what Paul writes here to be a description of our status, rather than a command to be spiritually minded rather than carnally minded. For by status we are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit (8:9). This fits the context of the argument so far in Romans- which has always been about a change of status, and our living in ever growing appreciation of that status change that has occurred. The mind of the flesh “is death”, here and now; whereas the mind or *phronema* of the Spirit “is life” here and now. *Phronema* means the inclination, the purpose, the intention. It doesn’t mean that we will consciously think of spiritual things

all the time (not that this is any bad aim or desire). Rather our intentions, inclinations, should be to the Spirit and not the flesh.

**8:7** *The mind of the flesh*- this is defined in 8:5,6 as the mindset which inclines to flesh rather than Spirit; that reads novels rather than God's word; than thinks of money and cars and holidays and restaurants and fine clothes and expensive jewellery... rather than the things of God's people and His service. That willingly thinks about banality rather than the things of Jesus and the Spirit. That doesn't really think much about the things of God's Kingdom but rather the things of this world. This kind of mindset is hatred towards God. So says Paul. This is the mindset of those who are in the flesh status, who mind the things of the flesh (8:5). Note that Paul is here talking mindsets, not total sin nor total righteousness. This kind of mindset of the flesh can never be "subject" to God's law, His principles, His Spirit. It is self-centered rather than God centered. Yet the same Greek word for "subject to" occurs in Rom. 8:20, where we read that we have been subjected beneath the state of vanity which there is in this fallen world, and yet we in Christ have been subjected to this in hope. The point is, whatever sense we have of being 'subjected under' the things of the flesh and indeed this present world, this is involuntary. It's not what our real self would wish for. We have subjected ourselves under the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:3), become servants to that wonderful concept that His righteousness has been imputed to us. We find ourselves therefore in subjection to this righteousness and yet involuntarily living in subjection to the sinful state we find ourselves in.

**8:8** *In the flesh*- not so much in status, for we are all still "in the flesh" in the sense Paul describes in Romans 7. Paul is surely speaking of being fleshly minded, having a mindset which is of the flesh not the Spirit. This simply cannot please God.

*Please God*- the Greek definitely suggests that God Himself has emotions which can be excited. And this is an amazing idea- that

we here on earth, so very far from Him in so many ways, can touch the heart of God. Notice that the other references to ‘pleasing’ in Romans are to pleasing our neighbour (Rom. 15:1-3)- our attitude to God, and His pleasure in us, is related to our attitude to our neighbour and our pleasure in him or her.

8:9- see on Rom. 6:12.

*Not in the flesh but in the Spirit*- by status, by position. Note from 1 Cor. 3:16 that believers, even those who have the gifts of the Spirit, can still be “carnal” or fleshly in some aspects of their actual behaviour. Hence Paul must be talking here in positional terms.

*If so be*- could imply that Paul doubted whether some of his readership really were in the sphere of the Spirit. However, this would contradict the entire tone of this section and the argument so far- that all those baptized into Christ must be considered by us as unquestioningly “in the Spirit”. It would also jar with the otherwise positive tone Paul takes towards the Roman believers, speaking in 8:12 as if “we”, he and his readership, are all in the same status. “If so be” can be read quite comfortably as meaning ‘Seeing that’. This is how it is translated in 2 Thess. 1:6, “*Seeing that it is...*”. We can be assured that our status is “in the Spirit” rather than “in the flesh” by the fact that the Spirit dwells in us. If we don’t have the Spirit of Christ, then we are not “his”- and the Greek for “his” would I suggest better be translated “Him”, or even “He himself”. We are reckoned as Christ Himself because we are in Him by faith and baptism into Him. His Spirit is counted as our spirit, in the sense that His character, His personality, His totally obedient mind, are counted as ours. So we aren’t so much as reading that we had better ensure we are spiritually minded and have the mind of Christ; we are being assured that we can be sure we are “in Him” because we are counted as Him, His perfect mind and character, His spirit, are counted as ours. Hence Paul can write with such confidence that “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). We do not in fact think like Him, at least, our mind and spirit are not of themselves

like His were and are. But His mind / spirit is counted to us, because of our status in Him. And “the spirit of God” is paralleled with the spirit of Christ in the sense that Jesus was perfectly like God in the way He thought, felt and acted. And this is counted to us. We thereby have also the mind of God counted to us- the family spirit is counted to us as we have been adopted into that family of Father and Son (Rom. 8:15).

8:10 *Christ in you*- parallel with the spirit of God and the spirit of Christ (8:9) and “the spirit” later here in 8:10. Paul is now exploring what it means to be “in Christ”. It’s not just that we opted into Him through baptism; He is in us as much as we are in Him. “Christ in you” is an idea Paul elsewhere uses (2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27). The exposition of the Spirit which follows in Romans 8 is further insight into what it means to be “in Christ”, to be declared right by God, and to believe it insofar as believe into Christ by baptism. The words “in” and “Christ” have been frequently used already by Paul in describing us as “in Christ”. But there’s a mutuality in our position- we are in Him, but He is also in us. Whilst we need exhortation to live as “in Him”, Paul here isn’t exhorting us- rather is he rejoicing in our status, and seeking to persuade us of it. “If Christ be in you” shouldn’t be read as something uncertain- the idea is clearly “Seeing that Christ is in you”.

*The body is dead because of sin*- because we are in Christ and He is in us, our body is counted as His dead body. The idea has been common throughout Romans 6- because of our baptism into Him, we are “dead to sin” (6:2), “he that is dead is freed from sin” (6:7), “truly we are dead to sin” (6:11). It’s as if the day of judgment has come already for us- it was the day of our baptism into Christ. We have sinned and so were counted as if we had already died. How did we die? In that we symbolically connected ourselves with the death of Christ. In going under the water, therefore, we not only align ourselves with Christ’s death; we also state our recognition that we have sinned, and that sin brings death. Through doing so, we are enabled to rise again with

Christ- as if our final, literal justification in resurrection to eternal life will just as surely take place. In this sense, it can be said that baptism is related to salvation. Not that dipping in water as a ritual can itself save anyone, but because that association with the death and resurrection of Christ really does save- involving as it does a willing recognition of our sinfulness and just condemnation, and only thereby resulting in a part in the resurrection. All this indicates the importance of repentance before baptism; it outlaws any kind of infant baptism, and likewise any attempt to claim a consciously performed baptism into the Lord's death and resurrection, after repentance, is in any sense invalid and requires rebaptism by other hands.

*But the Spirit is life because of righteousness-* surely uses "righteousness" in the way it has been earlier used in the letter, with reference to the righteousness of Christ which is reckoned to all those in Him. It is from the Spirit that we shall reap life eternal when Christ returns (Gal. 6:8), but through association with the death and resurrection of Jesus in baptism, His righteousness really is counted to us. But as His spirit is counted to us, so in a sense it does actually become our spirit- as Paul has been saying in Romans 7, although in the flesh we sadly do sin, yet in our spirit, which is the spirit / mind of Christ, we delight in God's law.

We feel at home with Paul's matchless confession of his innate tendency to sin, so strong that "When I would do good, evil is present with me... how to perform that which is good I find not". Yet it is no accident that this dire recognition of the seriousness of our spiritual position in Romans 7 should lead straight on to Romans 8, one of the most positive passages in all Scripture. It is instructive to trace the parallels between these two chapters. For example, Paul's lament "I am carnal" (Rom. 7:14) is matched by "To be carnally minded is death" (8:6). His argument in Romans 6-8 runs along these lines: 'We are all carnally minded by nature; but Christ had our nature, yet achieved perfection. If we are in Christ by baptism and by His spirit/disposition being seen in us,

then God will count us as Christ, and will therefore raise up our bodies to immortality, as His was'. The fact we still retain the old nature in this life means that we will be aware of the tremendous conflict within us between flesh and spirit. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin" (Rom. 8:10). Paul obviously didn't mean that we would not have the power of sin active in our natures any more- the preceding chapter 7 makes that crystal clear. The obvious connection with Rom. 6:11 explains the point: "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin". The apostle recognized his own innate sinfulness and spiritual failures which were solely his own fault ("When I would do good...", Rom. 7), yet he was confident of salvation (Rom. 8). This was because he intensely believed in Christ's perfection, and that he was in Christ, and that at baptism he had received the condemnation of death which he deserved. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). There is the certainty of salvation.

8:11 *But if the Spirit*- seeing Paul is talking about positions, status, and rejoicing so positively about it all, it seems appropriate to chose the equally valid translation "Seeing that the Spirit...".

*The Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus dwells in you*- as often in the NT, the Spirit of God is paralleled with the spirit of Christ which was mentioned in v. 10 and previously. Interpretation becomes difficult largely because of the very wide range of meaning in the word "spirit". I don't mean so much that the same word has many different meanings, but rather that within that one word is a range of meaning. God's "spirit" refers to both His power and His mind, His thinking, His attitude, His character, personality. All He does is a reflection of His mind, just as human actions, the use of human 'power', is a reflection of the spirit within the person. Hence to think thoughts is judged by God as if the action has been done. The spirit of God and the spirit of Jesus are therefore parallel- because Jesus was at one with the Father. Yet as His prayer of John 17 demonstrates, that

unity of spirit between the Father and Son is now shared with us who are in Him. It was the Spirit of God which raised up Jesus from the dead, and that same spirit / disposition of mind is counted to us, and is indeed in us- Paul has said this in Romans 7, where he rejoices that despite his lamentable practical failures, in his heart, in his spirit, in his deepest person, he is without doubt with God and delights in His ways. Paul, and all true believers, have a heart [or, a spirit] for God- despite the failures of the flesh. So the spirit / personality of Jesus- which is and was the very essence of righteousness- is counted to us, as if we are Him; and yet in our deepest selves, as believers, His spirit *is* in fact *our* spirit. Because this spirit within us is the spirit of Jesus and God, we can be assured of a resurrection like Christ's- for the spirit of God raised up Christ from the dead, and we have identified with that hope through baptism into His death and resurrection. The spirit / mind of God is also His power; not naked power, like electricity, but a power which is at one with His mind, which acts in congruence with what He really thinks and is, without posturing or hypocrisy. It's therefore the case that since that spirit dwells in us- because we are in Christ and His spirit is counted as ours, and because we have a spirit / heart for God as outlined in Romans 7- therefore we shall surely be raised from the dead as Christ was. This is what Paul has said in Romans 6; but he explains here on what basis that happens. It happens on the basis of the spirit of God, or the spirit of Christ, which is counted as ours, and which is in fact actually ours within our deepest heart, the weakness of the flesh notwithstanding. The spirit of God is not just a mental attitude, it is also His power, and it was that same spirit which raised the dead body of Christ from the dead. And it shall do the same for us at the last day. The Spirit of Jesus, His disposition, His mindset, His way of thinking and being, is paralleled with His words and His person. They both 'quicken' or give eternal life, right now. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth [present tense]... the words that I speak unto you, they are [right now] spirit, and they are life... thou hast [right now] the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:63,68). Yet at the last day, God will quicken the dead and physically give them eternal life (Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:22,36). But this will be because in this life we had the 'Spirit' of the eternal life in us: "He that raised up Christ from the dead



shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [on account of] his spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11). The NT describes our final redemption as our "soul" and "spirit" being "saved"; our innermost being, our essential spiritual personality, who we *really* are in spiritual terms, will as it were be immortalized (1 Pet. 1:9; 1 Cor. 5:5). This means that our spiritual development in this life is directly proportional to the type of person we will be *for evermore*. If, for example, we develop a generous spirit now, this is "a good foundation" for our future spiritual experience (1 Tim. 6:19). This is a stupendous conception, and the ultimate fillip to getting serious about our very personal spiritual development. Our mortal bodies will be changed to immortal, Spirit nature bodies according to the Spirit which *now* dwells in us (Rom. 8:11 Gk.). The attitude which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46).

*Quicken your mortal bodies*- Paul’s expectation and assumption seems to have been that Christ would return in the lifetime of his readership, and that instead of dying and being resurrected, they would come before the judgment seat of Christ in their current mortal bodies, and then be changed. He hints at the same when he speaks of how mortality shall be swallowed up of life, and our present “vile body” shall be “clothed upon” but not, he hopes, dissolved in death (2 Cor. 5:4). How could Paul, writing under inspiration, make an apparent mistake like this? I suggest that he was writing *as if* the return of Christ was imminent, because that is how we should live; part of the Christian life is to live as if we expect His return imminently. Another option is that perhaps the second coming was indeed scheduled for the first century; but the failure of various human preconditions resulted in this not happening and it being deferred [perhaps issues like the repentance of Israel, the spiritual maturity and unity of the body of Christ, or their spreading of the Gospel and making converts from all nations].

8:12 *We are debtors*- note the positive tone Paul takes towards

the Roman believers, speaking here as if “we”, he and his readership, are all in the same status. Given the wonderful certainty of our salvation, we can’t be passive. The Greek translated “debtor” is usually translated ‘sinner’ in the sense of having a debt to God. Paul has said that his debt is to preach the Gospel to others [1:14 s.w.]. The fact we truly shall be raised to eternal life, have been counted right, as having the spirit of Christ Himself- cannot be merely passively accepted. We have a debt to live appropriately, and one aspect of that debt is to share the great hope with others. And in our personal lives we likewise cannot be passive to this great salvation. We must make some realistic effort to bring our life spirit into conformity with the spirit and works of the Father and Son. We cannot go on living for the flesh, just indulging ourselves.

*Not to the flesh, to live after the flesh* - This verse is really saying the same as Rom. 6:1- we cannot continue living fleshly lives on the basis that we shall be saved by grace anyway. This is a repeated concern of Paul’s- that his bold, positive message that we who are in Christ shall be saved by grace regardless of our works could so easily be misunderstood, leading to passivity and sin rather than the vigorous, joyful practical response which is really the only thing we can do if we really ‘get it’. The practical section of Romans uses the same word in saying that Gentile believers have a debt to help their poorer Jewish brethren (Rom. 15:27). Be it in preaching the Gospel or in practical care for others, we are paying back our debt to God through paying to others- as if the debt to Him has been transmuted, and we are to pay Him back through giving to others, both spiritually and practically.

8:13 *For if you live after the flesh, you shall die*- Paul happens to use this same phrase ‘to live after’ in describing his life ‘living after’ Judaism (Acts 26:5). As he has implied elsewhere in his argument, to live according to law, hoping for justification by works, is in fact not spiritual but fleshly. Again, the point is made

that legalism doesn't defend the law and curb sin, rather does it encourage unrighteousness and spiritual failure.

*you shall die*- note the change from the otherwise positive spirit earlier in this section ["we"]. As all believers have the "mortal body" of which Paul spoke in Rom. 6:12, it would seem that Paul is here threatening some kind of spiritual death; or, 'you shall die eternally at the coming day of judgment'. He starts to balance out all his positive talk with this warning that we cannot just continue in sin, unaffected by the change in status and justification we have received by grace. Perhaps Paul here is alluding to the serpent's lie: "You shall *not* surely die", and putting the record straight again.

*Mortify*- see on Rom. 8:14 *led by the Spirit*.

*You shall live*- yet the whole tenor of Paul's argument has been that it is not by steel willed battle against the flesh that we shall attain the life eternal. He laments in Romans 7 that we simply don't have that strength of ourselves, but rather are we saved by our status in Christ. We "shall live" only because of the life of Christ being given to us at our resurrection, because we are in Him. The deeds of the body are therefore 'mortified' not in our own strength- as Paul makes clear in Romans 7, we simply lack the power to do this- but on account of the Spirit. We are made dead to the law by our participation in the body of Christ (Rom. 7:4 s.w.). Here in 8:13 we learn that we mortify the flesh by "the Spirit". The spirit of Christ in this sense *is* Christ personally. Hence "the spirit" is used as a title of Christ later in this chapter (Rom. 8:26,27). "The spirit" isn't defined, i.e. as to whose spirit it is- because the spirit / mind of God is that of Christ and is that which is to be found in the believers. So I suggest the idea is that we shall live "if", or 'because of the fact that', the Spirit- the Lord Jesus- puts to death the deeds of the flesh in that we are in Him, and in Him was no sin, no deed of the flesh. His death on the cross is counted as our death- several usages of the Greek

verb “mortify” used here are actually speaking of the death of Christ on the cross (Mt. 26:59; 27:1; Mk. 14:55; 1 Pet. 3:18). And significantly, the word occurs a little later in Romans 8- “For [Christ’s] sake we are killed [‘mortified’] all day long, we are counted [s.w. imputed, reckoned as] the sheep for the slaughter [i.e. Christ on the cross]” (Rom. 8:36). So we are counted all day long as mortified, put to death, with Christ; for we are counted, 24/7, as being in Him, counted as the sacrificial lamb. His dead body becomes ours. It is in this way that through / on account of our being in “the Spirit”, “the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18), we have the deeds of our flesh put to death. As Romans 7 labours, this doesn’t mean that we will not commit the deeds of the flesh. But we have identified ourselves with Christ, with His body, and in this sense those deeds of the flesh are rendered meaningless.

8:14 *Led by the Spirit*- the Greek may not imply mere guidance but something stronger- the Spirit leading us where *it* chooses. The same word is used about animals being led. It is the Spirit which mortifies the deeds of the body (8:13) more than us doing so. We want to know, of course, whether we really are “in Christ”, whether we really have His spirit. The phrase “led by the spirit” is found only in Lk. 4:1, where the Lord Jesus was led by the spirit into the place of testing. Perhaps the connection is intentional. As Jesus the son of God, the prototypical child of God, was led by God, into testing, to the cross, and to resurrection- so it will operate in our lives and lead us, who are also the sons of God. The overall impression may be of allowing the Spirit, which operates in the lives of all in the sphere of the Spirit, to lead us and do things in our lives. We who have a heart for God have surely sensed God leading us, over and above our own will; and as Paul goes on to develop, this may involve elements of predestination and Divine calling which were over and above our own will to control. Sensing these things, this Divine leading, is an encouragement that truly we are God’s sons, as Jesus was supremely- for the spirit of the Father works in us His children. In the context, Paul has been arguing that for those in Christ, His death becomes theirs. The Greek word for “led” is repeatedly used about the ‘leading’ of God’s Son to His death

(Lk. 22:54; 23:1,32; Jn. 18:28; 19:4,13), “led as a sheep to the slaughter” (Acts 8:32). We have commented under 8:13 that 8:36 speaks of all those in Christ as likewise being “the sheep for the slaughter”. Every detail of the Lord’s death and sufferings becomes ours. “Led by” could just as well be rendered “led *in* the Spirit”, with reference to Christ as “the Lord the Spirit”. This would suggest that our status “in Christ” means that we are going to be treated like Him- led as He was, to testing, to the death of the cross, to resurrection. Paul many times during his trials was “led”, just as Christ was. This same Greek word occurs many times in the Acts record regarding Paul. He wrote here from personal experience.

*They are the sons of God*- not in the sense that the Spirit makes us sons of God, but that the children of God are characterized (among other things) by the Spirit leading them. “Sons of God” would’ve been understood by the Jewish readers and hearers as a phrase referring specifically to Israel (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 3:19; 31:9; Hos. 11:1); Paul’s emphasis is that now all in Christ and within the sphere of the Spirit are now God’s children, regardless of their ethnicity. But above all, all who are “in” the Son of God (Rom. 8:3), in Christ by baptism, are likewise therefore “sons of God”. The spirit that was in Christ must therefore be in us, or rather, be allowed to work in and with us. This phrase is preparing the way for the appeal to be conformed to the image of God’s Son which is coming up in Rom. 8:29.

Jesus was led of the Spirit at His time of testing (Lk. 4:1); and Paul uses just those words of us in our present experience of trial (Rom. 8:14). His victory in the wilderness therefore becomes a living inspiration for us, who are tempted as He was (Heb. 4:15,16).

8:15 *Not received the spirit of bondage*- “bondage” is associated with the Mosaic law in Gal. 4:24; 5:1; Heb. 2:15.

*To fear*- the contrast is between bondage [slavery] and adoption;

and therefore between fear and ‘crying Abba, Father’. The fear Paul has in view must surely be the fear of not being good enough, the phobia about rejection at the day of final judgment. This fear of rejection is associated with bondage to a legalistic system, of obeying rules in order to seek acceptance with God. Such a system is itself bondage, slavery. And the image of slavery has been used by Paul with reference to slavery to sin. Once again, he associates sin with legalism and attempted justification through obedience to the Law- for this is where that mindset leads in practice. The implication seems to be that although Paul’s readership had received the “spirit of adoption”, yet they still feared. Paul is seeking to convince them of their high status in Christ, and to perceive, to the point of it affecting their feelings [e.g. of fear or otherwise], that really- it’s all true. The good news that seems too good to believe is really as good as it sounds.

*Spirit of adoption*- the fact we have become sons of God [see on Rom. 8:14] by means of being in Christ, the Son of God, means that God will send His Spirit into our hearts, to make us more natural members of the family we have now joined by status. Gal. 4:6 thus speaks of how “God sent forth the spirit of *His* Son into *our* hearts”. Thus *our* hearts have to become transformed to be like that of *His* Son. This can be so successful that we even call to God as Abba, daddy. Note that the Spirit and our hearts are connected- this Spirit works on the human heart, miraculous gifts aren’t in view here. The NRSV renders: “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’, it is that very spirit bearing witness” (8:15,16). The feeling we have toward God as Abba is proof enough that He has sent His Son into our hearts. The obvious question is begged: Is that how we feel? God wants us to feel like that towards Him. We can and should be able to! This is one of the most bottom line questions for us as believers; not what theological position we have on this or that point, not what precise statement of faith we follow with what clarifications or caveats, addendums or ammendments; not whom we fellowship; not how smartly we have lived our lives even. But whether we really feel to God as Abba, Father. If it takes a woman three divorces or another man

10 years in prison or another a lifetime's battle with alcohol- this is the end point to which we are being brought. This is the "witness" that we really are God's dear children, if we feel like that toward Him, if we can call Him "Abba, daddy" just as the Son of God did in prayer. If we do, then "the Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God" (8:16). And Gal. 4:6 becomes so true of us: "God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father". Roman law legislated that the adopted child took over the full identity of the adoptive father; what was true of that family became legally true of the adopted person- a concept which was apparently foreign to Greek and Jewish culture, but the concept would've been appreciated specifically by the Romans. The idea is similar to the concept of righteousness being "imputed".

There is only one Spirit- the spirit of God, of Christ, of the true believer, of adoption- is all the same. The statement here that those in Christ received "the spirit of adoption" must therefore surely be paralleled with the frequent comments elsewhere in the NT that the believer has "received" [s.w.] the Spirit at conversion, just as the apostles "received the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 7:39; 14:17; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 2:33,38; 8:15,17; 10:47; 19:2; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 3:2,14). Whilst the apostles had their receipt of this gift confirmed by miraculous displays of Holy Spirit gifts which have now been withdrawn, the assumption is clear from that list of verses that after "the hearing of faith" and baptism into Christ, the Spirit was "received" (Gal. 3:2 etc.). Baptism was seen as bringing about the receipt of this gift (Acts 19:2; Gal. 3:14 cp. 27-29). When we became "in Christ" at baptism, we were counted as Christ. Just as He called God "Abba", so we can. The way Jesus addressed God in this way is wonderful, indeed beautiful. It almost seems inappropriate that this personal relationship of the Son to the Father, calling Him "Daddy", should be observed by us even; and yet now Paul says that it has been applied to *us*, seeing we are truly "in Him". We have received such an extraordinarily realistic "spirit of adoption" that really, as Jesus was God's Son, so are we. Through the work of the Spirit, even the virgin conception and

birth of the Lord Jesus is now no barrier between Him and us; for in essence, our spiritual rebirth and adoption as God's children is such that we too are God's very own children just as He was. Our excuse for not fully following Him is that 'Well He was a bit different to us, you know... virgin birth and all that'. If we grasp what Paul is saying, this now has far less validity. For the same Spirit which caused the virgin conception is what has birthed each believer, and through the spirit of adoption we too can feel towards God as "Abba", just as His Son did. The unity between Father and Son has now been realized between the Father and all His children; the prayer of John 17 to this effect has now been answered. At least, potentially, and if we will accept the answer. And yet, it has to be said that we do not feel to God as Jesus did. The Lord Jesus could not have written the bitter lament about spiritual failure which we find in Romans 7. As we have often concluded, the answer is that we are asked to believe that really we are indeed "in Christ", and seen, counted and felt towards by God as if we really are His beloved Son.

*Whereby we cry*- "whereby" can be rendered "in whom". Because we are in Christ, we have His spirit, God's Spirit. We "cry"- in allusion to how in Gethsemane, the Son of God "cried" to God as "Abba". He there really can be our pattern. The Greek for "cry" really means to scream or croak- the idea is very much of a baby or young child crying out to "daddy".

*Abba* - In prayer, we address God as Abba, Father- precisely because "God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). I take these passages to refer to the way successful prayer involves the spirit / will of a believer becoming united with the Spirit / will of the Father and Son. Gal. 4:6 says that it is the Spirit of Jesus who prays to God "Abba, Father"; but Rom. 8:15 says that it is us of course who pray to God "Abba, Father". We are not slaves but God's very own dear children. The spirit / will / mind of the Lord Jesus is therefore seen as the mind of the believer. And thus Paul could write that it was no longer he who lived, but Christ who



lived in him (Gal. 2:20). The whole of the new creation groans or sighs in our spirit; and Jesus, the Lord the Spirit groans in prayer for us too. God's Spirit is to dwell in us, right in the core of our hearts (Rom. 8:11; Gal. 4:6). "We cry Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), as our Lord did then (Mk. 14:36). We can, we really can, it is possible, to enter into our Lord's intensity then. Paul saw his beloved brother Epaphroditus as "heavy" in spirit (Phil. 2:26), using a word only used elsewhere about Christ in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33). Luke and other early brethren seemed to have had the Gethsemane record in mind in their sufferings, as we can also do (Acts 21:14 = Mk. 14:36). I have wondered, and it's no more than me wondering, whether it could be that Rom. 10:9,13; Acts 22:16 and the other references to calling on the name of the Lord at baptism imply that the candidate for baptism made the statement "Jesus is Lord!" after their confession of faith or just before their immersion, and then they shouted the word "Abba! Father!" as they came out of the water, indicating their adoption as a child of God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Biblical prayers rarely request things; if we ask according to God's will, we will receive (1 Jn. 5:14); and yet if God's word dwells in us, we will ask what we will, and receive it (Jn. 15:7). Thus if our will is purely God's will, we will receive answers to every prayer. That our will can be God's will is another way of saying that our spirit can be His Spirit. This is why several passages speak of how God's Spirit witnesses with our spirit (Rom. 8:15,16,26; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). It's why the early church sensed that not only were they witnessing to things, but the Holy Spirit of God also (Acts 5:32; 15:28). His Spirit becomes our spirit. Who we are as persons is effectively our prayer and plea to God. This conception of prayer explains why often weeping, crying, waiting, meditating etc. are spoken of as "prayer", although there was no specific verbalizing of requests (Ps. 5:1,2; 6:8; 18:1,2,3,6; 40:1; 42:8; 64:1 Heb.; 65:1,2; 66:17-20; Zech. 8:22). The association between prayer and weeping is especially common: 1 Sam. 1:10; Ps. 39:12; 55:1,2; Jn. 11:41,42; Heb. 5:7, especially in the Lord's life and the Messianic Psalms. "The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer" (Ps. 6:8,9) crystallizes the point. *Desire* is also seen as effectively praying for something (Rom.

10:1; Col. 1:9; 2 Cor. 9:14). Weeping, desiring, waiting, meditating etc. are all acts of the mind, or 'spirit' in Biblical terminology. There is therefore a big association between our spirit or state of mind, and prayer. The spirit (disposition) of Christ which we have received leads us to *pray* "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). "Praying in the holy spirit" (Jude 20) is to be seen in this context. Prayer is part of the *atmosphere* of spiritual life, not something hived off and separate- it is an expression of our spirit. Thus there are verses which speak of many daily prayers as being just one prayer (Ps. 86:3,6; 88:1,2); prayer is a way / spirit of life, not something specific which occurs for a matter of minutes each day. The commands to "pray without ceasing" simply can't be literally obeyed (1 Thess. 5:17). "Watch and pray *always*" in the last days likewise connects prayer with *watchfulness*, which is an attitude of mind rather than something done on specific occasions. This is not to say that prayer *in no sense* refers to formal, specific prayer. Evidently it does, but it is only a verbal crystallization of our general spirit of life.

8:16 *The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God*- see on 8:15 *spirit of adoption*. The Greek can be read as "The Spirit himself bears witness *to* our spirit, that we are the children of God". But the idea seems to be of a joint witness- our spirit is in fact *the* Spirit, and bear witness [in a legal sense] that we are really God's children. As we have observed several times, there is only essentially one Spirit- God's, Christ's, the believer's, are all the same spirit. Paul uses the same idea in Rom. 9:1, where he asserts that his conscience [and he may as well have said his spirit, for the idea of essential, inner personality is the same] bears joint witness [s.w. 8:16] with the Holy Spirit. God's personality, His Spirit, is congruent with the person who has a spirit / heart for God. This meeting of minds between God and the believer is what confirms to us that we really are His children. Being His beloved children isn't dependent upon our moral perfection- we must keep remembering that we are reading the words here in their context

as the extension of what Paul was saying throughout Romans 7:15-25.

Paul here reverts to the image he used in chapter 3, of us for a moment acting as the judge (3:4), deciding whether God's promises and claims about us are in fact true, or lies. Our own spirit and God's Spirit bear legal witness- to whom? To us as the judges. They both testify, that really we are the children of God. Not only is the spirit of Christ, His righteousness, counted as ours; but God's spirit / mind really is ours in experienced reality. Thus we are joint witnesses in the box together, and v. 17 will develop this theme- joint heirs, joint sufferers, and thus jointly glorified together. All because of our connection with Him, we are counted as Him. Note how Paul seems to be aware of the huge doubt there would be about these things in the hearts of the baptized believers to whom he writes; and such doubt is with us today. Hence the enormous relevance and power of what he writes, and the need he felt to appeal to detailed intellectual argument in order to prove his point time and again. Imputed righteousness is given us on the basis of our faith. This means that insofar as we can believe all this is true, so it will be. In this sense "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom 8:16). We are His dear children (Eph. 5:1), the pride and joy of Almighty God, counted as wonderful and righteous by Him. Personal Bible reading and reflection are so important; for there the individual finds the essence of God's will and strives to make it his or her very own. This is how we can come to understand Rom. 8:16, which says that in prayer, God's Spirit bears witness with our spirit that is within us. Thus even although "we do not know how to pray for as we ought, the Spirit himself intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit of the Father and Son speaks in us when we pray (Rom. 8:15), if our will / spirit is theirs. To put this in more technical but I think very telling terms: "The subject-object scheme of 'talking to somebody' is transcended; He who speaks through us is he who is spoken to". It's perhaps the thought behind Mt. 10:20: "It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you". This is why Paul can thank God

that he finds himself praying constantly for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3)- because he recognizes that not only can we influence God by our prayers, but He influences us in what we pray for.

8:17 *Children... joint heirs*- very much the ideas of Gal. 3:27-29, where Paul taught that baptism makes us the children of God and joint-heirs with Christ of what God promised Abraham. For all that is true of Christ becomes true of us. If He was the seed of Abraham, then so are we; and what was promised to the seed personally thus becomes true for us all. Again, Paul is seeking to explain to the Romans the significance of their baptisms. The law taught that the firstborn was to have a double portion above his brethren. But we are made joint-heirs with Christ, the firstborn (Rom. 8:17). This is yet another paradox of grace. Likewise in the parable of the prodigal son, both sons receive equal inheritance, rather than the elder son getting more.

*If so be that we suffer with Him*- again, “if so be” is a misleading translation. This phrase is common in this part of Romans. It can indeed mean “if so be”, but the idea is equally of “seeing that...”, “although...”- and this is how it is commonly translated elsewhere. The good news Paul is teaching is almost unbelievable, too good news- and it was for the translators too, who for the most part have chosen to give a ‘conditional’ feel to the message by inserting all these “if...” statements as if they are conditions. But this impression contradicts the colossal positivism which Paul has, positivism expressed in the face of his own admission of failure in Romans 7; and such translation also fails to give due weight to the idea of positions, status “in Christ” as opposed to in Adam, which is so fundamental to Paul’s argument. Because we are in Christ, we are joint heirs with Him; and seeing that we suffer with Him, we shall be also glorified with Him in that we will share in His resurrection. This is the very teaching of Romans 6:3-5; baptism into His death and resurrection means that for sure we will be resurrected as He was. Note that we co-suffer with Christ right now- which suggests that He also in some sense suffers in this life, the essence of His cross

is lived out in His experience even now, as He suffers with our sufferings, and we with His. The only other time this Greek word for co-suffering occurs is in 1 Cor. 12:26- we co-suffer with the sufferings of other members of the body of Christ. This is one way in which “we suffer with Him”- to have an empathetic mind. Whilst we must strive for this, Paul’s point is more that we do suffer with Him, because we are in Him; just as in Romans 6 he has demonstrated that we suffered, died, were buried and rose again with Christ, because we are “in Him”. The suffering and groaning of which Paul speaks in Rom. 8:17, 22-26 could have specific reference to the ‘groaning’ he has just been making about his inability to keep the Mosaic Law. Our helplessness to be obedient, our frustration with ourselves, is a groaning against sin which is actually a groaning in harmony with that of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who makes intercession for us with the same groanings right now (Rom. 8:26). Indeed, those groanings are those spoken of in Heb. 5:7 as the groanings of strong crying and tears which the Lord made in His final passion. In this sense, the Spirit, the Lord the Spirit, bears witness with our spirit / mind, that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). This clinches all I am trying to say. Our inability to keep the Law of God leads to a groaning against sin and because of sin, which puts us into a unity with the Lord Jesus as our Heavenly intercessor in the court of Heaven. But that wondrous realization of grace which is expressed so finely in Romans 8 would just be impossible were it not for the conviction of sin which there is through our experience of our inability to keep the Law of God. Our failure and groaning because of it becomes in the end the very witness that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). God thereby makes sin His servant, in that the experience of it glorifies Him.

8:18 *I reckon*- s.w. to count, impute. As God counts us as in Christ, imputing us as having suffered and died with Him, we too in our turn must impute this to ourselves; and if we do, then we will realize that if our present sufferings are in fact seen by God and imputed by Him as being a part in the sufferings of Christ- then we can truly rejoice in the certainty that we will surely share in His resurrection life. If God counts us as He does, we should

count ourselves that way too, and have feelings and emotions which are appropriate to such an exalted position.

*The sufferings-* elsewhere Paul emphasizes that if we are “in Christ”, then His sufferings become ours in the same way as His glory and victory become ours too. The tribulations of Rom. 8:35 could therefore be understood specifically as aspects of Christ’s sufferings, with Rom. 8:36 likening us in our sufferings to the sheep for the slaughter, which spoke of Christ facing the cross. See on Rom. 7:5. The only other time in Romans that Paul uses the word here translated “sufferings” is in Rom. 7:5, where he speaks of “the motions [s.w. sufferings] of sin”. He may be implying that even the sufferings caused by our sins are part of the sufferings which connect us to Christ- for His sufferings were directly because of His bearing of our sins. This is a very profound thought- that even the sufferings of our sins serve only to connect us to the sufferings of Christ, in a mutual bond; for He suffered because of our sins. And for those in Him, our connection with His sufferings is the guarantee of our resurrection to glory with Him.

*Glory which shall be revealed-* the contrast between present suffering and future glory is common in Jewish texts. But they all tended to emphasize that the individual who does righteousness will receive personal glory (e.g. Apocalypse of Baruch, 2, 15:8). Paul is saying that the glory to which we look forward is a sharing in the glory of Christ in a material way. This glory exists now in that Christ exists glorified, but that glory must yet be revealed in us literally (1 Pet. 5:1).

*Revealed in us-* the “glory” is something internal, rather than referring to some unusually Divine light or cloud of shekinah glory, as imagined by 1st century Judaism and many others today. The Greek for “revealed” carries the idea of revealing, taking the lid off something to expose it. We are in Christ and He is thereby in us- the whole thing has a mutual quality to it. He

dwells in us not only in that His righteous character, His spirit, is counted to us- but in actual fact, it is placed within us. This is the “spirit” which Paul will go on to claim is in fact within us. It doesn’t mean we are thereby made righteous in our actual thoughts and actions- for he has bitterly lamented in Romans 7 that this isn’t actually the case. At the day of judgment, when we share in the Lord’s resurrection just as surely as we have in this life shared in His sufferings, that glory, that spirit, that personality within us shall be revealed openly. Perhaps Peter uses flesh and spirit in the same way that Paul does, when he says that believers are “judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Pet. 4:6), just as Jesus was likewise judged (1 Pet. 3:18). We are considered by our peers as mere human beings, they may even judge us for the kind of failures in the flesh which Paul admits to in Rom. 7:15-25. But God judges us according to the “spirit”, the fact that the spirit / character of Christ is counted to us, and in some hard-to-define sense is in fact latently placed within us. And this of course is how we should seek to perceive our weak fellow believers.

8:19 *Manifestation of the sons of God*- could imply that the believers aren’t really revealed for who they are in this life. This shouldn’t encourage our hypocrisy nor the idea that we can be a believer whose faith is invisible to the world; but it’s some comfort too. Because we look, smell, speak and act identically, for the most part, to the unbelievers around us. The huge difference in status and position has to be perceived by faith alone in this life. This “manifestation” is the same word as used in 8:18, “revealed”- see notes on 8:18.

*Earnest expectation of the creation*- the whole of creation is somehow looking forward to the revelation of the Christ that is within us. Christ, the spirit of Christ, is concealed deep within our flesh and will be manifested at the last day, even though we as it were feel the baby kicking, as Paul describes in Rom. 7:15-25 when he speaks of the two persons struggling within him. On a different scale, we are as it were concealed deep within the

creation, as the seed, the germ, which will sprout forth into the full Kingdom of God when Christ returns. All that is material and fleshly, this present system, will no longer conceal the Christ within us personally, and on a global scale it will no longer conceal *us*, who we really are. This element of hiddenness explains why we simply cannot judge others. Here in this closing section of Romans 1-8 there also seems a connection of thought with the opening section of Romans 1-8, where Paul wrote of how the invisible things of God which were as it were hidden within creation are in some sense declared to those who know God (Rom. 1:20)

8:20- see on Rom. 8:7.

*The creation*- given the way Paul writes of “they” as opposed to “ourselves” in 8:23, the creation here perhaps refers to all peoples (or maybe even, all created things) apart from the believers.

*Subject to vanity*- the connection with the opening of the entire section in Romans 1 continues. There Paul used the same word to describe how sinners ‘become vain’ (Rom. 1:21). They willingly glory in the fallen state of creation, seeking out every opportunity to gratify sinful desires. Although we are indeed “subject to vanity”, we don’t need to in our own turn ‘become vain’. If we can be made free from the daily grind in order to serve God, let us choose it. Let’s not fill our minds and lives with the things of basic human existence, gathering food, reproducing, indulging sexual desire. In one sense, as part of God’s creation, we are subject to vanity- and perhaps that’s why Paul uses the same word in the practical section of Romans to say that we “must needs be subject” to worldly powers (Rom. 13:1,5). By doing so we accept how things are in creation at this time. The idea of submission is quite a theme in Romans. Our natural mind, the status / person “in Adam”, isn’t submissive to God’s law and never can be (Rom. 8:7); the natural creation, of which our fleshly, human side is a part, is subject, in submission to, vanity. Yet we are to submit ourselves- our real selves- to God’s righteousness (Rom. 10:3).



*Not willingly*- continues the parallel between the believer in Christ's fallen and weak state, and the state of the entire creation. Again, this is a development of the theme of Rom. 7:15-25- that we sin because of our weakness in dealing with the state we find ourselves in, but our sin isn't willful- it is in fact committed not willingly, "that which I would / will not" (Rom. 7:19).

*Him who has subjected the same in hope*- a reference to God. This is a major deconstruction of the popular idea of 'Satan', who was and is supposed by many to be the one who has tied the world down under the consequences of sin. But it is *God* who has done the subjecting, and therefore He has done it "in hope", which He will be the One to bring to realization.

8:21 *The creation itself also*- Ultimately, the creation will share the deliverance which we personally experience now and shall experience in its final term at the Lord's return. The *whole* of creation earnestly looks forward to the manifestation of the sons of God. The whole of creation was made "subject to vanity, not willingly" - it was not their fault that the curse came upon them. "The *whole* of creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together", longing to share in the manifestation in glory of God's spiritual creation. The sadness and bitterness of the animal creation is due to their longing for that day of "the glorious liberty of the children of God" in which they will share.

*Shall be delivered*- the same word has been used by Paul in speaking of how even now, we have been delivered from slavery to sin and death by becoming "in Christ" (Rom. 6:18,22; 8:2). The same word is also used about our having been made free from slavery to the Mosaic Law (Gal. 5:1), which connection could suggest that the "creation" here has some specific reference to the entire Jewish system.

*From the bondage*- Gk. 'slavery'. The idea of being in slavery to

sin and the Law has been common in Paul's argument so far. The believer in Christ is saved from such slavery- and God's long term plan is that the entire creation will share in this redemption too.

*Corruption*- used by Paul in Col. 2:22 with special reference to the Law of Moses. But he also uses the word in explaining how our present corruptible body shall be changed to incorruption when Christ returns (1 Cor. 15:42,50). The whole creation will be changed and redeemed as we personally will be. In this sense the work of the Lord Jesus will bring about the creation, or re-creation, of a new earth without the results of Adam's sin. His achievement on the cross in this sense saved the world and not just the believers.

*Into the glorious liberty of the children of God*- The redemption and freedom from corruption which the believers shall experience will be experienced by all of creation. When at the end of Romans 11 Paul appears to rejoice in the totality and universality of Divine redemption in Christ, he may well have this in mind. Not that all human beings who have ever lived will be saved, but rather that the whole of creation, in a physical sense, will be saved / delivered just as the believers will have been. Our freedom is 'of glory' in the sense touched upon in Rom. 8:18- the glory of the character of Christ which is latent within us but which is yet to be revealed openly. Paul always uses the Greek word used here for "liberty" to exalt how believers in Christ have been set free from the Jewish law (1 Cor. 10:29; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 2:4; 5:1,13). He clearly has this at least as a subtext in his argument here, encouraging us to wonder whether by 'all of creation' he has in view "all Israel". In this case, his argument would be brought to its full term in Rom. 11:26, when he exalts that finally "all Israel shall be saved". When Paul speaks of "all [AV "the whole"] creation" in Rom. 8:22, this is the same word translated "all" in Rom. 11:26. They will finally share in the blessed redemption made possible by the Messiah whom they crucified, they will also experience the glorious liberty from sin

and the Law which was the strength of sin, which was exalted in by those like Paul whom they persecuted and reviled. For it is those who received Jesus as Christ rather than rejected Him as did the Jews, whom the NT styles “the children of God” (Jn. 1:12). In this sense, Paul in this very context notes that the Jews under the Law are not the true “children of God” - but the believers in Christ are (Rom. 9:8).

This “liberty” in which the NT so frequently exults (Lk. 4:18; 1 Cor. 10:29; Gal. 2:4; 5:13; James 1:25; 2:12; 1 Pet. 2:16) will be fully revealed in the freedom of the Kingdom: “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). As it will be then, so now: we will not be free to do what we like morally, but within the context of God’s covenant, we are free, totally and utterly free, in our service of Him.

8:22 *The whole creation* – Gk. “all” creation, s.w. Rom. 11:26 “all Israel”. See on Rom. 8:21.

*Groans together*- Groans together with whom? Perhaps the idea is that creation together, all parts of it, groan together. But I suggest the groaning is together with us and the Lord Jesus. The Greek for “groan” is used about the groaning of the Lord Jesus in intercessory prayer in Mk. 7:34. The believers in Him likewise groan in awaiting the change of our nature which shall come at Christ’s return (2 Cor. 5:2,4). This is the groaning we have heard throughout Romans 7:15-24, groaning at the hopelessness of our position as sinners. Paul perceived [“for we *know*”, Gk. ‘perceive’] that he wasn’t alone in his groaning, but there is even within the natural creation some premonition that a redemption is yet to come, and a groaning in discontent at the present situation. Thus he didn’t perceive nature as at peace with itself, as many today naively imagine. Rather is it groaning with us. And if we follow up Paul’s hints that “all creation” has some reference to “all Israel”, their groaning which he perceived would have been in terms of ‘not having found that which they sought after’, as he put it in Rom. 11:7; they sought righteousness but didn’t find it (Rom. 9:31). They were looking for the right thing in the wrong

places and by the wrong way. And yet their groaning, our groaning, the groaning perceived in the natural creation, are in fact but birth pangs- we groan and travail in pain together. The birth which this leads to is the new day of God's Kingdom, the final birth of the Spirit which believers in Christ have experienced in prospect through baptism. And again, Paul's subtextual reference to the bankruptcy of the Law to save is still there, for the only other time he uses this word for "travail" is in his allegorical comment that Judaism is barren and doesn't travail, and yet the true Zion is in travail, groaning to bring forth many children (Gal. 4:19,27). And yet he is perhaps hinting that just as the Jews subconsciously knew that Jesus was Messiah ["this is the heir, let us kill him"], so the Jewish system was in fact groaning and travailing towards the bringing forth of faith in Christ. The same idea of travailing in birth pangs is to be found in the descriptions of the situation just before the return of Christ (e.g. 1 Thess. 5:3). The significance of Paul's emphasis that this is happening 'right up until now' might then be a hint that he expected the return of Christ imminently. However, as previously touched upon in this exposition, it could be that Paul believed we should live as if the return of Christ is imminent; he therefore interpreted prophecy, Scripture and contemporary situations in that manner, just as we should. The groaning of creation and of ourselves also is therefore but the prelude to something far better- the actual birth at the second coming of Christ. My own interpretation of the radical changes in natural phenomena on earth at this time is that it's all an indication that creation is indeed groaning, now as never before, in a subconscious pleading for the Lord's return.

*Groans and travails*- a reference to natural disasters and the animal violence which there is within this fallen world? Our groanings, our struggling in prayer, is transferred to God by the Lord Jesus groaning also, but with groanings far deeper and more fervently powerful than ours (Rom. 8:22,23 cp. 26). See on Rom. 8:17; Col. 2:1. Romans 8 teaches that there is in fact just one Spirit; the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of God, and is "the Spirit" in the believer (Rom. 8:9-11). There is "one Spirit" (Eph. 4:4). If

the will of God is in us, if His will is embedded in our conscience, we will ask what we will, what our spirit desires, and it will be granted. This is because if our Spirit is attune with the Spirit of God and of Christ, our desires, our wish, is transferred automatically to Him. Whatever we ask being in the name of Christ, being *in* His character and the essence of His spirit, will therefore be done (Jn. 15:16). It doesn't mean that saying the words "I ask in the name of Christ" gives our request some kind of magical power with God. It must surely mean that if we are in Him, if His words abide in us, then we will surely be heard, for our will is His will. We are guaranteed answers if we ask in His name, if we ask what we will, if the word dwells in us, if we ask according to God's will... all these are essentially the same thing. If we are truly in Him, if the word really dwells in us, if our will has become merged with God's will, then we will only request things which are in accordance with His will, and therefore we will receive them. Thus the experience of answered prayer will become part of the atmosphere of spiritual life for the successful believer. The Lord knew that the Father heard Him always (Jn. 11:42). It is for this reason that the prayers of faithful men rarely make explicit requests; their prayers are an expression of the spirit of their lives and their relationship with God, not a list of requests. It explains why God sees our needs, He sees our situations, as if these are requests for help, and acts accordingly. The request doesn't have to be baldly stated; God sees and knows and responds. This is why Romans 8 appears to confuse the spirit of God, the spirit of Christ in the believer, and Christ himself as "the Lord the Spirit". Yet what Paul is showing is that in fact if we are spiritually minded, if our thinking is in harmony with the Father and Son, prayer is simply a merger of our Spirit with theirs; the idea of prayer as a means of requesting things doesn't figure, because God knows our need and will provide. The whole creation *groans*; we ourselves *groan* inwardly; and the Spirit makes intercession with *groans* that can't be uttered. Clearly enough, our groans are His groans. He expresses them more powerfully and articulately than we can. It has been observed: "As I read Paul's words, an image comes to mind of a mother tuning in to her child's wordless cry. I know mothers who can distinguish a cry for food from a cry for attention, an earache cry

from a stomachache cry. To me, the sounds are identical, but the mother instinctively perceives the meaning of the child's nonverbal groan. It is the inarticulateness, the very helplessness, of the child that gives her compassion such intensity". In deep sickness or depression it can simply be that we find formal, verbalized prayer impossible. Ps. 77:4 speaks of this: "I am so troubled that I cannot speak" (formally, to God). It's in those moments that comfort can be taken from the fact that it is our spirit which is mediated as it were to God. Tribulation is read as prayer- hence even the Lord's suffering on the cross, "the affliction of the afflicted", was read by the Father as the Lord Jesus 'crying unto' the Father (Ps. 22:24). This is sure comfort to those so beset by illness and physical pain that they lack the clarity of mind to formally pray- their very affliction is read by the Father as their prayer.

8:23 *Not only they but ourselves also... even we ourselves*- A fair emphasis by Paul on the fact that our groaning are in some sort of harmony with the groaning of all creation. If we understand 'all creation' as "all Israel", Paul's emphasis on the commonality of our groaning together would be as if to say 'Jews and Christians aren't that far apart really; we are united by our groanings'. And he argued the same at the opening of his argument in Romans 1-3; that Jew and Gentile are united by the desperation of their sinfulness, their common need for redemption.

*Which have the firstfruits of the Spirit*- I have explained earlier that Paul is teaching that the spirit or personality / mind of Christ is counted to us by imputed righteousness; but more than that, the Spirit of Christ is actually placed within us, although that spirit of Christ which dwells within us is latent, hidden beneath the flesh and failures of which Paul speaks in Romans 7. As we are in Christ, so He is in us, indwelling us by His Spirit. Clearly enough, the resurrected Christ is the firstfruit (1 Cor. 15:20,23), and we shall only be the firstfruits "afterward... at his coming". Yet because all that is true of Christ is true of we who are

counted in Him, we too are the firstfruits. “The Spirit” could refer to Christ personally, “the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18 RVMg.).

*Groan within ourselves-* Paul writes this in explanation of his groaning within himself which is outlined in Rom. 7:15-24.

*Waiting for-* The Greek rather carries the idea of expecting. For if we are in Christ, His sufferings counted as ours and ours as His, then our ultimate salvation is assured. We are therefore expecting it, rather than waiting to see what shall happen at His return.

*The adoption, the redemption of our body-* Continuing the image of adoption which was introduced in 8:15. We have already received the spirit of adoption. We are adopted unto God for the sake of our being in Christ, the supreme Son of God (Eph. 1:5). We are God’s adopted children in that we are in Christ, the ultimate child of God. But as has been lamented in Romans 7, our body, our flesh, is still as it is, unredeemed, and in practice unable to be subject to God’s law. We with Paul and with all creation, groan for redemption from this situation. Gal. 4:5 speaks of the death of Christ as being required “to redeem that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons”. The ideas of redemption, adoption and “sons” are repeated. So although we have attained such adoption as God’s sons in that we are in His Son by status, we long for the physical manifestation of that redemption which we have received- and we groan for it. Note that “the adoption of *sons*” isn’t sexist language; it is as sons that we are adopted rather than as daughters or androids because we are counted as in God’s Son, Jesus, who happened to be male. We are counted as Him. The status we have received in Him is one of redemption, we are labelled as it were “redeemed”. We in Christ have already received this redemption by grace (Rom. 3:24). He is “redemption” and we are in Him (1 Cor. 1:30). Consistently Paul speaks of ‘redemption’ as being “in Christ” (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), and we have been baptized into Him and are counted in Him, as Paul has laboured throughout

Romans so far. But our bodies still need that redemption, and we await / expect it at the Lord's return. Eph. 1:14; 4:30 likewise speak of "the day of redemption" as the second coming of Christ, and yet urge us to believe that we "sealed" by our receipt of the Spirit, as a guarantee, that this day will really come for us. The "spirit" referred to is the same as here in Romans 8- the indwelling of Jesus personally within all them who are "in Him", and the counting of His spirit to them by imputed righteousness.

*Adoption... redemption-* just as our minds have received the spirit of adoption, so our bodies will be transformed at the final judgment into a body like that of Jesus (Phil. 3:20,21).

8:24,25 *Saved by hope-* Better translated as "saved in hope". God's grace and the blood of Christ, believed in by faith, are what saves, rather than hope of itself. We have been saved, but in hope- for the fullness of salvation will only be revealed when Christ returns. As commented under 8:23, we have been redeemed, but the redemption of the body is our expectation at the second coming. Note that the Greek for "hope" means a confident expectation- the English 'hope' tends to carry a somewhat less confident flavour of meaning, the implication being that we 'hope for the best' rather than confidently await. But because we are saved in Christ, our hope is certain. Likewise the Greek translated in this section as "wait" better translates as 'confidently await'. We're not waiting to see what happens, but rather awaiting with confidence what must surely come for us- the redemption of our body. Anything less than this approach wouldn't have left Paul pulling out of his groaning within himself of Romans 7 with the confident cry of rejoicing, the scream in the night, of Rom. 7:25- that he has indeed found the way of escape and deliverance through Christ. Jesus personally is "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1). And we are in Him. But we don't physically see Him yet, nor physically have we seen the redemption of our bodies. We therefore wait, or await confidently, the fulfillment of the hope which is now reserved for us (Col. 1:5).



*Patiently wait for it*- Why does Paul labour his point here- that we don't have ["see"] what we know is coming for us, therefore we must patiently wait for it? Maybe to encourage patience in the waiting- perhaps the crux of his argument in these verses is on the word "patience". But maybe he is back to addressing the old worry which he know lurks in every reader: Why, then, am I still such a sinner right now, today? Given that reality, how then can I so confidently await the future redemption? And Paul's answer is that yes we have been redeemed, but no we don't see that redemption physically, no, we don't yet see it, but we are patiently awaiting it in confidence. Despite all our weakness and failure in the flesh. Our waiting is paralleled with the awaiting of all creation for the manifestation of God's children [the same word is used in Rom. 8:19,23,25]. The New Testament associates this 'waiting' with the faithful awaiting of Christ's return (s.w. 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28). Yet here in Romans we are awaiting the manifestation of ourselves as the sons of God (Rom. 8:19). Christ is us and we are Him, if we are in Him and He in us. His manifestation or 'coming' (s.w. 1 Cor. 1:7, we wait for the manifestation / coming of Christ) will be the same as the manifestation of the sons of God, all those who are in Him. His manifestation will therefore be ours; His glory shall be manifested in us in that day [s.w. Rom. 8:18] just as He personally shall be manifested. And thus we read that in a sense, Christ shall return with all those who are in Him with Him; for the faithful shall be snatched away to meet Him in the air, as clouds (1 Thess. 4:17), and then He shall come to earth with clouds, of the faithful believers (Rev. 1:7). In this sense the second coming of Christ is likened to the new Jerusalem, the spotless bride of Christ, coming down from Heaven to earth (Rev. 21:2). His manifestation is ours, for all that is true of Him is true of us. Our *hupomone* ['joyful endurance', AV "patience"] in awaiting the return of Christ is therefore possible because we are awaiting our redemption. We can only joyfully await His coming [and *hupomone* can carry an element of 'joy' within the wide flavour of its meaning] if we are confident that His coming means our redemption rather than our judgment to condemnation. If our attitude to the return of Christ is that we shall only then

find out, only then will our destiny be sorted out- then we are of all men most fearful and uncertain. But clearly enough for those in Christ, His revealing physically to the world shall be our revealing. His coming is going to be ours. “For thee he comes, His might to impart, to the trembling heart and the feeble knee”.

8:26 *Likewise also*- A phrase hard to interpret in this context. The sense may be more of “And even moreover”, “even so”; “And now guess what, even more...” might be the dynamic sense. That apart from us having a wonderful hope which we confidently await, it’s not all jam tomorrow. The spirit, both as the Lord the spirit, i.e. Jesus personally, and also as His spirit which indwells us, is actively at work even now.

*The Spirit*- a title for Christ personally. See on Rom. 7:14.

*Helps our infirmities*- “helps” occurs in the LXX of Ex. 18:22 and Num. 11:17, where Moses is the one helped. Paul is suggesting that each believer can rise up to the pattern of Moses; he was no longer to be seen by Jewish believers as some distant, untouchable, stellar example of devotion. He was a pattern that through the Spirit could be realistically attained; although the point is being cleverly made that he too had weakness that needed Divine help. Paul made it a credo of his own life, and urged other believers to follow his example in this, that he would labour to support [s.w. help, Rom. 8:26] the weak (Acts 20:35). For we are all weak, and helped only by grace. But the Greek word Paul uses for ‘helps’ also carries the meaning of ‘to participate it’. It clearly has this sense in 1 Tim. 6:2, “partakers [participators in] the benefit”. The Spirit participates in our infirmities and thus helps us; just as we should seek to empathize as far as we can in the infirmities of others, both practical and moral. The “infirmities” Paul has in mind would seem to be the infirmity of spirit he laments in Rom. 7:15-24; our moral weakness. The same word is used of how the Lord Jesus in His ministry fulfilled the prophecy of Is. 53:4 that on the cross He

would ‘take our infirmities’ (Mt. 8:17). These “infirmities” according to Is. 53:4 were our sins, but sin’s effect is manifested through sickness. The moral dimension to these “infirmities” has already been established by Paul in Romans, for in Rom. 5:6 he uses the word to describe how “when we were yet *weak* [s.w. ‘infirm’], Christ died for the ungodly; and he explains his sense here as being that “when we were yet *sinners*” (Rom. 5:8). Jesus as the Lord the Spirit engages with our infirmities, on the plane of the spirit, the deep human mind and psyche. What He did on the cross in engaging with our moral infirmity He did in His life, and He continues to do for us in essence. He does not turn away in disgust at our infirmities, rather through His Spirit within us He engages with them, perhaps deep within our subconscious, beneath our conscious will. The allusion to Mt. 8:17 seems certain- for there we read the same word for “infirmities” and “took” is *lambano*, a form of which is used by Paul in saying that the Spirit “helps” our infirmities. We are therefore led to understand “the Spirit” as a title of Christ personally. That title is used, however, because of the fact that in this context, His Spirit, His personality, is within us, He personally indwells us within our spirit; as we are in Christ so He is in us. His strength is perfected through our weakness (s.w. “infirmities”; 2 Cor. 12:9). He knows even now the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15; 5:2). If the Lord Jesus so engages with our weaknesses, we therefore ought to unhesitatingly “support the weak” [s.w., 1 Thess. 5:14].

*What to pray for*- Mt. 20:22 = Rom. 8:26. This is an example of where appreciating the links with the Gospels opens our understanding of Paul’s letters. Paul is implying that we are like the mother of Zebedee’s children, in that when we pray, we know not what we ask for in the sense that we don’t *appreciate* what we ask for. I know what to pray for: my redemption, and that of others. Read wrongly, Rom. 8:26 implies we haven’t the foggiest what on earth to ask God for. But we *do* know what to ask for; the point is, we don’t *appreciate* what we are asking for, just as that woman didn’t appreciate what she was praying for when she asked that her two boys would be in the Kingdom.

*Pray for-* a related word is used in this same context by Paul in Rom. 9:3, where he says that he “could wish”, s.w. “pray”, that he himself were condemned by God so that Israel might be saved. His allusion is to Moses’ prayer that he would be excluded from God’s book rather than Israel be excluded from the Kingdom. But Paul learnt the lesson from how God responded to Moses- that He doesn’t accept substitutionary sacrifice. Paul is admitting he too doesn’t know how to pray for Israel as he ought, but he leaves their salvation in the hands of their Saviour, whilst so earnestly desiring it in his own spirit.

*As we ought-* We don’t seem to have within us to pray as we *ought*, i.e. as we [s.w.] ‘must’. It’s not that we just don’t know what to pray about; we don’t pray as we ought to / must, and yet our gracious Mediator makes intercession with unutterable groans. And the older Paul can lament his failures to preach as he “ought”, as he *must*, and therefore he appeals for prayer that he will witness to the Gospel as every believer of it *must* (Eph. 6:20; Col. 4:4).

*The Spirit Himself-* a clear reference to Christ, whose spirit indwells us and is in dialogue with *our* spirit on some unconscious level. Our innermost spiritual desires are thereby transferred to God by our Heavenly mediator. And our innermost desire is to be right with God, to obtain salvation, deliverance from this body of death and life of spiritual failure. Now we can better understand why all we are reading here flows on naturally from his groaning of spirit in Romans 7. The Lord Jesus indwells us, His spirit perceives the spiritual groaning of our spirit, and transfers it as it were to Himself; for if we are in Christ, then He is in us. And His intercession for us is in that sense successful; our salvation was obtained on the cross thanks to His own groaning in spirit there, and this guarantees that He will obtain it for us [the idea of ‘intercession’, we have noted, includes that of ‘obtaining’].

*Makes intercession*- A return to the legal metaphors. The Lord Jesus is our interceder, the counsel for the defence, and also an emotional witness, pleading with groanings to the judge in support of our case. The Greek for "intercession" cannot be taken too far, but it is derived from the verb 'to obtain'. The obtaining of our salvation, the winning of our case, was achieved on the cross, in the groanings of Jesus in Gethsemane and on the stake; but in essence, He groans for us still in intercession, and in doing so, His groaning are in sympathy with our groaning for salvation. The type of groanings of spirit of Rom. 7:15-24 become the groanings of our Heavenly intercessor. He is not separate from our frustrations at our failures; He takes them fully on board. The crucial thing is that we have them; that we can read Rom. 7:15-24 with empathy and know that 'That's me'. Which I believe most readers of these words can indeed say.

*Groanings* - Heb. 5:7 comments that Christ prayed "with strong crying and tears". These words are certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of Christ making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". One might think from Heb. 5:7 that the Lord Jesus made quite a noise whilst hanging on the cross. But Rom. 8:26 says that his groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. No doubt the Lord Jesus was praying silently, or at best quietly, as he hung there. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved on the cross for us is what he now goes through as he intercedes for us with the Father. Heb. 5:7 describes Christ on the cross as a priest offering up a guilt offering for our sins of ignorance. He did this, we are told, through "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears". This must surely be a reference to "Father forgive them". Those were said with a real passion, with strong crying, with tears as He appreciated the extent of our sinfulness and offence of God. There is a connection between these words and those of Rom. 8:26,27, which describes Christ as our High Priest making intercession for us "with groanings". "Groanings" is surely the

language of suffering and crucifixion. It is as if our Lord goes through it all again when He prays for our forgiveness, He has the same passion for us now as He did then. Think of how on the cross He had that overwhelming desire for our forgiveness despite His own physical pain. That same level of desire is with Him now. Surely we can respond by confessing our sins, by getting down to realistic self-examination, by rallying our faith to truly appreciate His mediation and the forgiveness that has been achieved, to believe that all our sins, past and future, have been conquered, and to therefore rise up to the challenge of doing all we can to live a life which is appropriate to such great salvation. The suffering and groaning of which Paul speaks in Rom. 8:17, 22-26 is in my view a reference to the 'groaning' he has just been making about his inability to keep the Mosaic Law [see on Rom. 7:18]. Our helplessness to be obedient, our frustration with ourselves, is a groaning against sin which is actually a groaning in harmony with that of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who makes intercession for us with the same groanings right now (Rom. 8:26). Indeed, those groanings are those spoken of in Heb. 5:7 as the groanings of strong crying and tears which the Lord made in His final passion. In this sense, the Spirit, the Lord the Spirit, bears witness with our spirit / mind, that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). This clinches all I am trying to say. Our inability to keep the Law of God leads to a groaning against sin and because of sin, which puts us into a unity with the Lord Jesus as our Heavenly intercessor in the court of Heaven. Because of this, we are declared justified, there are no credible accusers, and the passionate intercessor / advocate turns out to be the judge Himself. Thus through our frustration at our own failure, we are led not only to Christ but to the certainty of an assured salvation. But that wondrous realization of grace which is expressed so finely in Romans 8 would just be impossible were it not for the conviction of sin which there is through our experience of our inability to keep the Law of God. Our failure and groaning because of it becomes in the end the very witness that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). God thereby makes sin His servant, in that the experience of it glorifies Him. How God works through sin is revealed in the way that although God always provided food for Israel in the wilderness, He 'suffered them to

hunger' for 40 years, in order to try to teach them that man lives not by bread alone, but by God's word (Dt. 8:2,3). The Jews in the wilderness despised the food God gave them as worthless (Num. 21:3); they went hungry not literally, but in the sense that they despised the manna of God's provision. And He allowed them to have that hunger, in order that He might [try to] teach them about the value of His word. He didn't simply punish them for their ingratitude. He sought to work through it in order to teach them something. Even the process of rejection results in the victims coming to 'know the Lord'.

*Cannot be uttered-* In the same way as our inner groanings for salvation, for deliverance from how we are, are unspoken, rarely verbalized (although Rom. 7:15-24 is a fine exception), so His intercession for us isn't in human words, it's a dialogue of the Spirit with God, a meeting of innermost minds. Our sinfulness and desire to be free from it is articulated through the spirit of God's perfect Son, to the mind or spirit of God Himself. Intercession, therefore, isn't a question of translating words which we say in prayer into some Heavenly language which is somehow understandable to God, rather like a translator may interpret from one language to another. It is our spirit which is perceived for what it is and articulated before God. This explains why both in Biblical example and in our own experience, our unspoken, unformulated desires of the spirit are read by God as prayers and responded to. I devote a whole chapter in my analysis of "Prayer" to exemplifying this Biblically, but we should also know it from our own experience. Desires which we had, above all we asked or thought, are read by God as prayers and responded to. Paul gives an example of this in saying that Elijah made intercession to God *against* Israel (Rom. 11:2,3), when clearly it was his thoughts in this context which were being interpreted as prayer. Perhaps the statement that the Lord Jesus intercedes for us without human words, in terms which "cannot be uttered", is intended as a comfort to those who feel they're 'not good at praying' because they don't know how to put it all in words. Verbalization skills are hardly a prerequisite for powerful prayer- because some people are more verbal, better with words,

than others. Rom. 8 speaks of the importance of being spiritually minded, and then goes on to say that our spirit, our deep inner mind, is transferred to God by Christ, called by His title "the Lord the spirit" , *without* specifically spoken words. This is surely proof enough that the Lord does not mediate our prayers as an interpreter would, from one language to another, matching lexical items from one language with those from another. "We know not what to pray for", so the Lord Jesus reads our inner spirit, and transfers this on a deep mental level, without words, to the Father. The whole process of mediation takes place within the Lord's mind, with the sort of groanings He had as He begged the Father to raise Lazarus (Rom. 8:26 cp. Jn. 11:38), and as on the cross He prayed with strong crying and tears for our redemption (Heb. 5:5 cp. Is. 53:12). The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday and today. That same passion and intensity of pleading really is there. This is why the state of our mind, our spirit, is so vitally important; because it is this which the Lord Jesus interprets to the Father. The Lord's Spirit struggles in mediation with crying and groaning (Rom. 8:26), as He did for the raising of Lazarus. There is a further connection with Heb. 5:5, where we learn that the Lord prayed on the cross with a like intensity. And this Lord is our Lord today. He can be crucified afresh, therefore He has the capacity for struggle and mental effort. The Greek for "groanings" in Rom. 8:26 also occurs in Mk. 7:34: "Looking up to heaven, he *sighed* and saith unto him, Ephthatha". The sighing of intense prayer by the Lord was His more spiritually cultured reflection of the number one desire of that man's spirit, as was His groaning and tears for Martha's desire to be granted, and Lazarus to be raised. It has been wisely observed that the language of Christ's mediation can be quite misunderstood. The picture we should have "is not that of an orante, *standing* ever before the Father with out-stretched arms... pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God... but that of a *throned* Priest-King, asking what He will from a Father who always hears and grants His request". The description of Christ groaning in spirit to transfer our spirit to God (Rom. 8:26) is a reflection of the fact that we groan for redemption and the coming of the day of the liberty of God's children (Rom. 8:22,23), when what is guaranteed by "the firstfruits of the Spirit" which we have, will at



last be realized. "All things work together for good" to this end, of forgiveness and salvation. It certainly doesn't mean that every story ends up happily-ever-after in this life. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26) seems to be some kind of allusion back to the mother of Zebedee's children asking Christ to get her two sons the best places in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:22). He basically replied 'You know not what you pray for', in the sense of 'you don't appreciate'. It may be that Paul in Rom. 8 is saying that in our desire for the Kingdom, in our groaning for it, we don't appreciate what we ask for as we ought, yet Christ nonetheless makes powerful intercession for us to this end. Because there is only "one Spirit", even the terms "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Christ" can be paralleled because they are manifestations of that same one Spirit: "Ye are... in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you... the Spirit is life... if the Spirit of (God) that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you... the Spirit (Christ, 1 Tim.2:5; 2 Cor.3:18 R.V.) maketh intercession for us" (Rom.8:9-11,26). See on Jn. 7:39.

8:27 *He that searches the hearts*- A clear reference to God, whom many Bible passages present as the One who searches human hearts. God knows and recognizes what the Lord Jesus is 'saying' because He Himself anyway knows the true state of our hearts, searching our motives and the inner thoughts which lay behind the external actions and words which are judged by men. Hence we can be judged [harshly] by men according to the flesh, but justified by the God who knows our spirit (1 Pet. 4:6). The 'searching' of human hearts is also done by the Lord Jesus (s.w. Rev. 2:23), as well as by God. And their findings are of course congruent. In this sense, the intercession of the Lord Jesus is "according to God" [Gk.], or "the will of God" [AV], or to fill out the ellipsis another way, 'according to the searching of God too'.

*Knows what is the mind of the Spirit [Jesus]*- God who knows

our minds knows the mind of Christ too. Because His mind is our mind, His Spirit is intertwined with, in dialogue with, reflective of, our deepest spirit in our inner, spiritual person. The hearts / minds of the believers are in this sense the mind of Christ; for due to our status in Him, “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Thus the mind of Christ as He comes before the Father in intercession for us is at one with God’s mind, as well as at one with our mind. In this we begin to see the profound depths, or something of them, of what it means to be “in Christ”, and how, mechanically, if you wish, reconciliation is achieved between God and man through Christ. The Lord Jesus does not just transfer our words to God as pieces of language. Seeing that we do not know how to properly express ourselves to God, He transfers the thoughts of our spirit to God (Rom. 8:26,27). It is in this context that Paul encourages us to have a spiritual mind in our daily life; because that is relayed to the presence of God by the Lord Jesus, “the Lord the Spirit”. Therefore our whole lives can be a life of prayer, lived out in the presence of the Lord God. However, we are encouraged to pray with our human words as well; indeed, Scripture is full of examples of men doing just this.

8:28 *For good*- a reference to the eternal “good” of the Kingdom age, i.e., ‘so that we might enter the Kingdom’? The future Kingdom is called “good things” in Is. 52:7 (quoted in Rom. 10:15) and Jer. 8:15. *All things work together for good* doesn’t mean that somehow everything will work out OK for us in this life- for so often they don’t. We are asked to carry the Lord’s cross, to suffer now and be redeemed in glory later at His return. “All things” may refer to “all creation” in Rom. 8:22, as if to say that everything in the whole of creation works together for our ultimate “good”. But that “good” must be defined within Paul’s usage of the term in Romans; and he doesn’t ever use it in the sense of material good in this life. Consider how he uses the word: “Doing good”, righteous behaviour (Rom. 2:7,10); “a good man”, a righteous man, maybe in reference to the moral purity of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 5:7); “no good thing dwells within me... the good that I would do, I do not” (Rom. 7:18,19). Remember that Paul is writing Romans 8 in commentary upon and extension to

his lament in Romans 7 that he cannot do the good that he would. Now he is taking comfort that in the bigger picture, man is not alone in creation; all things in this world are somehow working together within God's master plan so that we shall in fact do good, be righteous; both in our lives in Christ today and ultimately for eternity in God's Kingdom. For those who "love God", who in their innermost beings delight in God's law, somehow life works out, albeit in a very complex way, so that we may do that which is good, and have the goodness of Christ's righteousness eternally counted to us. Despite having lamented that he himself fails to "do good" as he would wish (Rom. 7:19), Paul urges us all to "do good" in the practical section of Romans. We are to cleave to the good, overcome evil with good, do good, be wise to that which is good and simple concerning evil (Rom. 12:2,9,21; 13:3; 16:19). Clearly Paul doesn't wish us to understand his frustration with his human condition as any excuse for giving up the effort. And the indwelling spirit of Christ seeks to orchestrate all things in the whole of creation to work together so that we may succeed in that doing of good. Snow in Latvia or flash floods in Australia may be brought about by cosmic forces which operate exactly so that we may... help up that old man who has slipped on the ice, take in that family who lost their home. And of course it all works out far more subtly than this, hour by hour. God has begun a "good work [s.w.] in us" and will bring it to completion in the day of Christ's return (Phil. 1:6). And all things in the whole of creation are somehow orchestrated to that end. Thus at baptism we were created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph. 2:10). And He gives us "all sufficiency to abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8), we are sanctified and prepared [Gk. 'provided for'] to perform every good work God intends for us (2 Tim 2:21); fully equipped by God to do every good work in His purpose for us (2 Tim. 3:17). Each time in these verses, the Greek word for "good" is the same as in Rom. 8:28. All this puts paid once and for all to the idea that we can do no good work because we don't have the money, the life situation, the resources. We have every sufficiency to do those good works intended for us; but we must "be ready to every good work" (Tit. 3:1), prepared to grasp the moment, living in the spirit of *carpe diem*. And thus we shall be 'established' in every

good work we put our hands to (2 Thess. 2:17), none shall ultimately harm us if we follow after performing these good works (1 Pet. 3:13), we shall be made perfect or completed “in every good work in the doing of His will” (Heb. 13:21). All things work together for good especially when the “good works” are in the context of assisting others towards the Kingdom. Paul’s concise summary of us in this verse as those who “love God” recalls 1 Jn. 4:20,21; 5:2- we only love God when we love others. The uncommon Greek word translated ‘work together’ is to be found in the great preaching commission in Mk. 16:20, where it is observed that the Lord Jesus ‘worked together with’ those who sought to preach the Gospel in all the world. This appears to be a comment upon the Lord’s promise that in this work of preaching the Gospel, He would be with His preachers unto the end of the world (Mt. 28:20). Whilst this can be understood as the end of the age, it seems to me that the Lord is saying that in taking the Gospel to the whole world, He will be with them in it, right to the ends of the world- be it in witnessing to Amazonian Indians or to your unbelieving family in a run down apartment block in Moscow or London or New York. We are workers together with Him in the work of saving others (2 Cor. 6:1); yet all things in all creation are also working together to this end. By becoming part of that huge operating system, dynamized as it is by God’s Spirit, we will experience God working with us. Somehow, resources become available; somehow we meet the right people. But all this happens if we are those who “love God”. If our love for Him and the furtherance of His glory in human lives is paramount, then we will naturally find ourselves part of this positive, triumphant system which always is lead in triumph in Christ. Paul uses the same Greek word translated ‘work together’ in the practical section of Romans, where he three time speaks of his brethren as his ‘workers together’, or co-workers (Rom. 16:3,9,21). I suggest that Paul has in view here that he was co-working with those brethren as co-workers with God. The co-working he refers to doesn’t simply mean that these brethren worked together with Paul. They were co-workers in the sense of being like Paul, co-workers- with God. All this isn’t only encouragement to those faced with decision making on a large scale- e.g. a mission organization wondering if they have the

resources to open a new front of work, or provide significant care to a needy group. More personally, it applies to each of us. We each have good works before ordained that we should walk in them, live a way of life which achieves them (Eph. 2:10). We need to ask the Lord to reveal what they are, to review our station and place within life's network and perceive them, remembering that "the unexamined life isn't worth living", and seek to go for them. The idea is commonly expressed that for now, I shall work in my career, in my business, and then I shall have the resources to serve God as I vaguely imagine I could in some specific way. Manic capitalism has succeeded in commodifying everything, turning everything into a price tag. But the good works God has in mind for us aren't usually of that nature. Kindness, acceptance, comfort, forgiveness, interest in others' needs and sufferings... these are the essence of being as Christ in this world. This is Christianity, Christ-ness, being like Christ. For He achieved all He did "with a minimum of miracle" as Robert Roberts put it, and with hardly any cash behind Him. And so all this working together towards ultimate "good" shall be possible and is possible, for those who in the core of their hearts truly "love God". This is another allusion, surely, to Romans 7:15-24, where Paul is saying that in his heart he loves God, but is frustrated by his flesh. I have no doubt that most of you my readers are in this category- of loving God. The Jewish mind would've been jogged by the reference to 'loving God' to the classic definition of loving God- to love Him with our heart and mind (Mt. 22:37). And this is exactly what Paul is saying he does in Romans 7, delighting in God's law in his mind, despite serving sin in his flesh.

*Them who are the called according to His purpose-* Here Paul starts to introduce the concept of calling, election according to God's purpose. He doesn't just start talking of Divine calling and predestination without a context. His whole message in Romans 1-8 is that we are saved by grace; and the fact there is some element of predestination and calling over and above our will and works is solid proof that salvation is by grace- and that we who know we have been called, in that we have heard the call of the Gospel which contains that call, really are those who have been

chosen to live eternally. Again and again, the message Paul preaches here is too good news. We struggle to qualify what he is saying, to allow our works and obedience a greater factor in the final algorithm of Divine salvation. But time and again we return to the question- why do I know all this, why am I reading these words, hearing this call, when so many others have lived and died without it? Why is it that I ‘get it’ about God, but my brother or my sister was never interested from babyhood? Why me, why her, why you, and not the guy next door? For all our philosophy, wise cracks and clever words, there is no abidingly satisfactory answer. It is of God’s grace and not of ourselves. Paul specifically connects our calling with God’s grace in 2 Tim. 1:9: “Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His purpose and grace”. Note how the ideas of calling, grace and God’s purpose all run together here as they do in Rom. 8:28. The “purpose of God” is further defined in Rom. 9:11 as not depending upon human works. We were called because we were called, by grace, quite independent of what works we would or would not do. Eph. 1:11 says that we are “predestinated according to the purpose of [God]”. The whole idea of calling according to a predetermined Divine purpose means we are predestinated. We need not struggle over whether we have been called or not. The call, the invitation to the Kingdom, is in the Gospel. Any who hear it have been called. If I invite you to an event, you are invited, you are called to it. Lest there be any doubt, Paul began Romans by assuring us that we are called just as surely as he was (Rom. 1:1,6,7). He opens 1 Corinthians the same way- speaking of his calling and then using the same word to describe how his readers are likewise the called (1 Cor. 1:1,2,24). The calling of God is “without repentance” in the sense that we can never be disinvented, become ‘uncalled’ (Rom. 11:29). And if we are called, then we are predestinated (Eph. 1:11). Whilst calling doesn’t mean final acceptance with God- for we must make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10), to not be saved at the last day would require us to have willfully fought against the predestined desire of God to save us, to have reasoned against destiny. Paul’s great theme in Romans 1-8 is that we are “in Christ” by status through having believed into Him by baptism. This connects with this theme of

calling according to the Divine purpose, because God ‘purposed His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Eph. 3:11). If we are in Him, then we are in God’s eternal purpose, we will continue eternally because God’s purpose for us is eternal. We would have to willfully reject that status if we are to somehow come out of that eternal purpose. Being “in” God’s purpose means that His purpose, His will, His Spirit, is to become ours- hence Paul can use the same word to speak of his “purpose” in life (2 Tim. 3:10).

*According to His purpose-* can be applied to the first clause of the verse, “all things work together for good” within the overall purpose of God to save us. It doesn’t have to modify the idea of our calling. Joseph stands as a pattern for us all. When Paul wrote that all things work together for our good (Rom. 8:28), he was echoing how in all the grief of Joseph’s life, the rejection by his brethren, the cruel twists of fate [as they seemed at the time]... *God meant it for good* (Gen. 50:20). This same wonderful process will come true in our lives- for they too are equally directed by a loving Father. God’s whole purpose, according to Paul, is that we should become like His Son-and to this end all things are directed in God’s plan for us (Rom. 8:28,29). To achieve the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” is the ‘perfection’ or maturity towards which God works in our lives. As we read of Him day by day, slowly His words and ways will become ours. The men who lived with Jesus in the flesh are our pattern in this; for the wonder of the inspired record means that His realness comes through to us too. Time and again, their spoken and written words are reflective of His words, both consciously and unconsciously.

8:29- see on Rom. 6:5.

*For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate-* We are called for sure, therefore we were predestinated for sure, and therefore we personally were foreknown. To the Jewish mind, it was the prophets and Messiah who were personally foreknown. And Paul uses this shockingly exalted language about each of us,

reasoning back from the basis that we know we have been called. His logical path is irresistible, at least intellectually. But in practice it amounts to an almost too good news. We were predestinated to be saved, to be part of God's eternal purpose, a plan for us which shall last for ever. It would require a battle of wills against God, a conscious, willful desire *not* to be in that purpose any more, to make us no longer a part of that purpose. No wonder we should strive to spread the invitations to that Kingdom far and wide, to call people to the Kingdom. We who have heard and accepted that call are even now part of a plan, a purpose, which shall last eternally- this is the significance of God's purpose with us being an "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11). This may explain why often we feel that God is indeed working with us, that we are part of some far bigger cosmic plan, but we're not sure exactly where it's going to end. All we can do is to play our part in that purpose as enthusiastically as possible, knowing that we are playing a part in some unseen purpose, which shall have eternal consequences. Why was the train cancelled, the airport closed by snow? So that for those who wish to be part of God's purpose, who "love God", we had time to make a phone call to brother X or pay a visit to sister Y or stay the night with family Z, so that we might play some part in encouraging them towards God's Kingdom? We cannot see it clearly, but we sense something of God in these things, even in death itself. The situation gets the more complex, the waters muddied, in that both we and others can at times and in some ways not respond as God intends, or not as far as He intended. And so the eternal purpose is in a sense thwarted, God's intentions delayed or forced by human failure to be rescheduled, reinterpreted, fulfilled in other ways or at other times. But all the same, we continue to play our part as best we can, as far as we can, loving God with our whole heart, soul and mind, not on a hobbyist, part-time level; and so we shall eternally continue.

*To be conformed to the image of His Son-* This is parallel to our being fully born into the family of God, of which the Lord Jesus is the firstborn. Whilst the process of being formed after the image of Christ is ongoing in this life, it will come to full term



only at our final birth of the Spirit when we enter God's Kingdom (Jn. 3:3-5). The Greek for "conformed" is used only in one other place, in Phil. 3:21, where we read that at Christ's return, our vile body shall be "fashioned like unto" [s.w. 'conformed'] the now glorious body of Christ. The conforming is therefore referring to our final change of nature at Christ's return, even though the conforming process begins in this life (Rom. 12:2). The end point, therefore, isn't so much eternal life, but to be like Christ, the Son of God. Paul has been arguing that we are counted as Christ now, His character, personality and spirit are counted to us. But finally we shall be changed into persons like unto Christ Himself. But the form of Jesus to which we shall be con-formed in that day is the "form" which He had on earth- for Phil. 2:6 speaks of the Lord Jesus as having "the form of God" at the time of His final spiritual climax in the death of the cross. This *morphe* or "form" refers not to His 'very nature', as Trinitarians willfully misinterpret this passage, but rather to the image of God mentally. Who Jesus was in His time of dying was in fact "God"; not that He 'was God' then, but in that His character and spirit finally matured to an exact replica of who God is in essence. And this is who or what we are counted as today- for all in Christ are counted as Him. And this is who we shall be conformed to in the final triumph at the day of His coming. Our calling is to be like Him; not simply to have eternal life in God's Kingdom. More essentially, the call of the Gospel is a call to be like Him in this life, and to then be finally made like Him. The parables which explain the good news of the Kingdom therefore speak of how life can be lived now, in forgiveness, service, kindness etc. This is the good news of the Kingdom life; the good news isn't simply an invitation to live eternally in a future Kingdom on earth; rather is it the good news of a form of life that can be lived now and shall eternally be lived to its intended fullness. When Paul writes of our being transformed into "the image of Christ" (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49) he seems to have in mind Ez. 1:28 LXX: "The appearance of the image of the glory of the Lord". "The glory" in Ezekiel is personified- it refers to a person, and I submit that person was a prophetic image of Jesus Christ. But Paul's big point is that we *each* with unveiled face have beheld the Lord's glory (2 Cor. 3:16- 4:6); just as he did on the Damascus road, and

just as Ezekiel did. It follows, therefore, that not only is Paul our example, but our beholding of the Lord's glory propels us on our personal commission in the Lord's service, whatever it may be. See on Acts 9:3. Martial described a crucifixion victim [in *Liber Spectaculorum*]: "In all his body was nowhere a body's shape". We are to be "conformed to the image of [God's] son" (Rom. 8:29)- to share His *morphe*, which was so marred beyond recognition that men turned away in disgust (Is. 52:14 cp. Phil. 2:7). The mind that was in Him then must be in us now (Phil. 2:5).

*That He might be the firstborn among many brothers*- Because we shall be made like Him morally, we will have the essential family characteristic: moral perfection. We will thereby become God's children also, as He was and is. We shall become His "brothers" in that we have been counted as Him now, and then shall be made like Him. So the language isn't thoughtlessly sexist, rather is it reflective of how we shall be made like Him. Through the resurrection, Christ became "the firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:15,18; Rev. 1:5); the same Greek phrase for "all creation" is to be found in Rom. 8:22. The idea may be that ultimately all creation somehow will follow this same path to glory, to ultimate reconciliation with God. And yet Col. 1:23 uses the same phrase in this context to speak of how the Gospel has been preached to "all creation", in fulfillment of the great commission to take the Gospel to "all creation" (Mk. 16:15 same phrase). "Firstborn among many brothers" here in Rom. 8:29 therefore becomes parallel to being the firstborn of "all creation" in Colossians 1. In the end, "all creation" will be God's redeemed children. And we will only be there because someone went out into our world and preached the Gospel to the "all creation". In this lies the eternal significance of calling others to that Kingdom by obeying the great commission.

8:30 *Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

This is partially a recapitulation of the argument of Rom. 8:29; a repeating for emphasis of something which is almost too good news to believe. We were called because we were predestinated; and Paul has earlier outlined in his argument that we who are in Christ have been “justified”, declared right, at the judgment seat of God. We haven’t yet been glorified, in that our bodies haven’t yet been changed, the final day of judgment hasn’t yet come. But Paul uses the past tense as if it has already happened. This ‘prophetic perfect’ was a Hebrew style which was quite grammatically acceptable, even if it may seem strange when translated into other languages such as Greek or English. Paul’s point is that if we are in Christ, declared right before God’s judgment right now, then we can be assured of final salvation, the glorification of the body- should Christ return at this moment, or if we should die at this moment. For tomorrow of course we might throw it all away. But we are not to worry about tomorrow in that sense; we can rejoice here and now that we are saved and are as good as ultimately saved and in the Kingdom. We have already been predestinated, already called, already justified- and therefore in prospect, already glorified. Yet again, Paul succeeds in making us gasp for breath, struggling as we do with the too good news of the Gospel. It is the Lord Jesus who has now been “glorified” (s.w. Jn. 12:16; Acts 3:13); and seeing that all that is true of Him is now true of us who by status are now “in Him”, it can be also said that we have been in this sense already glorified. Perhaps the practical section of Romans connects to this verse when we read in Rom. 15:6,9 that the Gentiles shall glorify God for His mercy; because He has glorified us, we are to glorify Him.

*Also glorified-* from God’s standpoint, outside of our kind of time. For that glory has yet to be revealed in us (1 Pet. 5:1).

8:31 *What shall we then say to these things?* – Paul returns to the rhetorical, legal style which he used earlier in Romans. The phrase could be an allusion to a legal one; as if to say to the accused or to the jury: ‘What then do you say to these things?’.

We are invited to be the jury at our own trial. The evidence that we shall be saved is devastating; nothing can be said against it. Or it could be that Paul is in the place of the defence, going on the attack against the prosecutor. What can be argued against all this evidence? And there would have to be silence. The case is set in concrete. The arguments simply cannot be answered. Paul has previously thrown down the challenge after some of his previous depositions of evidence in this very public case of God's Gracious, Certain Salvation vs. All Human Doubts And Fears. Four times he has challenged: What then shall we say to this (Rom. 3:5; 4:1; 6:1; 7:7)? And there can only be silence. But Paul's rhetorical style is almost aggressive; he is the counsel for the defence who is on the offensive rather than the apologetic and defensive. But it seems Paul isn't satisfied with winning the case. He drives it home now in the final verses of this chapter in a kind of *tour de triumph*, a victory lap before all of creation. He is exalting, both intellectually and emotionally, in God's grace and the certainty of our salvation. But he's not exalting just for the sake of it; he is aware of his own cries of frustration with his own failure which he voiced in Romans 7, and he is aware of how cautious and weak in faith are we his readers, who struggle to believe the goodness of this good news, this Gospel of grace. And so he has to hammer it home. "What shall we then say to these things?" - i.e. 'what form of words, of 'saying', is adequate response to them?' (Rom. 8:31; Paul uses that phrase seven times in Romans, so beyond words did he find the atonement wrought in Christ). Words aren't symbols sufficient for our experience of God's grace and love; all commentary is bathos, like trying to explain a symphony in words; we experience a collapse of language. What remains, I suppose, is to live, to exist, in the sober knowledge of this grace, to never lose sight of them in our hearts; and all the rest, the rest of life and living and all the decisions and responses we are supposed to make, will somehow come naturally.

*If God is for us, who can be against us?*- The songs of the suffering Servant are applied to us in Rom. 8:31, where Paul exalts that "if God be for us, who is against us?" - alluding to Is.

50:8 "The Lord God is helping me- who is he that would convict me?". If we are in Christ, we like Him cannot be condemned. In the legal context, if the judge of all is legally "for us", then there effectively is no accuser, nothing and nobody standing against us. It's as if Paul has rightly guessed his readers' response: 'OK Paul, I have nothing to say against your argument, but all the same you don't know what a sinner I am, what a line of sins I have waiting there to condemn me'. And Paul's exultant answer is that if God is "for us"- and he has demonstrated this time and again, that God quite simply wants to save us- then nothing and nobody, not even our own sins, can ultimately stand against us. The idea of God being "for us" is repeated twice elsewhere in Romans. In Rom. 5:8 we read that God commended His love toward us in that Christ, His Son, died "for us". This is the extent to which God is "for us". And in Rom. 8:34, Christ makes intercession "for us" to God the judge; and yet God the judge is also "for us". All this legal language is only metaphor, and all metaphors break down at some point if pushed too far. If in this case we push it too far, we would end up saying that God is somehow unjust, His sense of legal justice lacks integrity and so is worthless in an ethical, moral sense. However, the broad brush impression is that in the highest, ultimate court analysis of our case, both the judge and the counsel for the defence are passionately "for us" on a personal level. In God's case, He was "for us" to the extent of giving His Son to die "for us", for the sake of our sins and failures for which we are in the dock. Col. 2:14 uses the same phrase to describe how the Mosaic Law which was "against us" has been taken out of the way through Christ's death; and Paul has argued that the strength of sin is in the Law. If that is taken away, then sin will not have power in the lives of those who are "in Christ", in whom such law and legality is now no more. As an aside, it should be noted that when the Lord told John to "Forbid not; for he that is not against us is for us" (Lk. 9:50 Gk.), He could have been referring to God; as if to say that we don't need to as it were defend Him against possible impostors, because God Himself is the One who is not against us but for us. In this case, here in Rom. 8:31 we would have yet another of Paul's allusions to the Gospels; his point would be that

if God is for us and not against us, then nothing at all nor anybody, not even ourselves and our sins, can be against us.

8:32 *He that spared not His own son*- Perhaps alluding to how God commended Abraham for not having spared his son (Gen. 22:16). As noted on Rom. 8:31, God our judge is “for us” in that He gave His own Son to die “for us”, for our sins. The idea of God not sparing people is usually used in the sense of ‘not sparing them from condemnation’, and it is used like this twice elsewhere in Romans (Rom. 11:21 [twice]; 2 Cor. 13:2; 2 Pet. 2:4,5). The Lord Jesus bore our sins in that He identified with them; and the Old Testament idea of sin bearing meant to bear condemnation for sin. As the representative of we who are sinners, He in some sense died the death of a condemned man; His final cry “Why have You forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46) was surely rooted in the Old Testament theme that God will forsake sinners but never forsake the righteous. He felt *as* a sinner, although He was not one. The language of God not sparing His own Son could be read as meaning that God treated Him as condemned, in the sense that the Lord Jesus was to such an extent our representative. If this is the correct line of interpretation, then Paul would again be tackling our objection that we are such awful sinners that perhaps his fantastic news of grace still doesn’t apply to us personally. And he would be answering it by saying that because we are in Christ and Christ in us, Christ died as our representative, deeply identifying with us as characters and persons and thereby with the sinfulness and failure which is such a significant part of us. And therefore as our representative He died and rose again, so that we might be able to believe ‘into Him’ and thereby share in His resurrection and glorification.

*Spared not* - God ‘spared not’ His own son (Rom. 8:32)- alluding to the LXX of Gen. 22:16, where Abraham spares not his son. The Greek phrase is elsewhere used about God not sparing people when He assigns them to condemnation (Rom. 11:21; 2 Cor. 13:2; 2 Pet. 2:4,5). The Lord Jesus knows how not only sinners feel but how the rejected will feel- for He ‘bore condemnation’ in this sense. We should be condemned. But He

as our representative was condemned, although not personally guilty. He so empathized with us through the experience of the cross that He came to *feel* like a sinner, although He was not one. And thus He has freed us from condemnation. When Paul asks in Rom. 8:33,34 'Who can accuse us? Where are those people? Who can condemn us, if God justifies us?', he is alluding to the woman taken in adultery. For the Lord asked the very same rhetorical questions on that occasion. Paul's point is that we each one are that woman. We are under accusations which we can't refute. The Lord never denied her guilt; but He took it away. The Lord comforted her that no *man* has condemned her nor can condemn her, and He who alone could do so, instead pronounces her free from condemnation.

*Delivered Him*- the Greek is three times used in Is. 53 LXX about the handing over to Jesus to His death. The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: "Remember *how* he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis is on "*How*", with what passion and emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: " Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification". So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). Always the same word is used. These passages also stress that He delivered Himself up, and was delivered up, *for us*. It was *our salvation* which motivated Him at the moment of being delivered up. Perhaps it was at that moment that He had the greatest temptation to walk through the midst of them and back to Galilee. As the crowd surged forward and cheered, knowing they'd won the battle of wills with Pilate..."take ye him and

crucify him" ringing in His mind... this was it. This was the end. How He must have been tempted to pray again His prayer: "Let this cup pass from me...". Jerusalem was a small town by modern standards, with no more than 10,000 inhabitants. There must have been faces in that crowd which, through swollen eyes, He recognized; some whose children had benefited from His miracles, whose ears had heard His discourses with wonderment. The emphasis on this moment of delivering up is so great that there must have been an especial sacrifice on the Lord's part. But He "gave himself up" to *God* not men (1 Pet. 2:23); He knew He was giving Himself as an offering to *God* as the crowd came forward and the soldiers once again led Him. The almost terrifying thing is that *we*, for the sake of our identity with Christ, are also "delivered up to death" (2 Cor. 4:11). We are asked to share, in principle, the height of devotion that He reached in that moment.

*How shall He not with Him freely give us all things*- If so much was given to us by the death of Christ, if God gave His Son for us, then how much 'easier' is it for Him to give us absolutely anything. For nothing compares to the gift of God's Son to die; this is the ultimate gift from God to man. To give us eternity and forgiveness for our sins is in far less than the gift of the blood of His Son. And further, if God gave us His Son in order to save us, in order to "give us all things"- is it really feasible that having given us His Son *so that* He might "give us all things", He would then *not* "give us all things"? Again, Paul's logic is intrusive and powerful. We may shut the book, stop reading or listening, but the force of the argument silently echoes within our narrow and fearful minds. God did "not spare" His Son- by contrast, He "freely gave" Him [Gk. 'to grace with'], His Son was indeed "all things" to God, His only and beloved Son. Seeing God gave us Him, it's obvious that He is going to give us the things which that gift was given in order to make possible. "Shall He not with Him also" could be a reference to the resurrection- if God gave us so much in the *death* of His Son, think how much more was achieved and given to us through His resurrection. "With him" could be read another way, however- as referring to how Christ will meet the believers "in the air", and they shall come "with



him” to judgment (1 Thess. 4:14), with Him their judge clearly “for them”. However we must remember Paul is driving here at our fears that our sins are too great for the good news, however good it is, to be true for us personally. The Greek translated “freely give” is a form of the word *charis*, grace, and is often translated “forgive”. It’s the same word used in Lk. 7:42, where God ‘frankly forgives’ all the sins / debts of His servants. Perhaps Paul has this in mind. If God gave up His Son to die for us, in order to achieve forgiveness for our sins, then rather obviously, surely, He will “frankly forgive” or “freely give” us forgiveness for all things, all and any sin. We shouldn’t think that this is somehow harder for God than to give us His Son to die for our sins. He has already done that. And so giving us the forgiveness which Christ died to attain isn’t therefore so difficult. If we are in Christ, then God has “quickened us together with Him, having forgiven us [s.w. “freely give” in Rom. 8:32] all trespasses”. The “all things” of Rom. 8:32 can thus be understood as “all our trespasses”. And so Paul goes on to triumph in Rom. 8:37 that we are conquerors in “all things”, over all our sins, because we are in Him that loved us.

8:33 *Who shall lay anything to the charge* – Again, legal language. Where is our accuser? Can anyone accuse us of anything? No, insofar as we are “in Christ”. The allusion is to the Gospels, to the way the Lord Jesus could calmly challenge: “Which of you can convict me of sin?” (Jn. 8:46). If He could not be seriously accused of sin, neither can we. The records of the Lord’s trials are perhaps also in view here- for the accusers failed to produce any case which held together (Mk. 14:59). All this takes on striking relevance to us, as we stand in the dock before the righteous judgment of God- and are declared right, without any credible accusers. This of course is only possible because we are “in Christ”. The only other time the Greek for ‘lay to the charge’ occurs is in the records of Paul’s own trials, where again no credible accusation was found against him (Acts 19:38,40; 23:28,29; 26:2,7). As so often, Paul is reasoning from his own personal experience. He knew what it felt like to stand in court and see your accusers’ case just crumble before your eyes. He

makes the point in his own defence that there is no proof of anything of which he is accused, and that significantly the witnesses against him aren't even present in the courtroom (Acts 24:13,19)- all very much the scene of Rom. 8:33. And he says this is true for each one who is in Christ. God is the prosecutor- yet He is the one who shall search for Israel's sin, and admit that it cannot be found (Jer. 50:20). God is both judge, advocate for the defence, and prosecutor- and this is God is *for us*, the guilty! Rom. 8:33,34 develops the figure at length. The person bringing the complaint of sin against us is God alone- for there is no personal devil to do so. And the judge who can alone condemn us is the Lord Jesus alone. And yet we find the one 'brings the charge' instead being the very one who justifies us, or as the Greek means, renders us guiltless. The one who brings the charge becomes this strange judge who is so eager to declare us guiltless. And the judge who can alone condemn, or render guilty, is the very one who makes intercession to the judge for us- and moreover, the One who died for us, so passionate is His love. The logic is breathtaking, literally so. The figures are taken from an earthly courtroom, but the roles are mixed. Truly "if God be for us [another courtroom analogy], who can be against us" (Rom. 8:31). This advocate / intercessor is matchless. With Him on our side, 'for us', we cannot possibly be condemned. Whatever is 'against us'- our sins- cannot now be against us, in the face of this mighty advocate. Let's face it, the thing we fear more than death is our sin which is 'against us'. But the assurance is clear, for those who will believe it. With an attorney for the defence such as we have, who is also our passionate judge so desperate to justify us- even they cannot stand 'against us'. Rom. 8:33 states that there is now *nobody* who can accuse us, because none less than God Himself, the judge of all, is our justifier in Christ! And so whatever is said about us, don't let this register with us as if it is God accusing us. Not for us the addiction of internet chat groups, wanting to know what is said about us or feeling defensive under accusation. For all our sins, truly or falsely accused of, *God* is our justifier, and not ourselves. And thus our consciences can still blossom when under man's false accusation, genuinely aware of our failures for what they are, not being made to feel more guilty than we should, or to take false guilt. This is

all a wonderful and awesome outworking of God's plan of salvation by grace. If *God* is our justifier, where is he that condemns us, or lays any guilt to our charge (Rom. 8:33,34)? And yet in family life, in ecclesial relationships... we are so quick to feel and hurt from the possible insinuations of others against us. We seek to justify ourselves, to correct gossip and misrepresentation, to "take up" an issue to clear our name. We all tend to be far too sensitive about what others may be implying about us. All this reflects a sad lack of appreciation of the wonder of the fact that we are justified *by God*, and in His eyes- which is surely the ultimately important perspective- we are without fault before the throne of grace, covered in the imputed and peerless righteousness of the Lord. Paul, misrepresented and slandered more than most brethren, came to conclude: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me [right now] is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:3-4). The judge is the justifier, according to this argument. Paul is not justified by himself or by other men, because they are not his judge. The fact that God alone is judge through Christ [another first principle] means that nobody can ultimately justify us or condemn us. The false claims of others can do nothing to ultimately damage us, and our own efforts at self-justification are in effect a denial of the fact that the Lord is the judge, not us, and therefore He alone can and will justify. When a man is under accusation, his conscience usually dies. He is so bent on self-defence and seeking his own innocence and liberation from accusation. And we see this in so many around us. But for us, we have been delivered from accusation, judged innocent, granted the all powerful and all authoritative heavenly advocate. Rom. 8:33 states that there is now *nobody* who can accuse us, because none less than God Himself, the judge of all, is our justifier in Christ! And so whatever is said about us, don't let this register with us as if it is God accusing us. Not for us the addiction of internet chat groups, wanting to know what is said about us or feeling defensive under accusation. For all our sins, truly or falsely accused of, God is our justifier, and not ourselves. And thus our consciences can still blossom when under man's false accusation, genuinely aware of our failures for

what they are, not being made to feel more guilty than we should, or to take false guilt. This is all a wonderful and awesome outworking of God's plan of salvation by grace.

*Of God's elect-* The reason why there are no accusers against us, not even our own sins, is because we are "God's elect". The supreme chosen one of God was of course the Lord Jesus, "mine elect, in whom my soul delights" (Is. 42:1). And yet later on in the servant songs of Isaiah, "mine elect" clearly refers to the people of Israel (Is. 45:4; 65:9,22). The true Israel of God are therefore those counted as somehow "in" the elect one, the singular servant of God, Messiah Jesus. Those baptized into Him are therefore His elect. And how do we know we are "God's elect"? If we are baptized into Christ, "mine elect", then for sure we are. And further, we have heard the call of the Gospel, we have been called- so, we are God's elect, His chosen ones. Of course the objection can be raised that the whole idea of calling or election may appear unfair. Indeed, the Greek word for "elect" can carry the idea of 'the favoured / favourite one'. There is no ultimate injustice here. The chosen One is the Lord Jesus, beloved for the sake of His righteousness, His spirit of life. Those who respond to the call to be "in Him" are counted likewise. And all this is the way, the method used, in order for God to be the one who counts us as right in the ultimate judgment- for "It is God that justifies".

8:34 *Who is he that condemns?*- There are many links between Romans and John's Gospel; when Paul asks where is anyone to condemn us (Rom. 8:34), we are surely intended to make the connection to Jn. 8:10, where the Lord asks the condemned woman the very same question. It's as if she, there, alone with the Lord, face down, is the dead ringer of every one of us. The legal allusion is definitely to the judge, the one who will pass sentence. The question is "Who is?" rather than "Where is?". It's not that God, the judge of all, abdicates His judgment throne and ceases to tell right from wrong. There is an integrity in His judgment. The answer of course is that it is *God* who is the One who passes

sentence. The rest of the verse goes on to speak of the Lord Jesus as our intercessor at His right hand. The point is, that God the righteous judge is going to take notice of the pleadings of His Son, whom He gave to die for our forgiveness and redemption. The idea of condemning must be seen in the context of Rom. 8:3, where we have just read that it is sin which is condemned by God, and He has already condemned it, in the crucified flesh of the Lord Jesus. "Sin" is condemned; we are not condemned. The point clearly is that it is our status "in Christ" and our disassociation from "sin", as strongly as Paul disassociated himself from "sin" in Rom. 7:15-23, which is the means by which we are saved, and not only saved but declared right.

*Christ died, and moreover, is risen again-* This is said in the context of the comment that it is God who judges. It's not that the death and resurrection of a person of itself can change the mind of God or lead Him to not condemn us, in some mystical way. We are saved by the Lord's death and resurrection in that we can identify with it by baptism into His death and resurrection, and be counted as Christ, the Son of God. It is this which affects how God judges us. There seems to be a link made between the Lord's death and the judgment in Rom. 8:34: "Who is he that judgeth / condemneth? It is Christ that died...", as if *He* and His death are the ultimate judgment. The Old Testament idea of judgment was that in it, the Lord speaks, roars and cries, and there is an earthquake and eclipse of the sun (Joel 3:16; Am. 1:2; Jer. 25:30; Ps. 46:7; Rev. 10:3). Yet all these things are associated with the Lord's death.

*Who is moreover at the right hand of God-* Note the double use of the idea of "moreover". Paul is building up his logic towards the final crescendo- that we are in fact saved from condemnation in Christ. This is classic Paul. The death of God's Son for us would be enough to persuade God the Judge of all. But further, He rose again; and we who are in Him are counted likewise to have died and risen again, as Paul has laboured in Romans 6. So, for sure we are saved. But yet further, God's risen Son is now at

His right hand, pleading for us! I suggest that the sequence here of “Died, rose again, alive at God’s right hand interceding for us” is somehow repeated in Rom. 14:9: “Christ both died and rose and revived”. In this case the “revived” would be a reference to the fact that He not only resurrected but is alive and active for us in mediation. In this sense, perhaps, “we are saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10). Being at the right hand was the position of favour, of honour. The point in this context is that if God so deeply respects His Son- and the theme of the Father’s genuine respect of His Son is a beautiful theme in Scripture- then surely He will be very open to the Son’s work for us. The suggestion has been made that the Greek for “right hand” is from the root word “to receive”, and in this verse the idea that Christ stands to receive is balanced with the comment that from that position He makes intercession or request for us His people. He is in the supreme place to receive- and He asks from there for us to be counted as in Him.

*Makes intercession* see on Rom. 8:27. We should not think that whenever we sin, we have an intercessor in Heaven who can gain forgiveness for us and set us back right with God. The whole argument in Romans is that we are “in Christ” by status and are counted as Him; all that is true of Him becomes true for us. It is not that we are in Christ one moment and then out of Him the next, to be brought back into our “in Christ” status by His intercession. For if this were the case, the implication would be that we were perfect when we were ‘being good’; and if one happened to die at a point of weakness, then we would be eternally damned. God’s way is more profound. We are counted permanently as “in Christ” by status, and in this sense we have already been redeemed, and are simply awaiting the physical articulation of that redemption at the Lord’s return. The imagery of the Lord Jesus as a priest offering Heavenly sacrifices is metaphor, and as such is limited. The position between Him today, His work for us, and the work of the Mosaic priests is not completely analogous. We do not need a Levitical priesthood because the Lord Jesus has replaced that, but this is not to say that He is exactly for us what the Levitical priests were for sinful

Israel. For what, then, does the Lord Jesus make intercession? I suggested under Rom. 8:27 that the intercession involves a transference of our mind, our spirit, to that of the Lord Jesus as He sits before God. In this sense the intercession of the Lord Jesus for us personally has an eternal quality to it (Heb. 7:25) in that our spirit, the essence of who we are, continues in the mind of the Lord Jesus even after we die; just as the memory or spirit of those we love lives on within us after their falling asleep. We are eternally positioned before God, thanks to the intercession of the Lord Jesus. However, it cannot be denied that the Greek for “intercession” does indeed carry the idea of obtaining something. It is used here in the very context of stating that the intercession is made at the “right hand” of God, the place of receiving (see commentary above). Paul uses a related word to that translated “intercession” in saying at another judgment seat that he has “obtained help from God” (Acts 26:22). Perhaps he said that fully aware that he in fact had a Heavenly intercessor, a true counsel for the defence. The same word for “obtain” which is part of that translated “intercessor” occurs in the context of our obtaining salvation and resurrection to life (2 Tim. 2:10; Heb. 11:35). It is this which has been interceded for and obtained for us by the Lord Jesus, seated as He is at the right hand, the place of receiving, of the Judge of all. In this sense His intercession has that eternal quality to it which we earlier observed (Heb. 7:25). And yet even this idea, that the intercession is for our salvation, still seems to be a too simplistic summary of what Paul really has in mind here. The Lord’s intercession for Stephen in his time of dying was surely not simply for Stephen’s salvation. Rather it seems to involve a representation of our spirit, our deepest essence of thought, feeling, personality and life situation, before the Father; intercession for our salvation; and also for other things which are on the Lord’s agenda for us, and which we in this life may always be ignorant of.

*For us-* This pregnant phrase *huper hemon* may mean simply “for us”, but *huper* could suggest the idea of over and above, beyond us, more than us. In this case, there would be connection with the thought recently expressed by Paul that although we know not

how to pray for as we ought, the Lord Jesus as “the Lord the Spirit” makes intercession for us, beyond what we can verbalize. And of course the idea would freely connect with Eph. 3:20, where Paul exalts that the Lord Jesus can do “exceeding [Gk. *huper*] abundantly above [Gk. *huper* again- the sense of ‘beyond’ is very strong here in the Greek] all we ask or think, through the power that works in us”. The wonder of it all will literally take us eternity to appreciate. Our innermost desire is for salvation, to serve God, to be as the Lord Jesus, to achieve His glory, both in our own characters and in all of creation. This, yet again, is the significance of Rom. 7:15-23, that despite our failings and weakness, these are indeed our core desires. And it is this spirit of ours which is transferred to the Lord Jesus and understood by the Father and Judge of all. And in response to those desires, even now, there is a power working within us to do and be for us, to work in and for us, things beyond our wildest dreams and spiritual fantasies.

Rom. 8:34,35 suggest that the love of Christ, from which we cannot be separated, is manifested to us through His intercessions for us. He doesn't offer our prayers to God all the time; He is our intercessor in the sense that He is always there as our representative, and on this basis we have acceptability with God, as we are in Him. This is proof enough that intercession is not equal to merely translating our prayers into a language God understands. We offer our prayers ourselves to God, as men have ever done. We are, in this sense, our own priesthood. We offer ourselves to God (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5). He Himself made only one offering of Himself; He does not offer Himself again. If He were on earth, He would not be a priest. It is the fact we are in Him that makes our offerings acceptable. Many passages concerning mediation refer to the Lord's mediation of the new covenant through the atonement God achieved through Him. None of them associate His mediation with the offering of our prayers to God. Indeed, several passages suggest that the actual fact of the exalted Lord now being in heavenly places, and we being in Him, is in fact the intercession necessary to bring about our redemption- rather than His translating, as it were, of our



actual words (Rom. 7:25; 8:34; 1 Jn. 2:1). The references to intercession likewise never suggest that Christ intercedes in the sense of offering our prayers to God. "Intercession" can be read as another way of describing prayer; this is how the term is invariably used (Jer. 7:16; 27:18; Rom. 11:2; 1 Tim. 2:1). Thus when Jeremiah is told not to intercede for Israel, this meant he was not to pray for them; it does not imply that he was acting as a priest to offer Israel's prayers to God. Nowhere in the Bible is the idea floated that a man can offer another man's prayers to God and thereby make them acceptable. The Greek for "intercession" essentially means to meet a person; prayer / intercession is a meeting with God. There is evidently nothing morally impossible about a man having direct contact with God in prayer without any priest or 'mediator'; the Old Testament abounds with such examples. The fact we are called upon to make intercession for others is surely conclusive proof that "intercession" means prayer, not relaying the words of another to God (1 Tim. 2:1). This meaning of intercession needs to be borne in mind when we consider its occurrences in Rom. 8. There we are taught that we know not what to pray for as we ought; the Lord Jesus makes intercession for us- i.e. He prays for us- not with words, i.e. not transferring our human words into God's language, not shuttling to and from between us and God as it were, but with His own groanings of the spirit. We don't know how to pray, so Christ prays (intercedes, in the language of Rom. 8) for us.

8:35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*- The "who?" may be a reference to God, because the "who?" of Rom. 8:33,34 was God. But the point there as here was that seeing God is the only One who can do such things, then we can rest assured that they will not happen. Because God, for the sake of His Son, will not do these things. We are "in Christ" by status, and what happened at baptism is not breakable by anything human. We cannot be separated from Him by all the calamities listed in this verse, an 8:36 goes on to remind us that this cannot happen because we are counted as the slaughtered Lamb, the Lord Jesus. The Greek for "separate" is usually used about divorce (1 Cor. 7:10,11,15; Mt. 19:6; Mk. 10:9). Only if we chose to as it were

divorce from Christ can we be separated from Him. Only we can make that choice- no human situation in our lives is to be interpreted as meaning that Christ has withdrawn His love from us. Reading the list of awful tribulations which follows, we are to understand that the love of Christ does not, therefore, guarantee that we will not suffer in this life. Indeed, as Rom. 8:36 will go on to show, we as “in Christ” must be prepared to be slain with Him all the day long, so as to live with Him. “The love of Christ” frequently refers to His death for us. The fact He died for us should be enough to persuade us that having loved us so much, no human tribulation could possibly be interpreted to mean that He in fact doesn’t love us. And yet people stumble from their faith in Christ because of tribulation, as the parable of the sower makes clear. Why this happens is partly because they have failed to be focused daily upon the cross- that He there, then, did that *for me* today. This, then, is our challenge- to view all of life’s tragedies, pain and unfairness through the lens of the simple fact that the Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me, and I as a man or woman in Him shall therefore live eternally.

*Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword-* This list is to be understood in the context of Rom. 8:36, that we are counted as in Christ, the slaughtered lamb, and therefore all His sufferings we expect to be somehow articulated in our own lives, just as His resurrection life also shall be. In the first century context, this list was the kind of ‘par for the course’ which anyone could expect who had signed up to be counted as “in Christ”. Twenty centuries later, the list may be more subtle, but nonetheless as painful. For the cross of Christ is the cross of Christ. The forms in which we share it may vary over history and geography, but the essence shall remain. Shall divorce, betrayal, cancer, false accusation- separate *us* from His love? They should not, but rather be seen as a very real sharing in His death and sufferings, from which we shall just as surely arise into new and eternal life. There are many connections between Romans the visions of Revelation. The whole court scene presented here in Romans 8, whereby the accuser of Christ’s brethren is now no longer in court, he and his case ‘thrown out of court’, is naturally

reminiscent of the scene in Revelation 12. There, the accusers of Christ's brethren are likened to the great Satan, the personified power of sin in its political manifestation, and this is also thrown out of 'heaven', out of the Heavenly court / throne room. The fact that *sin* has been conquered by Christ and 'thrown out' is therefore the guarantee that whatever oppressive sinful powers are now in authority, they in their turn will likewise be cast out. It's only a matter of time now- because sin in its essence has been cast out already. This explains the seamless way in which Paul now moves on from speaking of how the power sin has been nullified to talking of how therefore and thereby, all human opposition to God's people is now ultimately powerless.

*Tribulation*- - see on Rom. 5:3; 8:18. The word used in the parable of the sower and also about the tribulations of the last days before Christ returns (Mt. 13:21; 24:9,21). Only through such tribulations shall we enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). Significantly, Paul uses the word earlier in Romans, in speaking of the tribulation which shall come upon the rejected at the last day (Rom. 2:9). It's either tribulation then, or now. In this sense we can glory in tribulation, knowing it is the guarantee that we are really in Christ (Rom. 5:3). Hence in the practical part of Romans we are exhorted to patiently endure tribulation (Rom. 12:12).

*Distress*- Again, the same word used in Rom. 2:9 ["anguish"] about the distress of the rejected in the last day. We must experience it now, or then. Paul uses this word again in 2 Cor. 12:10, along with words similar in meaning to the list here in Rom. 8:35, in saying that we experience distresses "for Christ's sake", for the sake of the fact we are in Him and must have a part in His sufferings.

*Persecution* – The same word is used in the parable of the sower (Mt. 13:21), to which Paul seems to be making allusion in Rom. 8:35. Many of the words in this list are appropriate to Paul's

personal sufferings for the sake of His being “in Christ”. He too was persecuted (Acts 13:50; 2 Tim. 3:11), distressed etc. The list of his sufferings in 2 Cor. 12:10 includes this word and others in the list here. Again and again, Paul writes as if talking to himself, and as such sets himself up as the parade example of what he means.

*Famine*- Lack of food. Again, this word is in the list of Paul’s own sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:27. Perhaps Paul has specific reference to the famine which there was in the first century which affected the believers (Acts 11:28). And again, famine is to be one of the latter day tribulations (Mt. 24:7).

*Nakedness*- Lack of clothing. Again, this word is in the list of Paul’s own sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:27.

*Peril* - This word is only used elsewhere in the list of Paul’s own sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:26.

*Sword*- Note that Paul envisaged his readership as likely to suffer from the sword. And yet in Rom. 13:4 he speaks of the first century authorities as using the sword to execute God’s will against those who do wrong. This would lead us to interpret Rom. 13:4 as having specific and limited reference in time and space, perhaps only to the Rome ecclesia at a certain point in time and in some aspects of justice. Nothing, whatever, can separate us from the love of Christ towards us in His death (Rom. 8:35). His cross is therefore the constant rallying point of our faith, in whatever difficulty we live through. The resolve and strength we so need in our spiritual path can come only through a personal contemplation of the cross.

8:36 – see on Rom. 8:13. The key word in this verse is “accounted”. Because we are counted as Christ, the lamb slain (and the allusion here is definitely to Isaiah 53), then we should

not be phased by our experience of His cross in this life. Indeed we should expect it. We cannot look passively at the cross. It must change how we see ourselves. It must radically affect our self-perception and self understanding. For we are in Him. It was us who hung with Him there, and who hang with Him still in the tribulations of life. For we are to account / impute ourselves as the sheep for the slaughter, i.e. the Lord Jesus, for whose sake we are killed all the day long in the sharing of His sufferings (Rom. 8:36); with Paul, we “die daily”, because we are in Christ. And if we suffer with Him, we will also reign with Him (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). To see ourselves as in Christ, to have such a positive view of ourselves, that the essential ‘me’ is actually the sinless Son of God, is almost asking too much of men and women living with all the dysfunction and low self-worth that seems part of the human condition.

8:37 *No-* Paul seems again to be interpreting his readers’ response. ‘Surely it can’t be right that if we are in Christ, then we will suffer so much? Aren’t all these terrible tribulations the sign that we are rejected by God rather than accepted by Him?’. And Paul answers that “No!”- in fact the way that we lose in this life is a sign that we have won, and more than won- we have become “more than conquerors”. Truly “I feel like I win when I lose” can become our credo in spiritual life.

*In all these things-* Every time they happen to us, they are the proof that we have therefore already won, in the very thing wherein it seems we have ‘lost’. The sense here is very much what we meet in the sermon on the mount- that we are to rejoice when we are persecuted, attacked and abused, because in that moment our reward is very great in Heaven.

*More than conquerors-* See on Rom. 8:34 “for us”. Again the word *huper* is used; there is the idea of being over and above conquerors. There is something superlative about the great salvation which there is in Christ. We don’t just scrape in to

God's Kingdom and sit there in humble gratitude for eternity thinking how blessed / lucky we were. Not at all. We are in Christ, and all that is true of Him is now and shall eternally be true of us. We are crowned as conquerors- and "more than [*hyper*] conquerors". There's something 'hyper' about the nature and quality of our salvation. It is all so hyper abundantly above all we ask or think. And it begins now, and in this sense we have some sense, at least a gasp from a great distance, of the 'hyper' nature of it all. Paul surely has in mind how the Lord had comforted His people that "I have overcome [s.w. 'conquer'] the world" (Jn. 16:33). We are counted not only as overcomers just as Jesus was; but hyper-conquerors, hyper-overcomers. John alludes to this passage in his Gospel record when he comments in his letters that *we* have overcome the world because of our belief into Jesus (1 Jn. 2:13,14; 4:4; 5:4,5). Clearly John like Paul perceived the believer into Christ [involving baptism into Him] as having the same status as Christ; if He has overcome, so have we. There is also a legal connotation to the word translated "conquerors". The same word has been used in Rom. 3:4 to describe how God 'overcomes' when He is put in the dock and judged by human disbeliefs in His declared plan of salvation. Paul is now drawing his treatise to a conclusion. He began with us as sinners in the dock, accused by our own sins. He has argued that we have been declared right because we are in Christ; not simply 'let off', but declared right. We have won the case; the whole thing has been turned round. We the condemned are now the justified, we leave the courtroom as conquerors, as having legally overcome when we were judged; all, of course, because we are in Christ. We are right now more than conquerors through Christ (Rom. 8:37); and yet to he who overcomes [s.w. conquers] the Kingdom shall be given (Rev. 3:21). This doesn't mean we can sit back and do nothing. And so Paul goes on to exhort us not to be overcome [s.w. conquered] of evil, but to overcome evil with good (Rom. 13:21). "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who (or what) *can* be against us?". Paul caught the gloriously positive spirit of all this, and reflected it in his fondness for words with the *hyper*- prefix (Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 7:4; Phil. 2:9; 4:7; 1 Thess. 3:10; 4:6; 5:13; 2 Thess. 1:3). God is not passively waiting for us to act,

indifferently offering us the possible futures of salvation or condemnation according to our deeds. He earnestly desires our salvation, He wills and wishes us into the upward spiral of relationship with Him; He has given us spiritual potential and strength.

*Through Him that loved us-* The love of Christ is often specifically related to His death for us on the cross. We can only become “in Him” because He was so fully our representative, including in death itself. All this wonderful schema of salvation and justification of sinners, counting them as if they are Christ, could only come true because of His death. This was and is the central point of all things; it is not simply so that Christ as a person is the central means by which all was made possible, but more specifically it was His love unto death which was and is that central point.

8:38 *For I am persuaded-* Just as we also need lengthy persuasion as to the ultimate truth that we are saved in Christ, so Paul too had gone through this process of persuasion. The same word is often used to describe how Paul “persuaded” people to continue trusting in God’s grace rather than in their own works (Acts 13:43; 18:4; 19:26; 26:28; 28:23; 2 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 1:10)-indeed, persuading people seems to have been a hallmark of Paul’s preaching. Yet Paul persuaded others on the basis of how he himself had come to be persuaded; and this will be the characteristic of any truly effective preacher of the Gospel.

*That neither death nor life-* In Rom. 8:35 Paul has argued that no suffering nor disaster in our lives can separate us from “the love of Christ”. Now he starts to talk in more cosmic terms, leading up to the same conclusion- that we cannot be separated or divorced from God’s love for us which is “in Christ”. For those “in Christ”, nothing can stand in the way or change that status; only we can decide to file for divorce / separation. If we die- we shall be raised again. More tellingly, however, we may fear that “life”

can separate us from God's love; Paul may refer to 'the tribulations of life', but he may also have in view the way we can mess up in our lives. But not even that can separate us from God's love for those who are "in Christ". In what sense could *life* separate us from God's love? Surely only in the sense of sins committed in human life. Yet even these cannot separate us from the love of God which is so ready and eager to forgive us. This is the extent of grace; that not even sin, which on one hand separate from God, can actually separate us from the love of God in Christ. We are often plagued by a desire to separate out the things for which we are justly suffering, and things in which we are innocent victims. We struggle over whether our cancer or her depression is our fault, or whether we only got into unhealthy behaviours as a result of others' stressing us... etc. This struggle to understand the balance between personal guilt and being a victim of circumstance or other people makes it hard for some people to free themselves from guilt. Seeking to understand is especially acute when we face death, suffering, tragedy, or experience broken relationships. How much was I to blame? In how much was I merely a victim? My determined conclusion is that it is impossible, at least by any intellectual process, to separate out that suffering for which we are personally guilty, and that suffering which we are merely victims of. The cross of Jesus was not only to remove personal guilt through forgiveness; all our human sufferings and sicknesses were laid upon Him there. Our burdens, both of our own guilt and those which are laid upon us by life or other people, are and were carried by Him who is our total saviour.

*Angels, principalities, powers*- I have argued elsewhere that Paul and the New Testament do not support the Jewish ideas of sinful Angels operating in various hierarchies and dimensions. Indeed, I have argued in *The Real Devil* that Paul consciously deconstructs these ideas. But for now Paul is prepared to allude to them, as if to say 'Whatever you fear, whatever you believe is out there, however you believe it is in the cosmos- the wildest fears of your worst nightmares about the spirit world are not going to get in the way of God's love for those in Christ'.



*Things present nor things to come-* Whatever present crises you face, and whatever you may yet face. Knowing we are secured in Christ enables us not to fear the future. For even death itself, and all that may lead up to it, emotionally or physically, are unable to affect our “in Christ” status. “Things to come” may refer to the expected latter day tribulation.

8:39 Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ, as revealed in the cross (Rom. 8:39). The idea of the love of Christ nearly always refers to the cross. And yet the same word occurs in Heb. 7:26, to remind us that the Son of God is “separate from sinners”. Here again is the paradox. We are sinners. And yet we cannot be separated from He who is personally separate from sinners. Again, the conviction of guilt is required so that we can know His saving grace. But it’s possible to understand this contradiction as just that- a contradiction. The Lord Jesus is separate from sinners; but nothing shall separate *us* from Him, although we are sinners. This can be seen as yet another of the many irreconcilable paradoxes which express the purity of God’s grace. We have elsewhere commented upon the way that God angrily speaks of permanently rejecting His people, and yet says in the same breath almost that He has not and will never reject them, because of His tender love for them.

*Nor height nor depth nor any other creation-* “Height” and “depth” may refer to creations supposed to exist beneath the earth or above the heavens. But no created thing can obstruct God’s feelings for us in Christ. Because we are human we tend to view life in a materialistic way; what is visible and concrete assumes huge importance for us. But no created thing can get in the way of God’s love for us- perhaps, the implication being, because this God who so loves us is Himself the creator of all things. Therefore no created thing, in any dimension, in this world nor any other world or dimension, can affect His feelings for us. In exalting about the wonderful power of God in human life

through Christ, Paul exalts that “neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities,

nor things present nor things to come: nor height (Gk. *hypsoma* – the highest point a star reaches) nor depth (Gk. *bathos* – the abyss from which a star rises), nor any other creature, are able to separate us from the love of God” (Rom. 8:38,39). “The position of the stars was supposed to affect human destinies. ‘Whatever the stars may be supposed to do’, Paul says, ‘they cannot separate us from God’s love’” (5). Likewise by referring to “any other creature”, Paul seems to be saying that there is no reality, nor even any supposed reality in heaven and earth, that can separate us from God’s loving power. It seems to me, given the facts that Paul doesn’t teach the existence of a personal Satan / demons and so often deconstructs the common ideas about them, that Paul is effectively saying here: ‘Even if you think these things exist, well they are of utterly no power and consequence given the extraordinary and ultimate nature of God’s power’. And so the argument is wrapped up. God’s love for us who are “in Christ” is part and parcel of His love for Christ Himself, His dearly beloved Son. We will be saved, because we are in Christ. And totally nothing and nobody, not even our own humanity and failure, can separate us from Him and His love.

## Notes

- (1) F.F. Bruce, *Paul And Jesus* (London: S.P.C.K., 1977) p. 78.
- (2) Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993) p. 79.
- (3) Vincent Branick, “The Sinful Flesh of the Son of God”, *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 47 (1985) p. 250.
- (4) Stephen Finlan, *The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).
- (5) A.M. Hunter, *Romans* (London: S.C.M., 1981) p. 87.

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