

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Part I

Admonition for Believing Jews

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Paul's Letter to the Romans

Part I Admonition for Believing Jews

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Course Instructions

Course Purpose

Comprehensive study of the first 8 chapters of the New Testament book of Romans.

Course Objectives

1. Expository study to learn the background, intent, and audience for the letter, how Paul executed his intent, and how his teaching applies to us today.
2. Exegetical study of key passages to learn in depth the full meaning of their content relevant to Paul's intent in Romans as well as in parallel passages of his other writings.
3. Comparative study of classical commentators on the book of Romans to learn their thoughts and interpretation as compared to more contemporary writers.
4. Interactive study through class participation, oral presentation, and exchange with other students.
5. Mastery of the overall content of the first 8 chapters Romans, their application to the 1st century church, and their relevance to present day environment.

Course Requirements

1. Participate in 17 hours of class, divided into one 4-hour orientation class, four 3-hour study classes, and a 1-hour final exam.
2. Read the exposition for each lesson and answer in writing the 10 questions relating to the passage under study. Discuss answers in class.
3. Complete a written exegesis of a key verse or text for each lesson, drawn from the passage under study (use the study sheet provided as a guide). See the appendix for an explanation of exegesis methodology. Orally present in class a brief synopsis of the exegesis.
4. Read the texts of classical commentators assigned in each lesson and write a 1-page summary comparing the classical comments with the contemporary writings cited in the exposition. MA students: Read an additional, assigned text and write a 1½-page summary derived from all comments read. Summaries are to be single spaced in Times New Roman font size 12. Orally present in class a brief synopsis of the summary.
5. Write a 10-page essay expanding one of the exegetical studies of key verses/texts. The essay should adhere to the MINTS format of title page, table of contents, 7 body pages, and bibliography. Essays are to be single spaced in Times New Roman font size 12. Draft the essay through group interaction with other students.
6. Complete the final exam – an impromptu, approximately 3-page essay on a theme of the instructor's choosing, drawn from the first 8 chapters of Romans.

Course Evaluation

1. One point for each hour of class participation for a total of 17 points (17% of grade).
2. Two points for answering each set of 10 questions for a total of 16 points (16% of grade).
3. Two points for completing written exegesis of a key verse/text for each lesson and orally presenting a brief synopsis for a total of 16 points (16% of grade).
4. Two points for completing the readings and writing a 1-page (1½-page for MA including extra reading) comparison summary for each lesson and orally presenting a brief synopsis for a total of 16 points (16% of grade).
5. Twenty points for completing the 10-page essay expanding one of the exegesis studies (20% of grade).
6. Fifteen points for completing the final exam (15% of grade).

Course Materials

1. The student manual of 8 lessons on the first 8 chapters of Romans (enclosed).
2. Access to at least two English versions of the book of Romans (many are available on line, e.g. crosswalk.com). The student manual uses the NIV basically, and cites other versions when referenced.
3. Access to classical commentaries on the book of Romans (most are available on line, e.g. ccel.org).
4. Preferably, access to one or two of the more contemporary commentaries on Romans listed in the bibliography.

Class Activities

A. Orientation (4 hours)

a. First hour

- i.* Introduce the professor, facilitator, and students
- ii.* Introduce course format
- iii.* Review lessons one and two

b. Second hour

- i.* Review lessons three and four
- ii.* Review the schedule for discussing answers to the questions: answers for lessons 1 & 2 will be discussed during study class 1; for lessons 3 & 4 – study class 2; lessons 5 & 6 – study class 3; lessons 7 & 8 – study class 4. Answers must be written out for credit.

c. Third hour

- i.* Review lessons five and six

- ii. Review the methodology for exegesis studies and the schedule for oral presentations. Same timeline as for discussing answers to the questions. Individual presentations should be no more than 5 minutes per lesson (time allotments and/or the percentage of students presenting during any one class may vary depending on class size). Exegesis must be written for credit.

d. Fourth hour

- i. Review lessons seven and eight
- ii. Review the schedule for orally presenting the comparison summaries. Same timeline as for discussing answers to the questions and presenting exegesis studies. Individual presentations should be no more than 5 minutes per lesson (time allotments and/or the percentage of students presenting during any one class may vary depending on class size).
- iii. Review the format and interactive process for drafting the 10-page essay expanding one of the exegesis studies.
- iv. Discuss the essay for the final exam – time allotment, content and length, expectation with regard to theme.

B. Study Classes (3 hours each)

[Notes:

- The facilitator will mark grade points earned for each class in the Class Record
- Students will lose 1 pt for every 10min tardy to class
- Students will lose 1 pt for each assignment, written or oral, not completed on time]

a. Study Class #1

- i. Mark attendance (3 pts).
- ii. Ensure completion of written answers to questions for lessons 1 and 2 (4 pts). Hold class discussion of answers. (45 min)
- iii. Ensure written completion of exegesis for lessons 1 and 2 (4 pts). Hear student presentations (5min per student per lesson) including time for discussion. (45 min)
- iv. Ensure completion of 1-page (1½-page for MA including extra commentaries) comparison summaries for lessons 1 and 2 (4 pts). Hear student presentations (5min per student per lesson) including time for discussion. (45 min)
- v. Hold class discussion (or break into groups, if a large class) of the exegeses and the comparison studies (as they may relate to the

exegeses) for lessons 1 and 2, in preparation for each student's selection of an exegesis for the 10-page essay. Consider the format. Recommend the following divisions: introduction, inductive study, expositional study, literary study, analytical study, devotional study, and conclusion. (20 min)

b. Study Class #2

- i. Mark attendance (3 pts).
- ii. Ensure completion of written answers to questions for lessons 3 and 4 (4 pts). Hold class discussion of answers. (40 min)
- iii. Ensure written completion of exegesis for lessons 3 and 4 (4 pts). Hear student presentations (5min per student per lesson) including time for discussion. (40 min)
- iv. Ensure completion of 1-page (1½-page for MA including extra commentaries) comparison summaries for lessons 3 and 4 (4 pts). Hear student presentations (5min per student per lesson) including time for discussion. (40 min)
- v. Hold class discussion (or break into groups, if a large class) of the exegeses and comparison studies for lessons 1 through 4. Before the next class, each student should select an exegesis for expansion into a 10-page essay (a student may exegete a verse/text from a future lesson as basis for the essay, if desired). Consider the format discussed in the earlier class. Bring to the next class the title page, table of contents, and bibliography for the essay. (35 min)

c. Study Class #3

- i. Mark attendance (3 pts).
- ii. Ensure completion of written answers to questions for lessons 5 and 6 (4 pts). Hold class discussion of answers. (40 min)
- iii. Ensure written completion of exegesis for lessons 5 and 6 (4 pts). Hear student presentations (5min per student per lesson) including time for discussion. (40 min)
- iv. Ensure completion of 1-page (1½-page for MA including extra commentaries) comparison summaries for lessons 5 and 6 (4 pts). Hear student presentations (5min per student per lesson) including time for discussion. (40 min)
- v. Each student should have the title page, table of contents, and bibliography for the 10-page essay expanding an exegesis study. Break

students into small groups to enable focused exchange of ideas, suggestions, and comments regarding one other's intended essays. Encourage written comments and notes. For the next class, each student should draft the body of the essay for further exchange. (35 min)

d. Study Class #4

- i. Mark attendance (3 pts).
- ii. Ensure completion of written answers to questions for lessons 7 and 8 (4 pts). Hold class discussion of answers. (40 min)
- iii. Ensure written completion of exegesis for lessons 7 and 8 (4 pts). Hear student presentations (5min per student per lesson) including time for discussion. (40 min)
- iv. Ensure completion of 1-page (1½-page for MA including extra commentaries) comparison summaries for lessons 7 and 8 (4 pts). Hear student presentations (5min per student per lesson) including time for discussion. (40 min)
- v. Each student should have a full draft manuscript of the 10-page essay expanding an exegesis study. Break students into small groups to again enable focused exchange of ideas, suggestions, and comments regarding one other's completed drafts. Again, encourage written comments and notes. (35 min)

C. Final Exam (1 hour)

- a. Mark attendance (1 pt).
- b. Collect finished manuscripts of the 10-page essay (20 pts).
- c. Assign the theme for the final exam, a ~3-page impromptu essay (15 pts). (50 min)
- d. Collect final exams at the conclusion of the 50-min period.

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Part I Admonition for Believing Jews

Introduction

Paul has not been to Rome. He's long wanted to go there, but his priority has been, and remains, preaching to those who have not yet heard the gospel (Ro 15:20-22). The Church has been in Rome for some time, likely inaugurated by those who returned there after Pentecost (Acts 2:10). But now might be the time for a visit. He's preached all over Asia and Greece (Ro 15:19), and now, as he says in Ro 15:23, "there is no more place for me to work in these regions." So he plans to push farther west – to Spain (Ro 15:24). Rome is along the way. And, moreover, it would be a good base of operations for points west, as Syrian Antioch has been for the Eastern Mediterranean.¹ Thus, he writes to those in Rome, announcing that he intends to visit after he completes a little chore – delivering the contribution from the brothers in Greece and Macedonia to the poor in Jerusalem (Ro 15:26).

But, while Paul's intended visit may be the occasion for his writing to the Romans, it's not the purpose. In his long letter (the longest of Paul's extant letters) he doesn't merely announce travel plans. Rather, he addresses at length a continuing, fundamental schism in the budding Church: the issue of the Jews as God's historically chosen and covenant people versus the Gentiles, new-comers who don't adhere to the Law of Moses.

The year is AD 57.² Paul is most likely in Corinth during his 3-month stay in Greece (Acts 20:2-3). Here, as nearly everywhere he has preached the gospel, Paul encounters opposition from the Jews. This continuing opposition comes, fundamentally, from two sides: 1) from Christ-believing, Law-abiders who argue that Gentile believers must come under the Law to complete their conversion, and 2) from essentially non-believers who contend that God's plan of salvation is for Jews only. The Council in Jerusalem supposedly resolved the former point years earlier (Acts Ch. 15). But in reality, the Council's decree did little to stem the controversy. Paul intends to address both points in his letter to the Romans.

In Rome, it seems, the schism between Jew and Gentile believers has become quite pronounced. It likely was the cause for the emperor Claudius' driving the Jews out of Rome in

¹ Stott, p. 33, citing N. T. Wright. *The Climax and the Covenant. Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (T. and T. Clark, 1991), p. 234.

² Bruce, p. 316.

AD 49³ (Acts 18:2). Now they have returned, following the death of Claudius in AD 54, but the issue remains. And the schism goes beyond the Jewish air of superiority that insisted on imposing traditional legalistic practices on the Gentiles; the Gentiles, for their part, are becoming arrogant toward the Jews since the traditions of the Law of Moses don't apply to them.⁴ As Stott says, "Paul saw the need to humble them both."⁵

The letter's purpose aside, what does it teach us? Paul may not have intended his letter to be a "Christian Manifesto,"⁶ but it turned out that way in many respects. It's the most comprehensive scriptural treatise of the gospel and the consequent new-covenant Jew/Gentile relationship available to us. Such well-known church leaders as Augustine, Luther, and Wesley (among others) have testified to the fundamental impact Paul's letter to the Romans had on their conversion and/or Christian walk.⁷ The letter follows much of what Paul had to say to the Galatians years earlier. But that letter was reactionary, conveying Paul's dismay that the Galatians were so easily, seemingly, drawn off the mark by misguided judaizers.⁸ Paul has mellowed since then. This letter is more winsome – direct but soft in tone, methodically constructed, and continual in its citing of scripture to support the text. One can imagine Paul preaching the same in a synagogue or house church, "proving" his point as Luke severally describes in the book of Acts.

In these first eight chapters, Paul for the most part addresses believing Jews.⁹ To be sure, he addresses also the Gentiles who likely constitute the majority of believers in Rome.¹⁰ But the conflict stems from those who consider "Christianity" a mere extension of the Law.¹¹ The Jews strenuously object to Paul's teaching otherwise, and they bear no countenance for the "Law-less" Gentiles.

Paul sets up a *diatribe* (which he uses throughout the letter) to answer objections which he almost certainly heard again and again in each new synagogue he visited during his journeys. The *diatribe* was a frequently used literary style of imaginary conversation with an opponent.¹² Paul's "imaginary" point/counterpoint centers on grace vs. the Law, and why the two are not in

³ *Ibid.*, p. 381ff.

⁴ Stott, p. 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20ff.

⁸ See Bruce, p. 325.

⁹ This conclusion is not without controversy (see Moo, pp. 9ff for an in-depth treatment of the topic).

¹⁰ Stott, p. 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹² See Moo, pp. 125f, for an explanation of "diatribe."

conflict. The Jews had long come to consider obedience to the Law as the essence of salvation; Paul strives through the diatribe to correct this error, and to explain God's intended purpose in giving the Law. In so doing, he lays out for the Roman believers – and for us by extension – a clear picture of God's plan: Justification by grace alone, through faith in the redeeming work of Christ Jesus.

Lesson I

The Issue

A. Exposition of 1:1-15

a. Introduction

Paul's opening contains the essence of his intent in writing the letter. In a rather unusual maneuver, he not so subtly discloses the heart of his message in his salutation: The scriptures (i.e. our Old Testament – the only “scriptures” at the time) reveal the gospel, attest to Jesus as the redeeming Messiah, and point to the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's new covenant of grace. But Paul also seeks a relationship with the Romans; he spends nearly half the passage praising their faith and discussing his intention to visit.

b. Straight to the Point – 1:1-4

The initial hint of the letter's purpose occurs in the second verse. In the first verse, Paul identifies himself, standard protocol in letter-writing of the day.¹ And as normal in his opening statements, he stipulates his calling: “An apostle set apart for the gospel of God.” But then he uses this stipulation to immediately digress and point out that this is the gospel that God “promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures” (v. 2). His opening clearly aims at the Jews. He quickly draws upon their own scriptures to lay a foundation citing God – not himself – as the author of what he teaches, and hence, his letter's substance.

He continues the digression to specify that God's promised gospel concerns his Son, descended from David in the flesh (v. 3) and raised in power through the Holy Spirit (v. 4a). And he identifies God's Son as Jesus, the Messiah² and our Lord (v. 4b). The Jews understood from scripture that the Messiah would descend from David.³ They also understood “Son of God” (v. 4a) as a messianic title from Ps 2:7.⁴ For “Holy Spirit,” Paul uses the phrase “Spirit of holiness” – the only occurrence of this phrase in the New Testament – which is the literal Greek translation of the OT Hebrew equivalent of Holy Spirit.⁵ At each step from v. 2 through v. 4, Paul employs

¹ Stott, p. 46.

² The literal meaning of “Christ.”

³ See Moo, p. 46.

⁴ Stott, p. 49.

⁵ See Moo, p. 50.

OT thought to “prove” the truth of the resurrected Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah foretold in scripture – probably in much the same way he would if he had just stepped into a synagogue.

Believing Jews in Rome have already accepted this truth, as presented thus far. But Jesus’ resurrection, in contrast to his incarnation, signals a *new* thought: A change or progression from *old* to *new* – from the old era of the “flesh” (pre-resurrection) to the new era of the “Spirit” (post-resurrection).⁶ And herein is the rub. Most of the believing Jews don’t see a progression to *new* – they see an extension of the *old*. They don’t grasp that Jesus’ resurrection inaugurated a new age of grace that *frees* them from the old age of bondage to the Law. Indeed, they don’t see bondage in the Law at all. Rather, they see *obedience* in the Law – obedience to God through adhering to the Law’s works. This is what Moses taught...this is what God required...and this is how it’s been for the past many centuries. For this very reason – that the Jews haven’t grasped the full truth – Paul in this letter will extensively elaborate on what he so succinctly captures in vv. 3-4.

c. *The Good News is for All Nations – 1:5-6*

Paul says he received⁷ apostleship to bring about “obedience of faith”⁸ (v. 5a - NASB). What does this mean? The Greek phrasing unavoidably allows alternative interpretations. Thus, most commentators devote a few pages to its discussion. It could be rendered as obedience to the faith, or obedience that is faith,⁹ or the NIV’s “obedience that comes from faith,”¹⁰ or some other, minor contender. The alternatives aside, however, Stott (albeit in passing) makes an insightful observation: “Obedience of faith” stands in opposition to “obedience of Law.”¹¹ This, I believe, gets to the heart of it. Paul sees his apostleship as bringing people to an understanding that *faith* is the response to the good news of Christ’s redeeming work – not continued obedience to the works of the Law. In this light, we see a flowing continuity of thought from vv. 3-4 (see above) into v. 5: The new age of grace that Christ’s resurrection inaugurated is obtained by faith, a truth that Jesus has commissioned Paul to teach.

Paul further says in v. 5 that his commission is to bring about this obedience of faith “among all the nations”¹² (v. 5b). The predilection most scholars exhibit toward rendering “nations,” here,

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Most scholars agree that in saying “we received” in v. 5 Paul was using the royal *we* vice including other apostles (e.g. Stott, p. 51; Moo, p. 51).

⁸ Lit: “unto obedience of faith” (εις υπακοην πιστεως).

⁹ E.g. Murray (see vol. I, pp. 13f) and Moo (see pp. 51f) favor this interpretation.

¹⁰ E.g. Stott (see pp. 52f) and Mounce (see pp. 62f) champion this version.

¹¹ Stott, p. 52.

¹² The Greek word εθνη (pl) literally means “nations,” but it frequently denoted those outside the nation of Israel; i.e. “Gentiles.”

as “Gentiles” seems shortsighted.¹³ Why be so limiting? True, Paul was Apostle to the Gentiles – but not exclusively.¹⁴ Arguments that Paul must be addressing Gentiles, since that was his commission; and that the point/counterpoint of Law vs. grace throughout the letter must be aimed at Gentile proselytes¹⁵...I find unconvincing. And I find illogical the implication from these arguments that Paul needed to convince the *Gentiles*, proselyte or no, that salvation included the *Jews*. The situation was quite the opposite.

Stott, I believe, sums it well by pointing out Paul’s “unique position.” He was both a patriotic Jew *and* Apostle to the Gentiles. He had insight into both sides of the Jew/Gentile conflict. His “ministry” to the Roman believers was one of reconciliation, something his unique insight could well serve. A major part of that reconciliation was the “consequent redefinition” of the people of God. No longer were God’s people defined by descent, circumcision, or culture. Rather, they were defined by one thing: faith. And all shared the same guilt of sin, and the same means to salvation.¹⁶ This redefinition is a recurring theme in Paul’s letters. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”¹⁷ Consistent with this redefinition, therefore, Paul in Ro 1:5 addresses “the nations” inclusively vice “the Gentiles” exclusively.

And the purpose of Paul’s commission? Why is he bringing about obedience of faith among all the nations? “For the sake of his [Christ’s] name” (v. 5c - ESV). The NIV places this phrase near the beginning of v. 5, losing some of its emphasis. This phrase is the point. This is why Paul does what he does. It “expresses the ultimate focus of Paul’s ministry.”¹⁸ And Paul quickly brings the Roman believers into this focus by saying they are included...they are among the nations being brought the obedience of faith...they, too, are called to belong to Christ (v. 6).

In the first six verses of his letter, Paul has encapsulated the “good news.”¹⁹ Stott sums these verses into what he calls “six fundamental truths”: The gospel is “*of* God, *about* Christ, *according to* Scripture, *for* the nations, *unto* the obedience of faith, and *for the sake of* the Name.”²⁰

¹³ By far, most Bible versions translate the word as “nations”; NIV and NASB are notable exceptions.

¹⁴ See Acts 9:15.

¹⁵ See Moo, pp. 9ff; Murray, vol. I, pp. xvii & ff.

¹⁶ Stott, pp. 35f.

¹⁷ Gal 3:28.

¹⁸ Moo, p. 53.

¹⁹ Literal for “gospel” (ευαγγελιον).

²⁰ Stott, p. 54.

d. Paul a Debtor to All People – 1:7-15

After his long digression aimed more toward the Jewish believers, Paul now addresses “all” the saints in Rome (v. 7). He maintains the air of inclusion begun in v. 5 by using terms familiar in OT scripture as referring to God’s people. “Beloved of God”²¹ and “called [as] saints”²² both echo OT designations of Israel.²³ And “beloved of God” is used uniquely here.²⁴ Paul’s use of the terms seems a conscious effort to convey that all believers, Jew and Gentile, belong to God’s covenant people.²⁵

Paul also conveys that his correspondence is not meant to be purely academic. Having not been to Rome, he desires above all to cultivate a relationship.²⁶ He gives thanks for their faith (v. 8), he prays for them, he says he “longs” (v. 11) to see them and even planned many times to do so. Now, “at last” (v. 10), God may have opened the way.

Although Paul doesn’t want to build “on someone else’s foundation”²⁷ (a reference to his not having founded the Church in Rome), he nonetheless desires to “have a harvest” (v. 13) among the Gentiles there. Why? Paul speaks of it as *indebtedness*²⁸ (v. 14). Jesus himself has put Paul *in debt* by charging him to carry His Name into the world, especially to the Gentiles²⁹ – *all* the Gentiles – refined and barbaric,³⁰ wise and foolish. This *indebtedness* is why Paul is “so eager” to preach to the Gentiles in Rome (v. 15).³¹

e. Conclusion

Paul has introduced the issue, the Jew/Gentile conflict. More specifically, he has pointed to the believing Jews’ failure to grasp the new covenant of grace. In so pointing, he has set a foundation he will build upon over the next several chapters.

²¹ NASB

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Moo, p. 54.

²⁴ Murray, vol. I, p. 15.

²⁵ Stott, p. 55f.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁷ Ro 15:20.

²⁸ Literally, “I am a debtor” (οφειλετης εμι). Many Bible versions prefer to interpolate “obligation” here.

²⁹ See Acts Ch. 9.

³⁰ Greeks regarded themselves as “refined” speakers compared to foreigners attempting to speak Greek, whom they regarded as “barbaric” (see Moo, p. 61f).

³¹ See Stott, p. 59.

B. Questions *(drawn from both the Introduction to Part I and Lesson I)*

1. What is the fundamental occasion and purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans?
 2. What is the schism in the church between Jew and Gentile?
 3. How is Paul's letter to the Romans similar/different from his letter to the Galatians?
 4. Whom does Paul address in this initial section of his letter?
 5. From where would the Jews have first learned of the gospel?
 6. What does Paul "prove" from OT thought?
 7. What new thought emerges when contrasting Jesus' incarnation with his resurrection?
 8. What's the significance of "obedience of faith"?
 9. What's the one thing that defines the people of God post-resurrection?
 10. Since Paul did not found the church in Rome, why does he seek to "have a harvest" there?
-

C. Exegesis

Select a verse or text from Ro 1:1-15, and write down the verse/text from a bible version of your choosing. Following the sample outline given in Appendix A, write an inductive, expositional, literary, analytical, and devotional study of your selection. Appendix A provides an explanation of these study methods. Choose a title for your study, and make concise notes as indicated. Appendix B provides a sample exegesis.

D. Classical Comments

For Martin Luther, Paul’s letter to the Romans was “truly the most important piece in the New Testament.”³² Romans had a profound impact on Luther’s reformation – in fact, it was key to his break with the Roman Catholic Church. Read Luther’s preface to Romans.³³ Assimilate his overall thoughts on the letter into your study of other classical writers for this and following lessons. [Unfortunately, only the preface to Luther’s commentary is available on line.]

John Calvin, in the opening to his commentary on Romans,³⁴ wrote that he considered the letter so “excellent” that he was somewhat reluctant to comment. Read the first three paragraphs of Calvin’s opening “Argument” as well as his commentary on the first 15 verses of Chapter 1.³⁵

Mathew Henry is renowned for his Commentary on the Whole Bible. Although he died before he could complete his commentary on Romans, others composed it based on his manuscripts and notes. Read his commentary on the first 15 verses of Romans Chapter 1.³⁶

Write a 1-page comparison of Calvin’s and Henry’s comments on Ro 1:1-15, including what thoughts Luther had relevant to the passage. Contrast these, where appropriate, with the exposition citing contemporary scholars, above.

³² Luther, “Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans,” translated by Bro. Andrew Thornton, OSB.

³³ Available at ccel.org.

³⁴ Calvin, “Epistle to the Romans: The Argument.”

³⁵ Available at ccel.org.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Lesson II

True Righteousness

A. Exposition of 1:16-17

a. Introduction

Having laid a foundation upon which to build in the first few verses of his letter, Paul here captures the essence of the gospel and the new covenant of grace. He stipulates the true source of righteousness: God – not the Law, nor obedience to its works...and not any effort of man.

b. The “Power of God” – 1:16a

Paul has just conveyed how eager he is to preach the gospel to the Romans (v. 15). Now, he seemingly blurts out an assertion that he’s “not ashamed” of the gospel. Why would he be ashamed? It’s not hard to see his assertion as underscoring his eagerness to preach, in Rome or anywhere, but why did he feel the need to state he wasn’t “ashamed”? Stott once heard during a sermon on this text, “there’s no sense in declaring you’re not ashamed...unless you’ve been tempted to feel ashamed.”¹ Had Paul at one time been ashamed...or been tempted so? For that matter, have we ever been ashamed of the gospel? Jesus admonished his disciples to not be ashamed of him,² and Paul in turn admonished Timothy to not be ashamed of testifying about the Lord.³ “The emotion of shame,” says Murray, “betrays unbelief in the truth of the gospel.”⁴ Certainly, Paul didn’t suffer from unbelief.

Paul is the great stalwart of the gospel. All we know of him attests to this. Paul preaches the gospel wherever he goes – it’s his reason for living.⁵ From the time we first encounter him preaching, he’s doing so without regard to opposition, or even to his physical well-being.⁶ So, *why* does Paul need to emphasize that he’s not ashamed...? I believe it’s a statement of confidence – confidence in what he believes. More accurately, confidence in *whom* he believes.

¹ Stott, p. 60.

² Mk 8:38

³ 2Tim 1:8.

⁴ Murray, vol. 1, p. 26.

⁵ Cf. Phil 1:20ff.

⁶ See Acts Ch. 13ff.

Paul wrote to Timothy, “I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is able...”⁷ (emphasis added).

Paul is confident. He has no doubt about the truth of the gospel. If he visits Rome, he *will* preach the gospel there. And what drives him in this confidence? Why will he so certainly preach wherever he goes? “Because,” v. 16 continues, the gospel “is the power of God unto salvation”⁸ (emphasis added).

What does that mean – *the power of God*? Mounce says, “The gospel is God at work.”⁹ Paul’s phrase puts salvation into its proper context. It’s *God* who does the saving, and it’s his *power* that brings it about in us. Paul’s statement contrasts with the Law – the *effort of man* – which *can’t* lead to salvation. Although the Law is of God, its practice is of man. Man is the weak link (Paul will address this in more detail in subsequent chapters).

So, Paul is confident in the gospel. He’s confident that when he preaches, God will execute His power to save His people. He’s confident that God, and only God, can accomplish this. Indeed Luther, in decrying any ability of man to contribute to his own salvation, wrote that “God, by the cross of Christ, has utterly declared null and void” any such perceived ability. For “man’s own power must be destroyed,” he declared, “otherwise, the power of God will not be in us.”¹⁰

And with that, Paul deftly weaves his way back to the reason for his letter – the Jew/Gentile conflict in the Church. The gospel is the power of God unto the salvation of “everyone who believes” (emphasis added). For the Jew reading/hearing this letter (whether believing or not), this statement constitutes a (somewhat shocking) redefinition of God’s people.¹¹ For centuries, God’s chosen people have been the Hebrew nation, from which the Jews descend. All those other “nations” – i.e. “Gentiles” – were excluded. But in reality, God never intended to “exclude” the Gentiles.¹² Rather, he established a temporary “barrier” between the Hebrews (the Jews) and the Gentiles – a barrier which he has now “destroyed” through the work of his Son, Christ Jesus.¹³

This redefinition – the destruction of the “barrier” – along with faith superseding the works of the Law are the two biggest points Paul strives to convey to the Jews.¹⁴ And they’re the two biggest obstacles for the Jews. The Jews are having a hard time coming to grips with these two

⁷ 2Tim 1:12.

⁸ Literal translation (Δυναμις γαρ θεου εστιν εις σωτηριαν).

⁹ Mounce, p. 70.

¹⁰ Luther, p. 40.

¹¹ See *Lesson 1* for initial discussion of the “consequent redefinition” of God’s people.

¹² Paul will address this in detail in later chapters.

¹³ See Eph 2:14.

¹⁴ See Stott, p. 35f.

“big changes,” as they see them. So hard, that most Jews have become and remain hostile to Paul, and they accuse him, essentially, of ungodliness in proclaiming these two points. Paul will try over the next several chapters to bring these points home through diatribe.¹⁵

Paul explains his statement that salvation is for “everyone” by pointing out that it’s for everyone who “believes” – as opposed to everyone keeping works of the Law. And what do they “believe”? That Christ has redeemed them...has paid for their sins...and will raise them up at the Last Day. They have *faith* in Christ. Moo says the noun “faith” and the verb “believe”¹⁶ are key words in Romans. He points out that Paul’s use of these words goes beyond mere intellectual assent of what Christ has done. To “believe” is to put “full trust” in God. “Faith” is total “surrender” to God. And Paul will emphasize in his letter that faith is not to be construed as a “work.” “Believing” is not something we *do*. Rather, it’s our *response* to the gift – our *acceptance* of God’s gift to us of his grace.¹⁷ Stott talks about saving faith as the great leveler. “For, everyone who is saved is saved in exactly the same way, by faith.”¹⁸

c. “First for the Jew” – 1:16b

Why “first for the Jew”? Immediately after saying that salvation is for *everyone* who believes, Paul singles out the Jew *first*. Why is that? For the answer, we must look to whom the Promise was made – Abraham and his descendants,¹⁹ who are (now) the Jews. Paul will later enumerate (in Ro 9:4-5) the favor God bestowed upon his chosen people over the centuries, including the human lineage of Christ. Also, Jesus himself indicated that his mission (initially) was to “the lost sheep of Israel.”²⁰ Early in Paul’s ministry, in Psidian Antioch, he along with Barnabas pointed out to a crowd of Jews jealous of the Gentiles hearing the gospel, that “we had to speak...to you first.”²¹ But since that crowd had rejected the gospel – had not considered themselves “worthy of eternal life” – Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles.²²

Moreover, support for Paul’s statements can be found early in Acts, where Luke quoted Jesus as saying witness of him would be in seeming progression from Jerusalem and all Judea to Samaria and the whole world²³ – i.e. to the Jew first. On this point, Murray cautions that this “priority” to the Jews should not be construed as pertaining to Paul’s time, only. Rather, the

¹⁵ See the Introduction to Part I for a discussion of “diatribe.”

¹⁶ In Greek, “faith” (πιστις) and “believe” (πιστευω) have the same root.

¹⁷ See Moo, p. 67.

¹⁸ Stott, pp. 60-61.

¹⁹ See Gen 12:2ff.

²⁰ Math 15:24.

²¹ Acts 13:46.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Acts 1:8.

power of God unto salvation through faith has “primary relevance” to the Jew. The promise of the gospel is (through the Hebrews) to the Jew.²⁴ Peter on Pentecost specified to the Jews, “The promise is for you and your children.”²⁵ Given all this, how strange and “totally contrary” it is, as Murray comments, that some contemporary thinking leans toward Jews having their own brand of salvation outside Christianity.²⁶ That comment aside, the gospel is, indeed, “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

d. *The “Righteousness of God” – 1:17a*

Verse 17 may well be the meatiest statement in the letter to the Romans. In it, Paul captures the essence of God’s power in the gospel: his *righteousness*. For apart from God, there is no righteousness. And without righteousness, there is no salvation. OT scripture is rife with prophecies that God would reveal *his* righteousness...*his* salvation.²⁷ Murray writes that in the language of these OT texts the salvation of God and the righteousness of God “are virtually synonymous.”²⁸ The Jews would have been familiar with these prophecies. Thus, Paul writes that in the gospel “the righteousness of God is revealed.”²⁹ In this phrase, Paul hammers home two points. First, he stipulates that righteousness is “of God,” as opposed to “of man” (which is pure delusion).³⁰ He emphasizes for the Jews (and for the Gentiles that might be swayed by the Jews) that their effort to keep the Law may be obedient, but it’s not righteous. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Paul says that this righteousness (the *only* righteousness) is now “revealed.” The prophecies are fulfilled. Here at last – in the gospel – is the righteousness and salvation of which God spoke through his prophets.

And what *is* God’s righteousness? Stott comments that the phrase has attracted throughout church history “an enormous, even unmanageable, literature”³¹ all clamoring to decipher what Paul really meant. Commentators generally categorize this literature into fundamentally three alternative emphases that define the phrase (and God’s righteousness) as either an attribute (God’s character), an activity (God’s saving intervention), or an achievement (the status God has bestowed upon believers through Christ’s work). Stott is not alone in concluding that Paul intended, at the very least, the latter. Thus, the NIV interpolates, “righteousness from God.” But

²⁴ See Murray, vol. 1, p. 28.

²⁵ Acts 2:39.

²⁶ Murray, vol. 1, p. 28. This refers to the “New Perspective” on Paul, a discussion of which we will take up in a subsequent lesson.

²⁷ E.g. Ps 98:1-2, Is 46:13, Is 51:5-8, Is 56:1, Is 62:1.

²⁸ Murray, p. 29.

²⁹ NASB.

³⁰ Cf. Phil 3:9.

³¹ Stott, p. 61.

Stott points out, wisely I think, that in defining God’s righteousness “all three are true” – why do we have to choose?³² A holy and righteous God (his character) has imputed his very righteousness to us (his activity); thus, we stand before him in possession of his own righteousness (his achievement). And that’s the *only* way the unrighteous can become righteous (justified) in God’s sight.

Mounce writes, “This radical departure from conventional wisdom had to be ‘revealed’.”³³ The “conventional wisdom” he refers to is man’s fatally flawed concept of righteousness: approval through effort – If we *do* good, we’ll *be* righteous. The idea that we might have God’s approval through *no* effort simply does not compute in normal human terms. Still today, as then, many cannot get past the thought that they must do *something* to earn God’s favor. They do not grasp “the righteousness of God” foretold in OT scripture and “revealed” in the gospel.

e. “From Faith to Faith” – 1:17b

The “meat” of v. 17 continues. Paul writes that the gospel reveals God’s righteousness “out of faith unto faith.”³⁴ This phrase, too, has its controversy. With variations, it’s usually translated “from faith to faith” (as in the NASB). But what does it mean? Whose faith? If Paul had simply written (literally) “out of faith,” we would have rendered it in English as “by faith” or “through faith” and have been done with it. We would have understood that only by/through faith could we grasp what the gospel reveals. But Paul intends something more, and he draws from Habakkuk 2:4 to support his intent.

One attractive rendering is, “from [God’s] *faithfulness* to our faith.”³⁵ This captures the essence of God’s faithfulness in revealing his righteousness (as promised) which we receive by faith.³⁶ But it’s not likely Paul would use the Habakkuk quotation to support this rendering since “faith” in the quotation is clearly of the righteous man (see discussion below). Moo writes that the phrase has been unclear since the early church Fathers. But he points to a similar construct in 2 Co 2:16: “an aroma from death to death...from life to life.” The NIV renders these phrases as “the smell of death...the fragrance of life,” constructs which are quite understandable in contemporary language. Thus, Moo suggests that “from faith to faith” is likewise rhetorical –

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 62f.

³³ Mounce, p. 73.

³⁴ Literal translation (Εκ πιστεως εις πιστιν).

³⁵ See Stott, p. 64.

³⁶ Murray opposes this rendering, and devotes an entire appendix in discussion. See pp. 363ff.

something like “faith and nothing but faith.”³⁷ Paul, then, means here only to emphasize that God’s righteousness is revealed by faith alone.

f. “The Righteous...Will Live” – 1:17c

The seemingly straight-forward Habakkuk quotation has received its own share of discussion. Paul’s rendering of Habakkuk, literally, is “and the righteous by faith will live.”³⁸ So, does it really mean the righteous will live by faith? Or, does it emphasize the righteous by faith will live? Hence, the RSV’s version: “He who through faith is righteous will live.” Stott asks whether it’s legitimate to alter Habakkuk 2:4 in this way, making faith the way to righteousness rather than the way to life. He answers with another question, “Are not both true?”³⁹ While indeed both are true, I believe there’s an order to maintain, here.

Paul used the same quotation in Gal 3:11 as support for why no one is justified under the Law. The emphasis there, as here, is God’s righteousness (vice the Law’s righteousness, or man’s righteousness). God’s righteousness is paramount for our salvation. Only by possessing his righteousness can we be assured we will live. And as discussed above, his righteousness is obtained “by faith and nothing but.” Thus, a paraphrase of v. 17, capturing the foregoing discussions, might be: “The gospel reveals God’s righteousness, which is obtained by faith alone. And as Habakkuk wrote, the man who is righteous by faith – that man is assured of eternal life.”

g. Conclusion

After laying the foundation for his letter (see Lesson I), Paul has now defined the essence of God’s power in the gospel, which we call “justification by faith.” He has pointedly, and succinctly, stated that the gospel reveals true righteousness – God’s righteousness – and he’s declared that this righteousness, this “justification,” is for Jew and Gentile alike. Moreover, he’s pointed to OT scripture’s support of the premise that God’s righteousness is accessible only by a simple response – faith – implying by contrast that no effort by man, with or without the Law, can secure God’s favor. Now, over the next several chapters, Paul will address why this is so.

³⁷ Moo, pp. 76f.

³⁸ Ὁ δε δίκαιος εκ πιστεως ζησεται (this closely parallels the original Hebrew text).

³⁹ Stott, p. 65.

B. Questions

1. Why does Paul say he's not ashamed of the gospel?
 2. What does Paul mean when he says the gospel is "the power of God" unto salvation?
 3. Why would a statement that salvation is for "everyone" be somewhat of a shock to the Jews?
 4. Regarding the Jews, what are the two biggest challenges facing Paul?
 5. Why is faith not a "work"?
 6. Why "first for the Jew," and how should we regard this statement today?
 7. What is the "righteousness of God"?
 8. How would the Jews know about the righteousness of God?
 9. How is the righteousness "revealed" in the gospel so different from the conventional wisdom understood before the gospel?
 10. What does Paul's reference to Habakkuk 2:4 really mean?
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C. Exegesis

Select a verse or part of a verse from Ro 1:16-17*, and write down the verse/selection from a bible version of your choosing. Following the sample outline given in Appendix A, write an inductive, expository, literary, analytical, and devotional study of your selection. Appendix A provides an explanation of these study methods. Choose a title for your study, and make concise notes as indicated. Appendix B provides a sample exegesis.

[*Note: The sample exegesis in Appendix B is of Ro 1:17. Since the sample is only partially complete, you may continue to exegete all or part of verse 17; or (if you prefer not to do vs. 16), you may (for this lesson only) choose another verse/passage from Lesson I.]

D. Classical Comments

Read what John Calvin⁴⁰ and Mathew Henry⁴¹ had to say about Romans 1:16-17. Read, also, what Martin Luther wrote about the two verses in the preface to his commentary on Romans.⁴² Ro 1:17 had an especially major impact on Luther.

Write a 1-page comparison of Calvin's and Henry's comments on Ro 1:16-17, including what thoughts Luther had relevant to the passage. Contrast these, where appropriate, with the exposition citing contemporary scholars, above.

⁴⁰ Available at ccel.org.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

Lesson III

God's Present Wrath

A. Exposition of 1:18-32

a. Introduction

Having succinctly defined the gospel (v. 1:16-17), Paul now launches into a full expose of why we need it. He begins with the basics: Man's sin and God's consequent wrath. He has said the gospel is for Jews and Gentiles equally; now, he must show they equally need it.¹ Before someone will go for a cure, he needs to know – and admit – that he's sick. This is Paul's point in writing this section of his letter – to show the Jews and Gentiles both that they are indeed "sick."

We must be careful to understand what God's wrath is. It's not a tantrum thrown by someone who didn't get his way. It's not an outburst from God against those who turn their backs on him. Rather, "his wrath is his holy hostility to evil."² God abhors evil. Stott writes, "The alternative to 'wrath' is not 'love,' it's 'neutrality'...and God is not neutral."³ God stands unswervingly against evil. Incredible, then, is that God, through the gospel, would give us –evil people – his righteousness.

Paul presents a step by step review of what scripture does – and does not – say about God's wrath. He shows that the wrath is for *all*. He begins with man's suppression of the knowledge of God, especially the knowledge that God made evident to all through general revelation (i.e. what God has made known of himself in Creation). This suppression is the fundamental reason why no one is exempt. And he relates that God's wrath is not reserved only for the Last Day – it's present here and now...and it's clearly evident.

b. The Sin – 1:18

The first thing to note is the counter extremes of vv. 1:17 and 1:18. Paul spoke of the "righteousness of God" in v. 17; here in v. 18 he brings up the "wrath of God." God is revealing his righteousness in the gospel, and at the same time he is revealing his wrath. Paul immediately sets the two alternatives in opposition: We can have God's righteousness (through belief), or God's wrath (through unbelief). There's no middle ground. Murray writes

¹ Stott, pp. 67f.

² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³ *Ibid.*

that God provides his righteousness in the gospel to “meet the need” manifest in his wrath.⁴ Paul will put specifics to the revelation of God’s wrath later in the passage, and we’ll take them up in the sections below.

The second thing to note here is that Paul boils sin down to a single source: Suppressing the truth – and very specifically, suppressing the truth about the knowledge of God. All other sins spring from this one transgression. The wrath is directed against “ungodliness and unrighteousness,”⁵ but the “unrighteousness” of suppressing the truth is behind them. The NIV interpolates these terms as “godlessness and wickedness” which, I believe, better convey in modern language the gravity of the unbeliever’s condition. So, Paul writes that God’s wrath is against *all* “godlessness and wickedness,” but more specifically against those who *through* their “wickedness” suppress the truth. “Truth cannot be changed,” Mounce writes, “but it can be held down or stifled.”⁶

In a sermon on v. 18, John Piper said that without grace we all suppress the truth.⁷ Without the gospel, in other words, *we all* lack righteousness. And without righteousness, *we all* turn to wickedness. And in our wickedness, *we all* suppress the truth. Piper pointed out that unbelievers don’t merely suppress the truth, they don’t see it any more: “I don’t suppress the truth of God,” the unbeliever contends; “I don’t think there is any truth of God to suppress.”⁸ The world of today contends that truth is “relative.” Nothing is absolute. Truth is what society deems true at the moment. Homosexuality, for example – once shunned and even illegal (old “truth”) – is today acceptable in western society (new “truth”). Therefore, scripture’s stance against homosexuality, according to the world, is by definition old truth and, hence, irrelevant. The *truth* is that denying absolutes is “by definition” *suppressing* the truth.

And this suppression – denying absolutes – is a conscious decision. Unregenerate man wants to get rid of God. God and his truth stand in the way of man’s self-centered pursuits. Suppressing the truth suppresses God, in his mind, and he can live as though he had succeeded in getting rid of God.⁹ If there’s no absolute truth, there’s no absolute God.

So in the final analysis, what *is* “suppressing the truth”? The pagans (Gentiles) of Paul’s day, as during the millennia prior, paid homage to things (idols) they themselves created (cf. v. 23). They didn’t believe in the true Creator. The pagans were guilty, therefore, of *not believing* – of suppressing the knowledge of the one true God available to them through general revelation (which we’ll discuss below). What about the Jews? The Jews had been given *special* revelation – special knowledge of God through the Law and the Prophets. A Jew spent his entire life striving to obey the works of the Law, to obey God’s Commandments, and to keep himself separate

⁴ Murray, p. 35.

⁵ NASB.

⁶ Mounce, p. 77.

⁷ Piper, Ro 1:18: “The Wrath of God Against Holding Down the Truth,” Sep 13, 1998.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See Stott, p. 72.

from the ungodly pagans. Jews *believed* in the Creator – the one true God. Surely, the Jews weren't guilty of suppressing the truth of God...were they?

Who was it, then, that didn't believe Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah? Who was it that refused to believe the revelations about Jesus given in their own scriptures? ...Who refused to believe, as scripture attested, that God's righteousness included the Gentiles? ...Who "suppressed the truth" of Christ and his work on the Cross? Who was it that *didn't* believe...and violently opposed those who did?

Not only then, but now, the Jews suppress the truth...they don't believe. And *this* is God's indictment against mankind, Jew or Gentile – unbelief.

c. *Why the Present Wrath? – 1:19-23, 25*

But, we might say, the ignorant pagan of Paul's day – and to the same extent the unchurched heathen of the present day – really doesn't know God's truth...hasn't been exposed to the knowledge of God; thus, he can't be held accountable for suppressing the truth. No, says Paul. God's wrath is upon him precisely because God made known to him through general revelation the truth about himself (v. 19). Creation holds the evidence of God's existence – the truth of his sovereignty and power over the earth and its forces and creatures since all things in heaven and earth (including man) came into being through him.¹⁰ Since the creation of the world, God's qualities and attributes have been "clearly seen" in Creation itself; they are clearly understood by "what has been made" (v. 20). All man need do is *look*; the evidence of God is all around him. Therefore, Paul says, man is "without excuse."

But man, though unregenerate, is ingenious. In recent history he's come to suppress the truth even about Creation: Evolution is the truth (and of this he speaks, interestingly, as absolute). And since there's no Creation, there's no revelation about God. Indeed, men do "suppress the truth by their wickedness" (v. 18). "It's not just that they do wrong," writes Stott, they "deliberately stifle any truth" that challenges them.¹¹ This is the essence of Paul's charge that suppression of the truth is what brings God's wrath. The truth is all around them, but they choose not only to ignore it for themselves, but to "prove" (they intend) to others that what is naturally perceived as truth is no truth at all. Jesus himself warned against this very thing – against leading others astray: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come," he said, "but woe to that person through whom they come" (emphasis added).¹²

God's wrath is upon them also because "knowing God"¹³ and what he has made, they don't give him the glory nor thank him for it (v. 21).¹⁴ Paul emphasizes here that they *do* know of

¹⁰ See Col 1:16.

¹¹ Stott, p. 72.

¹² Luke 17:1.

¹³ Literal translation (γινοντες τον θεον).

¹⁴ Stott points out that "knowing" refers to knowing *of* God, since people outside Christ do not *know* God, p. 76.

God. They know of him despite their denial of absolutes...despite their denial of Creation. Paul is saying it's not that they're too dull to recognize God in Creation – they do recognize him. They just don't *want* to recognize him. Thus, they suppress any knowledge of him. Mounce writes, "People who do not 'know' God are those who have made that choice." Because the evidence of God is all around, knowing of God requires a "decision, not additional information."¹⁵ And Paul is pointing out in v. 21 that since they do know of God, they incur wrath because they take God's glory and place it on themselves. They concoct fantasies to account for the existence of man and universe apart from God. They become wise in their own eyes, although in truth they become fools (v. 22). On this point Mounce writes, "Self-deification lies at the heart of human rebellion," but "the rejection of truth marks the rebel as a fool."¹⁶

Paul points to their foolishness in worshipping created things rather than the Creator – the "exchange" of immortal God for mortal creatures (v. 23). Exchanging immortality for mortality shows "the abysmal ignorance of fallen humans."¹⁷ It's no different today. Instead of men and animals and birds, it's things and money and power – idols, all the same. As Bruce points out, "the root of the trouble was idolatry."¹⁸

But idolatry is merely the outward manifestation of an inward desire. What is that desire...what is it that man *really* wants? Idols all have one thing in common: Their worshipper controls them. He decides what the idol is and what it "requires." He determines what response is appropriate, when, and where. Suppressing the truth of God is more than denying knowledge of him – it's denying his *control*...his *sovereignty*. Man denies God in wayward belief that *he* is in control...that *he* is sovereign. Mounce writes that man through his idolatrous images "worships himself."¹⁹

Paul characterizes man's ultimate desire in v. 25 where he says that men exchanged the truth of God for "the lie."²⁰ What is *the* lie? What is it that drives man's desire to control? We look to Genesis.... In the Garden, the serpent told Eve that she could "be like God."²¹ Until then, neither she nor Adam had questioned God's sovereignty. Neither she nor Adam entertained any thought of suppressing the truth of God – they *talked* with God every day. But she believed "the lie." She took control. And in that moment when she reached out her hand to take the fruit...when she suppressed her knowledge of God and his truth...in that fleeting moment *she* was sovereign – *she became* God. And *this* is "the lie" – that man, believing he is in control, is his own god. Hence, he doesn't *need* God.

¹⁵ Mounce, p. 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁸ Bruce, p. 327.

¹⁹ Mounce, p. 82.

²⁰ The Greek includes the definite article (εν τω ψευδει).

²¹ Gen 3:4.

Men may claim they don't need God. But man must have a god – he must have *something* to believe in. Even the atheist “believes” in unbelief. And denying the true God, man fills that void with himself.

d. What is the Present Wrath? – 1:24-32

“Therefore,” Paul writes, “God gave them over...” (vv. 24, 26, & 28). *This* is the wrath “being revealed” in v. 18. Not to be confused with the eschatological wrath of judgment at the last day, this wrath is God’s anger poured out “quietly and invisibly” in the handing of sinners over to themselves.²² God simply lets them go their own way, not intervening. The result is a deepening spiral into moral degradation. Such is what happens when God allows man to have his way. We might imagine God saying, “You want to be in control? Go ahead – take control. Let’s see how well you do.” In fact, God *did* say through the psalmist, “My people would not listen to me...so I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.”²³ It’s important to understand that the moral degradation spoken of here is a *consequence* of God’s wrath, not the reason for it.²⁴ God lets man have his way; then man degrades himself.

We teach in Reformed Theology that man is totally depraved. We teach that the only reason man is not as depraved as he could be, is that God restrains him. What Paul writes in this section provides one of the clearest points of evidence that we teach the truth. Left to his “own devices,” man’s true depravity pours forth.

And his depravity manifests most prominently in immorality. “The history of the world confirms that idolatry tends to immorality.”²⁵ Now left to his own devices – allowed to control himself – what does man do? He abandons God’s intended, natural relations between man and woman (vv. 26-27). God “gave them over,” and they in turn gave “themselves over” to a lust for impurity.²⁶ They became inflamed for their own gender.

Scripture condemns homosexuality. Contrary to popular belief, scripture is not ambiguous on this point. The OT condemns it,²⁷ and the NT condemns it.²⁸ And here Paul emphasizes that its very existence is a consequence of God’s wrath. “Scholars” of recent years who argue that Paul wasn’t condemning homosexuality per se, but only homosexual prostitution,²⁹ or only

²² Stott, p. 75, citing Stephen C. Neill, *The Wrath and the Peace of God: Four Expositions of Romans 1-8* (CLS, 1943), pp. 12f.

²³ Ps 81:11-12.

²⁴ Mounce, p. 81, citing E. Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 47.

²⁵ Stott, p. 76.

²⁶ See Eph 4:19.

²⁷ See Lev 18:22.

²⁸ Here, and see 1 Co 6:9-10.

²⁹ See Moo, p. 114, citing R. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), pp. 17-65.

heterosexuals “deviantly” engaging in homosexuality,³⁰ wholly miss the point. Just as denying absolutes...just as denying Creation...denying God’s condemnation of homosexuality – in any form – is “suppressing the truth.”

In v. 28, Paul moves on from sexual deviancy to even deeper depravity – “the sins of inhumanity, of man’s hatred of his fellow man.”³¹ In a play on words, Paul says that just as they didn’t “see fit” to have knowledge of God, God gave them over to an “unfit” mind (i.e. a “depraved” mind).³² Again, just as is sexual deviancy, this depravity of mind is a further consequence of God’s allowing man to have his way. Moo comments that those who turn from God lose ability to even *think* ethically.³³ When God “gives them over” and no longer provides a guiding hand, they not only succumb to the fallacy of *self* guidance...*self* control, but they unwittingly lose all sense of moral and ethical reason. Life without God is ugly. The tragedy is, the unregenerate in their ignorant bliss view this ugliness as beauty.

With such a mind, Paul continues, they do “what ought not to be done (v.28).” Mounce points out that this phrase in the language of the day would have been broadly understood even to pagans as referring to things that just aren’t proper under any human terms.³⁴ Paul then lists 21 negative qualities that result from a depraved mind (vv. 29-31). Such lists of qualities, both negative and positive, were common in writing of the day, and several occur throughout the NT. The catalogue given here is the longest in the NT, and it’s not easily classified. Scholars variously divide and subdivide the list, and provide alternate translations and interpretations attempting to exact more precisely Paul’s definitions of depravity. Nevertheless, however they classify the list, scholars agree that it centers on a common theme: “The breakdown of human community” – the disintegration of society.³⁵ ...The ultimate consequence of God’s present wrath.

And in such depravity, they sink to an almost unimaginable mindset. They know that what they do deserves death (v. 32). “Their conscience condemns them.”³⁶ Yet, they *ignore* this knowledge *and* their conscience. They not only continue their depraved practices, but heartily condone others who practice likewise. “To put it bluntly,” Murray writes, “we are not only bent on damning ourselves, but we congratulate others” for doing the same.³⁷

³⁰ See Stott, p. 77, citing John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 107ff.

³¹ Moo, p. 117.

³² In Greek, the verb *see fit* (δοκιμαζω) and the adjective *unfit* (αδοκιμος) have the same root.

³³ Moo, p. 118.

³⁴ Mounce, p. 84.

³⁵ Stott, p. 78.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³⁷ Murray, p. 53.

e. Additional Thoughts about the Present Wrath

A couple of points about the revelation of God's wrath: To those who would say there is no wrath – that a loving God could not possibly invoke a “wrath” of this sort³⁸ – Paul in effect says “look around you.” Evidence of the present wrath – shades of the eschatological wrath to come – confronts us every day. We see it in the constant decries against God, scripture, and Christianity itself. We see it in the continuing proclamations of “new discoveries” attesting to man's genesis through evolution. We see it in the unyielding suppression of truth to justify man's control of his own destiny. We see it in man's continual inhumanity to man. In this passage, Paul says to such people, “Look at your life – you're *living* the wrath.”

A second point is that “the need,” as Murray puts it,³⁹ is real. All mankind has already incurred the wrath of God and there's nothing we (of ourselves) can do about it.⁴⁰ Since the Fall, everyone – Jew and Gentile – is born under wrath. We can be assured that we are destined to undergo the wrath Paul describes here, and the final wrath of Judgment, *unless* – and only unless – we accept the gospel. Only if we *believe* the Good News that Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins can we escape the wrath. There is no alternative.

And regarding “Jew and Gentile,” what's this passage to do with the Jew/Gentile conflict? It seems like Paul has expended a lot of words on something that has little to do with the Jews. Most scholars attribute this passage to Paul's indictment of the Gentiles, and indicate that he'll get to the Jews in Chapter 2. But many of these same scholars acknowledge that nowhere in the passage does Paul refer to “Gentiles”; rather, he refers to “men.” And these scholars add that the condemnation of idolatry in v. 23 is reminiscent of language in OT scripture condemning the Hebrews of the same.⁴¹

Paul's method here, I believe, is quite purposeful. He's setting the Jews up for the accusations he'll bring beginning in Ch 2. It's frequently best to relate a story from the beginning. This he did by pointing out that all mankind incurred God's wrath long ago by suppressing the knowledge of himself revealed through Creation (general revelation). Implicitly, then, Paul is contrasting general revelation with God's special revelation of himself which he gave uniquely to the Hebrews, from whom the Jews descend. While the Jews in Rome reading or hearing Paul's letter would themselves ascribe the passage solely to the Gentile experience, Paul will begin in Ch 2 pointing out that, despite God's having given them special knowledge of himself, the Jews are guilty of essentially the same sins.

³⁸ Stott, p. 71.

³⁹ Murray, p. 35 (and see above, under *b. The Sin*).

⁴⁰ See Stott, p. 68.

⁴¹ E.g. Mounce, p. 75; Moo, pp. 96f.

f. Conclusion

Paul has shown that all mankind – Jew and Gentile – is in need of the gospel. He has given the evidence of God’s present wrath, and described why and how it’s revealed. Although most Jews would not acknowledge this passage as an indictment of themselves, Paul will, in Chapter 2, point a finger directly at them.

B. Questions

1. What is God's wrath?
 2. What is it that man does in his wickedness, especially, that invokes God's wrath?
 3. Why can't man – even unregenerate man – claim ignorance of God?
 4. What is "suppressing the truth," ultimately?
 5. What does Paul say about unregenerate man and God's glory?
 6. Who, ultimately, does man worship through his idols?
 7. What is "the lie" (1:25), ultimately?
 8. What's the difference between God's wrath "being revealed" (1:18) and the eschatological wrath at the last day?
 9. What is the main consequence of God's present wrath?
 10. How does the long passage about God's wrath (1:18-32) relate to the Jew/Gentile conflict within the church?
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C. Exegesis

Select a verse or passage from Ro 1:18-32, and write down the verse/passage from a bible version of your choosing. Following the sample outline given in Appendix A, write an inductive, expositional, literary, analytical, and devotional study of your selection. Appendix A provides an explanation of these study methods. Choose a title for your study, and make concise notes as indicated. Appendix B provides a sample exegesis.

D. Classical Comments

Read what John Calvin⁴² and Mathew Henry⁴³ had to say about Romans 1:18-32. Read, also, what Martin Luther wrote about the passage in the preface to his commentary on Romans.⁴⁴

Write a 1-page comparison of Calvin's and Henry's comments on Ro 1:18-32, including what thoughts Luther had relevant to the passage. Contrast these, where appropriate, with the exposition citing contemporary scholars, above.

⁴² Available at ccel.org.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Lesson IV

All Mankind is Guilty

A. Exposition of 2:1-3:20

a. Introduction

Having succinctly defined the gospel (v. 1:16-17) and expounded upon why all mankind needs it (1:18-32), Paul now turns his attention to the Jews, saying in essence “this need includes *you*.” Part (perhaps much) of the Jew/Gentile conflict stemmed from Jewish interpretation of God’s wrath in scripture as applying to godless pagans, not themselves.¹ After all, Jews had been given the Law by God himself – surely the wrath spoken of in scripture couldn’t apply to them as long as they adhered to the “works of the Law” (v. 3:20). Paul will now show, through scripture, why the Jew is not exempt...why the wrath spoken of earlier applies to him as much as the Gentile...why the Jew’s reliance on obedience to the Law is not sufficient for salvation.

Paul points to the Jews’ knowledge of God’s special revelation of himself as reason why they, in particular, are without excuse.² And he exposes their misconception about the Law they’ve been given – it’s not a special ticket to righteousness. On the contrary, it’s an instrument to show them, especially, *their sin*, and *their need* for a savior.

Paul also discloses an underlying theme that he will return to again and again. Gentile believers who have turned (or who are trying to turn) from their pagan ways recognize, for the most part, the sin of their former idolatry and associated conduct. Jewish believers, on the other hand – while quick to point out Gentile sins – fail in general to recognize their own. Their misconception of the Law has so clouded their vision that they don’t see how they commit the very same sins they so hastily point out in the Gentiles.

b. Wherefore, You are Without Excuse – 2:1-8

And so he begins. “Therefore, inexcusable are you, O man”³ (v. 2:1). Here, Paul moves from referring to “men” in general (1:18-32) to addressing specific “man,” and he changes from the abstract “they” to the pointed “you” (singular). Paul is beginning his diatribe, the imaginary conversation with an opponent.⁴ Scholars are quick to point out that this “imaginary” conversation most likely reflects the point/counterpoint that Paul actually has encountered throughout his missionary journeys.⁵ Yet, these scholars are

¹ See Stott, p. 101.

² See Bruce, p. 328.

³ Literal translation (Διο αναπολογητος ει, ω ανθρωπε).

⁴ See the Introduction to Part I for an explanation of “diatribe.”

⁵ E.g. Moo, p. 126.

rather conservative in their view of who this opponent is. Since Paul doesn't address the Jews expressly until v. 17, they shy away from attributing these earlier verses to the Jews – directly, at least.

Some have settled on the view that Paul is addressing both Jew and Gentile, and that the point here is moralistic behavior.⁶ But following “O man,” vs. 2:1 continues, “– all [of you] passing judgment.”⁷ Certainly, there were moralizing Gentiles. But the situation in the conflict is not the Gentiles passing judgment on the Jews – it's the other way 'round. Mounce writes that in the Ch 1 passage we learned that the Gentiles were without excuse for rejecting the knowledge of God seen in Creation; now we learn that the Jews are without excuse for judging the Gentiles.⁸ Murray goes so far as to say the opening line of Ch 2 identifies the Jew by his national characteristic: “The propensity to judge,” says Murray, “was peculiarly characteristic of the Jew.”⁹ With respect to those with a more conservative point of view, I believe that right from the opening line of Ch 2 Paul is very pointedly addressing the Jews. They may not realize it quite yet, but by the time vs. 17 rolls around they will understand Paul is talking to them.¹⁰ “It is clear,” writes Moo, “Paul's main target is the Jew.”¹¹

In continuing vs. 2:1, Paul pointedly addresses the Jews' equal guilt. By accusing others (read: Gentiles), the Jews “condemn” themselves in that they practice the very “same things” of which they accuse. Given how the Jews would have viewed the Ch 1 passage – that it applied solely to the Gentiles – Paul implicitly connects the Jews with the “things” addressed in Ch 1 (particularly, those in vv. 29-31¹²). He addresses both their hypocrisy and their blindness – hypocritical because they themselves are guilty of what they accuse, and blind because they don't see their own guilt.¹³ It was against this very state of mind that Jesus warned when he said, “Do not judge lest you be judged.”¹⁴

Paul continues from a point of common agreement, saying “We know” that God's judgment upon people who practice these things is true (vs. 2:2). The “agreement” is that the Jews do teach the truth of God's judgment; they just don't teach that it's upon themselves. Thus, Paul charges “O man”: Do you really think you'll not be judged (vs. 3)? Do you really not see that God's kindness is giving you room for repentance (vs. 4)? Do you really not see that your stubbornness is storing up wrath for yourself (vs. 5)? Do you really not understand that God “will render to every man according to his deeds” (vs. 6 NASB) – eternal life for those who seek goodness (vs. 7), but wrath for those who ignore the truth (vs. 8)?

Stott points out that the 1st Century Jews were not alone in failing to “see.” People today use selective theology to support their contention that God's judgment will not fall upon them. They cite “the riches

⁶ E.g. Stott, pp. 81f.

⁷ Literal translation (...πας ο κρινων).

⁸ Mounce, p. 88.

⁹ Murray, p. 55.

¹⁰ See Moo, pp. 128f.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 126.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 131.

¹³ Murray, p. 57.

¹⁴ Math 7:1 (NASB).

of his kindness” (vs. 4) as evidence that God cannot punish anybody. But this manipulation is not faith, it’s presumption. It shows contempt for God. It misses the very point Paul is conveying to the Jews.¹⁵

Regarding v. 6: In saying that God will render to each “according to his deeds,”¹⁶ does Paul now imply that salvation is by works? ...Does Paul contradict himself? ...Is faith not the way after all? No, salvation is indeed by faith. But *judgment*...that’s something else. God will judge according to what we do. God will judge our faith by the difference it makes in us.¹⁷ The presence of faith in our hearts will be disclosed by the presence of “good deeds” we have done as a result of that faith.¹⁸ This is why James wrote that faith without works “is dead.” And, “I will show you my faith by my works.”¹⁹ It’s important to understand, here, that James is not saying his works lead to faith. Good works will not *produce* faith (nor earn God’s favor). But faith will of itself move us to good works. And if it doesn’t, we must question whether we indeed *have* faith.

And although Paul is pointing his finger at the Jews in this passage, by extension he’s pointing his finger at *us*. We today who judge are just as guilty as the Jews of Paul’s day. This is something we all need to watch for. We all have a natural tendency to be “critical of everybody except ourselves.”²⁰ Hence, the “O man” that Paul charges, above, includes us. We would do well to heed what Paul writes in these first 8 verses of Chapter 2.

c. Jews Have No Advantage – 2:9-24

Tribulation and distress await “every soul of man” doing evil (v. 9 – NASB). No exception, Paul says. Not only that, but the tribulation and distress (i.e. the wrath) come “first for the Jew.” Just as he told the Jews in 1:16 that they are first in line for the gospel, here Paul tells them that they also are first in line for God’s wrath. You who think you are exempt, he says, are in reality the first on God’s list. Why? ...Because, God gave them special revelation about himself. He revealed himself especially to them. And he holds them especially accountable for that revelation. God said to OT Israel, “You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your sins.”²¹

But referring back to v. 6, Paul says glory and honor await those who do good...those who through faith produce good works. And, again, such is “first for the Jew.” But Paul’s point, here, is that God shows no favoritism (v. 11). Whether Jew or Gentile, God will reward “good” and punish “evil.” The Jew has no advantage. The Jew is mistaken to think that “special revelation”

¹⁵ Stott, pp. 82f.

¹⁶ NASB. Paul likely is drawing from Ps 62:12 and Pr 24:12.

¹⁷ Mounce, p. 91.

¹⁸ Stott, p. 84.

¹⁹ Jas 2:17-18 (NASB).

²⁰ Stott, p. 82.

²¹ Amos 3:2.

includes special favor. The only thing “special” about the Jew in this regard is that he’s first in line to receive reward or punishment.

Becoming a little more pointed, beginning in v. 12 Paul addresses the Jews’ belief that the Law protects them from wrath. In this, his first mention of the Law, Paul underscores that those outside the Law (i.e. Gentiles) will indeed perish, but those within the Law “will be judged” by that very Law. Both groups have sinned and are subject to wrath. It’s not that they sin differently; it’s that their basis for judgment is different.²² The Gentiles have no outward knowledge of the Law. God deliberately kept them from the Law, choosing to give it to the Hebrews specially. And those without the Law come under wrath because, as we discussed in Lesson III, they suppress the truth of God manifest in general revelation. But those within the Law...those given special revelation not only of God’s existence, but of exactly what he expects – they come under wrath for failing to keep that Law.

Paul stresses in v. 13 that possessing the Law doesn’t matter; merely “hearing” the Law won’t bring righteousness. It’s keeping the Law...doing what God requires...obeying his Commandments – only this brings righteousness. And in stressing the point, Paul implicitly says to the Jews: *You know you haven’t done this* (and he will address this more explicitly in vv. 17ff). Even Jewish teaching held that God detested hearing the Law without doing it.²³ While Paul affirms, here, that keeping the Law would indeed bring righteousness, his charge is: *Who among you has kept the Law?* Moreover, keeping the Law doesn’t mean most of the time; it means perfectly.²⁴ And in this regard, all have failed (save one – Christ Jesus).

Although the Gentiles have not been given the Law, Paul points out in vv. 14-15 that they have been imbued with its tenants. He says the “requirements of the Law are written on their hearts” (v. 15). What does this mean? If they haven’t been given the Law, how could they know its requirements? Paul refers not to the special revelation of the Law given to the Jews, but to the inherent morality given to all at creation. We are all born with a conscience. We often tend to ignore that conscience (i.e. we suppress the truth of it), but we have it, nonetheless. This conscience gnaws at us when we do wrong. Consequently, our “thoughts” accuse us of the wrong. Or, they “defend” what we have done – they *justify* our having done it (and man can justify anything). Hence, Paul says, our conscience testifies that God has written the Law’s requirements in our hearts.²⁵

²² Mounce, p. 93.

²³ Moo, p. 147.

²⁴ See Calvin, p. 67.

²⁵ See Stott, pp. 86f; Mounce, p. 95.

We must take care not to confuse Paul's reference to inherent morality with God's promise of the new covenant. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God spoke of the new covenant in the same terms: "I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts."²⁶ But note that Jeremiah says the Law *itself* will be written on hearts. Paul speaks of the Law's "requirements,"²⁷ i.e. what the Law produces.²⁸ Where Paul addresses man's inherent morality – possessing innate knowledge of right and wrong – Jeremiah refers to a time (now come) when man will have *inner* knowledge of God's Law and a desire to keep it, all stemming from the *indwelling* Holy Spirit.

Scholars address vs. 16 as a challenge: To which previous verse does it link? Does it link 'way back to vs. 13, leaving vv. 14-15 a parenthesis (as the NIV interpolates)?²⁹ Does it link with "conscience" in vs. 15 as testament that our own conscience will convict us on judgment day?³⁰ Perhaps it links with the conflicting thoughts of "accusing" and "defending" in vs. 15, in keeping with vs. 16's reference to the secrets of men?³¹ Or, maybe it refers to the whole passage from vs. 5 through vs. 15?³² Clearly, there's no consensus on the subject.

Regardless of where Paul intended the link, however, vs. 16 conveys two important truths. First, man's "secrets" are not hidden from God. "God knows your hearts" (Lk 15:16). "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight (Heb 4:13)." Scripture contains many such statements. On the Day of Judgment, God will already have known the things we've done in secret. No amount of "accusing" or "excusing" – by either Jew or Gentile – will blur God's knowledge. As Stott says, "There will be no possibility of a miscarriage of justice."³³

Secondly, the gospel of grace includes the truth of God's wrath and judgment. How could it not? If only by implication, "salvation" inherently includes that from which we've been saved. But it's more than mere implication. We stand under wrath and judgment *except* for the gospel. God will judge *all* men (and their secrets) on the last day, and the gospel teaches that *only* through believing in the saving work of Christ Jesus can anyone hope to escape the wrath. Stott adds that "we cheapen the gospel" if we represent it as delivering us from anything but the wrath.³⁴

²⁶ Je 31:33.

²⁷ Lit. the "work" (singular) of the Law.

²⁸ Mounce, p. 95, n. 100.

²⁹ As in Stott, p. 87.

³⁰ As in Mounce, p. 96.

³¹ As in Moo, p. 154.

³² As in Murray, pp. 76-77.

³³ Stott, p. 87.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

In vs. 17, Paul sharpens the attack.³⁵ If the Jews failed to recognize themselves in the previous verses of Chapter 2, they won't fail now. Paul charges, "If you call yourself a Jew...." Not "if you *are* a Jew," but if you "call yourself" one. Still today, we recognize the challenge in such a statement. When we hear it, we know something derogatory or at least accusatory is about to follow. We can, therefore, put ourselves in the shoes of the Jew reading/hearing this charge. He's thinking that he's about to be "disrespected," as is said in today's vernacular. But far from disrespecting the Jew, Paul (a Jew himself) is about to lay down some truth – truth the Jew can't help but acknowledge, inwardly at least (if he's at all honest with himself). And that truth is that the Jew (not unlike others, of course) doesn't practice what he preaches.³⁶ And because he doesn't practice what he preaches, he violates the very thing (the Law) that he claims protects him.

Paul says, in essence: *If you know the Law so well that you can teach it (vv. 17-20), why is it you don't follow the Law yourself (vv. 21-23)?* The epitome of hypocrisy is the teacher who violates what he teaches...the preacher who violates what he preaches. And Paul concludes this section with reference to OT scripture that the Jews' violations of the Law "blaspheme" God's name to the very people they portend to teach (v. 24). Paul is saying that where the Jews should embody the "knowledge and truth" of the Law (v. 20), they in fact embody the "breaking" of the Law (v. 23) – in God's name. Hence, the blasphemy.

Moo points out that in this section (and the next on circumcision) Paul attacks the *status* the Jew maintains as his stronghold. In the first 16 verses of Ch. 2, Paul stressed that God's wrath applies to all, Jew and Gentile alike. But the Jew would hold up his status in the Law as protection. He would say that merely *being* a Jew, under God's given Law, exempted him from the wrath. As long as he remains under the Law, what Paul said in vv. 1-16 is irrelevant. But in vv. 17-23, Paul exposes this "status" for what it is: The Jew would be correct in his stance...*if he obeyed* the Law. But he doesn't obey the Law. Therefore, his status is no status at all.³⁷

Of course, not practicing what one preaches is not exclusive to the Jewish community. Certainly, we all have been guilty of this at one time or another. In this respect, Paul's words are as much an admonition to us as they were to the Jews.

d. True Circumcision – 2:25-29

Now Paul attacks the very symbol of Judaism...the thing that sets Jews apart from the world...the banner of their existence – circumcision. For a Jew to hear that his circumcision is

³⁵ Moo, p. 157.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Moo, p. 157f.

meaningless surely cuts him to the quick. It has to be the ultimate insult. But Paul does not intend insult. Rather, he intends truth – the truth that physical circumcision indeed means nothing if it is not heartfelt.

Continuing the thought that disobedience of the Law obliterates the Jew's perceived "status," Paul says that, likewise, disobedience nullifies the symbol of circumcision (v. 25). *If you don't obey the Law*, says Paul, *you may as well have not been circumcised*. What good is a banner if you don't honor what it proclaims? It's only so much hoopla. Stott points out that the Jews regarded circumcision as if it were a magic charm. ...A get-out-of-jail-free card. ...A seal of *salvation* vice a seal of the covenant. Rabbinic epigrams of the day expressed things like, "Circumcision will save Israel from Gehenna (hell)." ³⁸ And isn't that the way some today regard baptism? ...That it's some guarantee of salvation vice a seal of the new covenant? Here was a myth Paul was striving to dispel – circumcision (like baptism) does not save you!

As if this isn't shocking enough, Paul then says the *uncircumcised*, if they keep the Law, will be given that very "status" the Jews feel they have (v. 26). ...The status they consider uniquely and solely theirs. The *Gentiles*, Paul was saying – if they are Law-abiding – will stand righteous before God where the Law-breaking Jews will not. That an unconverted Gentile might have *any* status before God beyond wrath was totally inconceivable to the Jews. And now Paul was taking their "status" and applying it to the Gentiles. Viewed in this light, it's easy to see why unbelieving Jews railed against Paul. ...Why they hounded him, even seeking his death. He attacked the very essence of their (misguided) beliefs.

And he's not finished. The Jews considered themselves righteous judges of the God-less, pagan Gentiles. But Paul says a Gentile keeping the Law will judge a Law-breaking Jew (v. 27). Of course this is all hyperbole; Gentiles don't keep the Law any more than the Jews (and aren't *we* prime examples?). But the point is well made. Anyone keeping the Law (if that were possible) would judge one *not* keeping the Law. But saying this was quite enough to infuriate the Jew. *He* had the Law. God gave it to *him*. The Gentile was *excluded*. How dare Paul say a Gentile would judge a Jew. But this was the essence of the problem, wasn't it. The Jew put himself on a pedestal...he was *better* than the Gentile. The Jew who held to this mentality of elitism excluded himself from true fellowship with God. Paul was merely pointing it out.

Adding insult to injury, Paul goes so far as to say that physical circumcision and the "outward" practices of Jewish custom do not a Jew make (v. 28). Paul says: *If this is all you've got, you're not really a Jew*. Then, he draws from OT scripture to prove his point. "Circumcision," he says, is "of the heart" (v. 29a). On several occasions God, through Moses and the other prophets, drew

³⁸ Stott, p. 92.

attention to “uncircumcised hearts.” God cited this as reason for punishment.³⁹ Paul adds that circumcision of the heart is “by the Spirit” and not by the Law (v. 29b). God told the OT Hebrews that *he* would circumcise their hearts⁴⁰ and Paul is pointing to the role of the Holy Spirit in doing just that – changing a man’s heart “inwardly.” The inward work of the Holy Spirit is something the Law can never do.⁴¹

Redoubling emphasis on God’s work (the Spirit) vice man’s work (the Law), Paul ends the matter by pointing out that a heart changed by the Spirit glorifies God. Pious things done outwardly under the Law garner praise from men. The “true Jew,” Paul would say, “is praised not by people but by God.”⁴²

All this talk about the Law and circumcision was not new. Paul almost certainly had said it all before in synagogues and elsewhere, and likely in terms more pointed than these. Although he risked the ire of the very people he was trying to reach, his purpose was singular: To persuade those Jews still clinging to the Law (whose shoes he was once in) to look critically at what they held so fast...to recognize the false assumptions they had come to embrace...and to see the gift that was before them – the gift God had been promising them for all these hundreds of years past. And Paul has yet more to say.

e. Are Jews at a Disadvantage? – 3:1-18

The diatribe continues with a series of questions. The first: *If what you say is true, Paul, why be a Jew at all (3:1)?* This question seems almost childish. It says in essence, *if we can’t be special, why “be” at all?* But Paul responds that they *are* special. And the foremost reason is they’ve been entrusted with God’s word (v. 2). Paul doesn’t go on to a secondary reason; he leaves it at that – as if to say, *what more reason do you need* (although in Ch 9 he will list several more reasons). And what could be more special than to have custodianship of God’s special revelation?⁴³

The next question (v. 3) doesn’t seem a natural follow-on to the first. It goes to a different subject altogether: God’s faithfulness. But as we will see, Paul is following a train of thought he almost certainly contends with regularly. Scholars have written much about how this question is asked; who, exactly, is asking the question; the real purpose of the question; and just what, specifically, is being asked. All that aside, however, the question is quite comprehensible as posed: *If someone doesn’t believe God, does that somehow impact God’s faithfulness?* Paul

³⁹ E.g. Je 9:25-26.

⁴⁰ Deut 30:6.

⁴¹ Stott, p. 94.

⁴² Moo, p. 175.

⁴³ Stott, p. 96.

answers with a resounding “no” (v. 4). And he underscores his answer by adding that even if *no one* believes (“let every man be a liar”), God’s faithfulness will remain unfettered.⁴⁴ Another way of putting it: God is not dependent upon man; it’s the other way ‘round.

The next questions seemingly deepen the absurdity of this train of thought. The thought is proceeding like this: *If we’re still “special,” and God’s faithfulness is intact no matter what we do, and the contrast of our unrighteousness with God’s righteousness makes him shine more brightly* (v. 5a) – *how can he bring wrath upon us? ...Won’t he be unjust* (lit. “unrighteous”) *if he does* (v. 5b)? Paul quickly states parenthetically that this is a human train of thought (v. 5c) – only degenerate man could come up with such logic to justify himself. But Paul is continuing to poke a stick at the Jews’ misconception of their status with God: That their “specialness” makes them immune to the judgment God will bring against the Gentiles.⁴⁵

Again, Paul answers with a resounding “no” (v. 6a). And he supports his answer with reference to the Jews’ own doctrine that God will judge the world.⁴⁶ So, he asks them in return, if God were unjust in this (or any other) case, how could he possibly be the righteous judge of the world (v. 6b)?

The next question essentially re-phrases the previous one, with different emphasis. *...If the contrast of my lie with God’s truth makes him more glorious* (v. 7a), *why am I still condemned* (v. 7b)? In Paul’s answer, we see where he’s been taking us with this line of “reasoning.” He says, let’s just take the thought a bit further and say – *as we’ve been accused of saying* (v. 8a): “Let’s do evil that good may result” (v. 8b). Paul’s terse response says in no uncertain terms that such an absurd question is not worthy of an answer: *They deserve what they get* (v. 8c).⁴⁷

The last question Paul poses in this section (v. 9a) has a textual complication that makes the question itself uncertain. In the Greek it’s a one-word question,⁴⁸ requiring several words to render in English. Alternate interpretations of that word change the sense of the question considerably. Most biblical translations follow the NIV’s rendering “are we any better?” Most scholars agree with this rendering, although they admit it raises a seeming contradiction between this verse and v. 1 where Paul asked essentially the same question but gave a different answer. And many scholars go to great lengths to explain some nuance to avoid contradiction.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Cf. Murray, p. 92.

⁴⁵ Cf. Stott, p. 97.

⁴⁶ Mounce, p. 105.

⁴⁷ Cf. Stott, p. 96.

⁴⁸ Προεχομεθα may be interpreted as passive voice, or middle voice with active meaning.

⁴⁹ E.g. Moo, pp. 197ff.

Rather than try to explain away a contradiction that scholars agree is not intended, I'm inclined to take a minority position that the word in question is a passive verb⁵⁰ that asks, literally, "are we *bettered*," or "are we excelled."⁵¹ Better phrasing would be "are we at a disadvantage"⁵² (the RSV footnotes this phrasing as an alternative). What, then, is the "conclusion" Paul reaches in v. 9?

With seeming contradiction out of the way, now, we see Paul responding to one final question in a string that stemmed from the Jews' assumption of special standing before God. With his "specialness" now having been countered, the Jew asks: *If I have no superior standing, do I somehow stand inferior to the Gentiles?* Again, Paul gives a resounding "no," and repeats what he said in 2:9-11 – all are under sin, Jew and Gentile *alike* (3:9b). Implicitly, Paul refers to what he wrote in 2:11: "God does not show favoritism." There is no *superior* or *inferior*; we're all in this together. And to prove his point, he cites several OT texts that say exactly that: *No one* is righteous; not even *one* (v. 10). Not a Jew...not a Gentile...*no one*.

The testimony from the OT that Paul gives in vv. 10-18 serves to show the true state of man, whether Jew or Gentile. It shows his ungodliness, as well as the pervasiveness and universality of his sin.⁵³ It shows that he does not seek God; he deliberately turns away from God.⁵⁴ It provides evidence that he is *enslaved* to sin.⁵⁵ It says the verdict of scripture is that man is totally and utterly depraved.⁵⁶ Paul provides this testimony in climax to building the case that all men (Jews included) need a Savior. There is no way out of this morass otherwise.

f. No Justification in Observing "Works of the Law" – 3:19-20

As if he hadn't done so already, Paul now drives his point home. He starts from a place of common knowledge ("Now we know...") anticipating no disagreement on what "we know."⁵⁷ And that is, the Law speaks to those who are within the Law (v. 19a), namely, the Jews. By "Law," here, Paul is referring to the whole of the OT⁵⁸ – scripture itself – the "law" the Jews live by. His purpose in stating the obvious is to connect the Jews steadfastly to the testimony he just provided from the "Law" in vv. 10-18. Jews commonly viewed those texts as applying to the

⁵⁰ BAGD, p. 706.

⁵¹ Murray takes this view, p. 102.

⁵² Mounce, p. 107.

⁵³ Stott, pp. 100f.

⁵⁴ Mounce, pp. 108f.

⁵⁵ Moo, p. 201.

⁵⁶ Murray, p. 102.

⁵⁷ Moo, p. 204.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

Gentiles, not themselves.⁵⁹ But Paul reminds that the Law speaks to those under it; therefore, the texts are speaking to *them*. It's what we today might call a "gotcha." The Jews' very own Law, and their professed adherence to it, placed them in a defenseless position.⁶⁰ And it speaks to them, Paul says, so that every mouth (yours too, Jews) is silenced and, thus, the whole world is accountable to God (v. 19b).

Because, Paul continues, no one is justified by "works of the Law" (v. 20a). Now, what does that mean, exactly – "works of the Law"? We find this phrase not only in *Romans*, but in *Galatians*, as well.⁶¹ But we don't find it used by other letter-writers or elsewhere in the NT. It's uniquely Paul's. The knee-jerk response says it refers to all the rites, restrictions, and stipulations God commanded of the Jews (Hebrews) in the ceremonial (and civil, to a certain extent) part of the Law. These were the "works" God commanded be performed in keeping the Law, and the Jews went to great lengths to ensure they performed them. Some scholars have advocated this viewpoint.⁶² But in looking at how Paul used the phrase here and elsewhere, we see a much broader context intended.

First, in our text here we note that Paul is concluding the long section that began 'way back at 1:18 in which he describes why all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike (i.e. the whole world), needs the gospel. Thus, although he continues to address the Jews, we find he quickly turns his focus away from those under Law – where he's been since the beginning of Ch 2 – back to the "whole world" (v. 19b). He specifies that the Law speaks for the very purpose of *including* the Jews in the whole world "under judgment,"⁶³ and he states the reason is "because by works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (v. 20a, NASB, emphasis added). Not just Jewish "flesh" – *no flesh...the "whole world."* While not a direct quote, Paul almost certainly is drawing from Ps 143:2b: "no one living will be justified in your sight"⁶⁴ (emphasis added). Paul merely substitutes "no one living" with "no flesh," a common reference to all humans, everywhere. "No one living"..."no flesh"..."the whole world" all testify that "works of the Law" cannot refer to Jews alone.⁶⁵

Secondly, if we may jump ahead to 3:27ff (which we'll address with proper context in the next lesson), we find Paul asking a question regarding the gospel's exclusion of boasting. "By what kind of law" was it excluded, he asks (v. 27, NASB). ...By one "of works?" "No," he answers, "by

⁵⁹ Stott, p. 101.

⁶⁰ Mounce, p. 110.

⁶¹ Ro 3:28; 9:32; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10.

⁶² See references provided in Moo, p. 207, n. 56.

⁶³ Literal translation of υποδικος.

⁶⁴ From the Greek of Ps 143:2b (Ps 142:2b in the Septuagint).

⁶⁵ See Moo, p. 208.

a law of faith.” Because “a man is justified by faith apart from [lit: “without”] works of the Law” (v. 28, NASB, emphasis added). The pitting of “works” against “faith” is key, here. Paul continues in this vein to point out in 4:2-3 that Abraham had nothing to boast about, either, since he too was justified not “by works,” but by faith (he “believed God”). Paul’s equivalence of simple “works” with “works of the Law” serves to show that he means something much broader than the ceremonial rites of the Law.⁶⁶ And Abraham’s inclusion in the context shows the Law can’t in any way be the focus since it came some 400 years after Abraham. Thus, “works” is the operative word, to be understood as we apply it today: *works righteousness*. So, why didn’t Paul simply say “works”? ...Why did he add “of the Law”? The answer, I believe, is that he was addressing the Jews. Their “works” were indeed what they performed under the Law, and they had indeed come to view them as *saving* works – things to be done to maintain God’s favor.⁶⁷ Even in *Galatians*, Paul was addressing the Galatians *about* the Jews – specifically, about the Judaizers⁶⁸ who were preaching *works righteousness* to the Galatians.

Thirdly, “virtually all the reformers”⁶⁹ held that *works righteousness* is exactly what Paul meant. Calvin addressed it this way in providing counterpoint to scholars of his day and prior.⁷⁰ Luther referred to it as “works” in general.⁷¹ It would seem that we have general agreement across the board that what Paul means by “works of the Law” is *works righteousness*. After all, Paul did rail against the Jews precisely because they had a *works-righteousness* mentality; and he should know – he *was* a Jew. But, alas, we have a wrinkle.

Relatively recently, since the 1970s, a movement has emerged (which seems to be gaining popularity) that negates sentiment that the Jews had a works-righteousness mentality. And therefore, proponents reason, the phrase “works of the Law” cannot equate to works righteousness. This movement was initiated in earnest by E. P. Sanders in 1977. Subsequently, J. D. G. Dunn picked it up in 1983 and has become its leading proponent with his “New Perspective on Paul.”⁷² The “New Perspective” says essentially this: Paul wasn’t railing against the Jews’ works righteousness (because they weren’t works-righteous); rather, he railed against the air of superiority they developed being God’s chosen people, and the “elitism” they maintained that excluded the Gentiles. The details of all this tend to become a bit foggy, but this is the essence.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ See Stott, p. 104.

⁶⁸ Those who felt the Gentiles had to come under the Law before Christ’s saving work would apply to them.

⁶⁹ Moo, p. 206, n. 55.

⁷⁰ Calvin, pp. 95f and pp. 106f.

⁷¹ Luther, p. 75.

⁷² Moo, pp. 206ff, and Stott, pp. 24ff and pp. 102ff, address this movement extensively.

Paul indeed railed against superiority and exclusivity. But he didn't stop there, nor were they his prime focus (witness the discussion we've just had in this lesson). This fact caused Moo to write that this new movement is flat "wrong"⁷³ and Stott to say he agrees with Moo, adding "Judaism was more legalistic" than the proponents of this movement have found.⁷⁴ The intent, here, is not to address this aberration in detail; merely to acknowledge its existence. ...And, to add my own voice to those of Moo, Stott, and others.

In responding to Paul's statement that no one is justified by works of the Law (v. 20a), the Jews might well ask: *So, what's the point of the Law? ...And its works? ...Why have we been striving to obey it...and do them...all these hundreds of years?* Paul provides the short answer, here (he'll give a more in-depth answer, later): To bring you to "the full knowledge⁷⁵ of sin" (v. 20b). ...To drive you to your knees in search of a savior. ...To make you understand that you cannot obey God's Law. ...To prepare you for the promised Messiah who will fulfill the Law for you. And this Paul will take up next.

g. Conclusion

Paul has made his case. All mankind (including the Jew) is guilty and stands defenseless before God, quite deserving of his wrath. He very pointedly showed that the Jew's special covenant with God does not include special treatment where guilt and wrath are concerned. Further, he has shown that the Jews' reliance on the Law and its works is false; it will not save them. Now, he will return to telling them where true salvation is.

⁷³ Moo, p. 208.

⁷⁴ Stott, p. 104.

⁷⁵ Literal translation of επιγνωσις.

B. Questions

1. Why did the Jews of Paul's time believe that God's wrath didn't apply to them?
2. What was God's intention in giving the Law, and how did the Jews of Paul's time perceive the intention of the Law?
3. What do we derive from the early part of Ch. 2 that makes it almost certain Paul was addressing the Jews from the outset?
4. Why does Paul say, "First for the Jew," whether for wrath or salvation?
5. How does Paul's reference to law written on the hearts of Gentiles (2:15) differ from the Law written on hearts under the new covenant (Je 31:33)?
6. Is God's wrath part of the gospel?
7. In the section that begins, "If you call yourself a Jew..." (2:17), what is Paul's main point and why?
8. What does Paul mean by: *Won't the uncircumcised be regarded as circumcised* (2:26)?
9. What, in essence, does Paul convey in citing the OT scriptures in 3:10-18?
10. What does Paul mean by "works of the Law"?

C. Exegesis

Select a verse or passage from Ro 2:1-3:20, and write down the verse/passage from a bible version of your choosing. Following the sample outline given in Appendix A, write an inductive, expositional, literary, analytical, and devotional study of your selection. Appendix A provides an explanation of these study methods. Choose a title for your study, and make concise notes as indicated. Appendix B provides a sample exegesis.

D. Classical Comments

Read what John Calvin⁷⁶ and Mathew Henry⁷⁷ had to say about Romans 2:1-3:20. Read, also, what Martin Luther wrote about the passage in the preface to his commentary on Romans.⁷⁸

Write a 1-page comparison of Calvin's and Henry's comments on Ro 2:1-3:20, including what thoughts Luther had relevant to the passage. Contrast these, where appropriate, with the exposition citing contemporary scholars, above.

⁷⁶ Available at ccel.org.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Lesson V

Righteousness Comes By Faith Alone

A. Exposition of 3:21-4:25

a. Introduction

Paul now returns to the gospel. Back in Ch. 1, after succinctly defining the gospel (1:16-17), he launched into a long exhortation of why all mankind needs it – Jews included (1:18-3:20). Now, he picks up where he left off in 1:17, even restating the main thoughts he had put forth at that point.

It's in this section that Paul brings up *justification by faith*, which many scholars contend is the main point of *Romans*. Certainly, it's the greatest concept we learn from *Romans*. But Paul is keeping pressure on the Jews. Following a relatively short paragraph introducing *justification by faith*, Paul returns to emphasizing that the Jews' reliance on the Law is in error. And he discusses at length Abraham, the great patriarch of the Jews, as an example of true righteousness – righteousness *without* the Law. Paul's introduction to justification by faith includes points that he will address later in more detail (and that we will detail more in subsequent lessons).

b. "Apart from the Law" – 3:21-24

After laboring long through Ch. 2 and most of Ch. 3, reasoning with the Jews and demonstrating from OT scripture that the Law is not sufficient, Paul now returns to what *is* sufficient – the gospel. "But now..." he begins. Stott points out the greatness of this opening: "After the long dark night" that Paul has been painting, "the sun has risen" and "a new day has dawned."¹ Apart from any *effort* to be right with God...apart from *working* to earn his favor..."apart from the Law" (v. 21) – God, in this new day, has revealed true righteousness: *His* righteousness. The *only* righteousness there is.

His digression about why we need the gospel having been long, Paul restates the points he made in Ch. 1: It's God's righteousness, not our own; the Law and the Prophets foretold of it; it comes through faith in Christ; and it's for Jew and Gentile alike – for "all who believe" (v. 22).

¹ Stott, p. 108.

He underscores this last point (that there's no difference between Jew and Gentile) by restating the crux of the OT testimony he provided earlier (see 3:10-18): "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23). Sin has tainted all (Jew and Gentile), and the gospel avails itself to all (Jew and Gentile) *who believe*.

Then Paul addresses the concept that he's only hinted at previously: Justification by grace. He says we're "justified freely by his grace" (v. 24a). When Luther finally came to realize that this is what Paul meant by God's righteousness, it "set him afire."² But, what does "justify" really mean? Does it mean *forgive*? ...To *make* righteous? No, it's neither of those. Rather, it means to *declare*³ or *pronounce*⁴ righteous. Why isn't it to *make* righteous? Because we're still sinners; we still don't *act* righteously. It's important to understand that "justify" is a *legal* term. *Legally*, we've been declared righteous. But that doesn't make us *virtuous*.⁵ That takes time – and we have all our earthly lives (which is indeed what it will take).

At that moment when God "justifies" us – declares us righteous – the Holy Spirit sets us on a road toward holiness. He does this by giving us a heart for God...giving us the *desire* to please him and do his will,⁶ even though we yet lack full *ability* to do so. This desire we receive – the newness of heart – we call "regeneration."⁷ Our heart is "regenerated" from its old penchant for suppressing the truth of God to a new perspective that not only acknowledges his truth, but desires to keep it. This perspective is wholly foreign to a newly-regenerate person. Thus, the Holy Spirit – that great Counselor and teacher⁸ – *guides* us along the road towards eventually *fulfilling* our newfound desire. This road we call "sanctification"⁹ (one of the points Paul will address later). As we progress down this road, we should recognize a difference in our outlook and conduct. We should readily see, over time, the old desires of the world begin to fade, replaced by new desires to do God's will. And if we don't, we need to question – not God...not the Holy Spirit – but our own heart.

Why doesn't "justify" mean to forgive, as well? ...Or, to pardon? Isn't that what God is doing – forgiving us? Actually, he's not. Some might consider this a slight nuance, but I think it's important. Forgive (or pardon) means that the infraction remains: *I'm just letting you off*

² ccel.org: Luther, biography.

³ Moo, pp. 86f and p. 237.

⁴ BAGD, p. 197.

⁵ Stott, p. 111.

⁶ See Ezek 36:26-27.

⁷ See Stott, p. 111.

⁸ Jn 14:26.

⁹ Stott, p. 111.

without punishment; I'm going to let it go.¹⁰ But the rest of v. 24 tells us why *forgive* is inappropriate, here: "...through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (v. 24b, emphasis added). God didn't let it go; Christ *paid* for our sins.¹¹ *He* endured the punishment in our stead. Can you grasp the magnitude of this truth? God gave us *mercy*...then punished *Jesus*. And now, the sin is paid and God looks at us as if it had never been. Only God can impart such mercy. This is another point about which Paul will have more to say, later.

It's important to answer a very specific question, here: To whom does the saving initiative of the gospel belong? ...Who started this? The answer is God the *Father*. You may well ask: *Didn't Christ start this, by dying on the Cross?* He did die on the Cross, and he did so of his own free will; but it was at the initiative of the *Father* – God the *Son* was submitting to the initiative of God the *Father*.¹² *Well, what about us – don't we choose to accept God's grace? ...Doesn't it all start with us?* This would be a grave misconception. Paul will have much to say about this as we go on, but the short answer, here, is that in our helpless, hopeless, and unregenerate state we did not seek God – *he* sought us. Mounce is so right in saying "we underestimate the hopelessness of our sinful state."¹³ No, any formulation of the gospel that removes the initiative from the Father is *not* biblical.¹⁴

And this he did "freely" (v. 24a). ...At no cost to us. Paul will expound on this later, but his point is that no *merit* is involved. We deserve punishment. *Nothing* we can do will avert that. And God asks for nothing; he just gives – "freely." This is the essence of "justification by grace."¹⁵ And this is what set Luther "afire," sparking the Reformation.

c. Christ Our "Propitiation" – 3:25-26

In bringing about redemption, God set forth his Son as "propitiation" for us (v. 25a – NASB). Now, what does that mean? ...What does it mean to "propitiate"? It means to "placate someone's anger." ...Whose anger? God's anger...his wrath – the very thing Paul spent so much time talking about since mid-chapter 1. Many are uncomfortable with the thought of placating God's wrath. It's too close to the pagan concept of keeping the gods happy so they won't make your life miserable.¹⁶ So, they prefer to emphasize the atoning quality of Christ's sacrifice, and

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹¹ See Moo, pp. 229f.

¹² Stott, p. 112.

¹³ Mounce, p. 116.

¹⁴ Stott, p. 111.

¹⁵ See Moo, p. 228.

¹⁶ See Mounce, p. 117.

so avoid the concept of placating, by calling it “expiation” (a covering for sin) or “mercy seat” (paralleling the OT ritual Day of Atonement).¹⁷ Even Luther and Calvin favored “mercy seat.” The NIV calls it “sacrifice of atonement” in an attempt to amalgamate the nuances, but that still sidesteps the placating concept.

Stott says we shouldn’t shy away from using *propitiation* in reference to Christ’s work...no more than we should drop *wrath* from God’s character.¹⁸ We understand that God’s wrath – his anger – constitutes his holy hostility to evil (we addressed this in Lesson III). It’s nothing like the pagans’ view of their gods’ grumpy attitudes. Moreover, after Paul spent the equivalent of two chapters telling us *why* we’re under God’s wrath, we need to let him tell us *how* we get out of it. Otherwise, we’re still under it.¹⁹ And, of course, we don’t get out of it – *God* got us out by setting forth his Son as propitiation. As Stott says, “God gave himself to save us from himself.”²⁰

Paul says in v. 25 that God had left “unpunished” the sins of former generations. He had “passed over” these sins (v. 25c – NASB). Now, after our discussion above about God’s not *forgiving* our sins...about his not “passing over” them, or *letting them go*, but punishing them in his Son Jesus Christ – how could he leave the sins of former generations “unpunished” and remain a righteous God? The answer is, all along he intended to punish those sins in the death of his Son.²¹ He didn’t *excuse* them...he didn’t *let them go*. He did punish them – in his time. And why did he wait to punish them? ...“To demonstrate his justice” (vv. 25b, 26a). He demonstrated his justice to this present age (v. 26a) by indeed punishing the sins of the past age (v. 25c)...lest anyone *think* he had let them go.²² And in so doing, he showed himself to “be just” as well as “the one who justifies” (v. 26b). Stott emphasizes on this point God’s supreme purpose in the Cross: Without it, not only would we not be justified, but God himself would not be just.²³

It’s important to point out that Christ’s propitiation of God’s wrath is effective only “through faith” (v. 25a). For those without faith, there is no propitiation of wrath; it’s still upon them. The same must be said for justification: God justifies “those who have faith in Jesus” (v. 26b). One must exercise faith to avail himself of Christ’s work and God’s justification. So, then...does that

¹⁷ Such interpretations are not inconsistent with the word Paul used (ἱλασθηρον), although they tend to be restrictive in this context. See Moo, pp. 231ff.

¹⁸ Stott, pp. 114f.

¹⁹ Mounce, p. 117, citing Morris, L. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, pp. 180f.

²⁰ Stott, p. 115.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²² See Murray, vol. 1, p. 119.

²³ Stott, p. 116.

make faith a *work*? If it's something we must *do*, doesn't that qualify as a work? How does it go...*God contributes the Cross, and I contribute faith. Or, grace is God's gift to me and faith is my gift back to God.* You've probably heard these or something similar. What do these say? They don't say *I believe*; rather, they say *I have to believe*. You catch the difference?

Those who profess such things risk works-righteousness. For them, Christ's work is insufficient without their contribution. But this thinking doesn't at all constitute true faith. Luther wrote, "Faith...apprehendeth nothing else but that precious jewel Christ Jesus."²⁴ It's not the worthiness of one's belief, but the worthiness of what (who) is believed.²⁵ If I believe something, I simply have faith (hold the belief) that it's true. I've done nothing to *make* it true; it's either true (for me) or not. In this case, I believe that Christ's death 2000 years ago paid for my sins, thus placating God's wrath against me. I have faith (hold the belief) that it's true. I accept the truth of it – nothing more, nothing less. Where's the work in that?

One thing more: *Justification by grace* separates us from all other belief systems. No other system has a "gospel" – the "good news" that God himself has borne our judgment and declared us righteous though we have done (and can do) nothing to deserve it. All other belief systems teach some form of self-salvation...works righteousness...you must somehow *earn* God's favor. These systems are all about man's movement towards God. *Grace* is just the opposite. It's about God reaching out to man...it's about God placating his own wrath...it's about God making man right with himself...it's about *God* – period. Man has nothing to do with it. No other system is like that.²⁶

d. So No One Can Boast – 3:27-31

Having briefly (yet, explicitly) explained to the Jews that it's God, through Christ, who has done the redeeming work...that it's his hand and his hand alone that placates his wrath...that he alone justifies...he alone declares righteous, Paul now asks: How can you (or anyone) say *you* did something? ...How can anyone "boast" (v. 27a)? ...How can anyone even *think* he contributes to his own righteousness? He can't. That kind of thinking is "shut out."²⁷ So, where's the Law now? ...What kind of "law" brings this about? ...A law of (your) works? No, he answers – it's a "law" of faith (v. 27b). *Believe* what God has done. ...*Believe* what Christ did for

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 117f, citing Luther's *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 1531; James Clarke, 1953, p. 100.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118, citing Hooker, Richard "Definition of Justification," in *Ecclesiastical Polity*, 1593.

²⁶ See Stott, p. 118.

²⁷ Literal translation for ἐξεκλεισθη.

you on the Cross. ...*Believe*. That's the only "law" that's in effect, here. And *praising*, not "boasting," is what *believers* do.²⁸ "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1Cor 1:31).

In stating it's a "law" of faith, Paul sets up a *principle* that stands in opposition to the "Law" of works.²⁹ Because: "...man is justified by faith (alone)" – without works (v. 28). What a great statement. Paul captures succinctly the simple *reason* why "works of the Law" are not in play, here.³⁰ If it's faith (alone) – belief in what *God* has done – it simply *can't* be anything man has done. It's "shut out," as he said in v. 27. Although Paul again says "works of the Law," here, he means "works" of any kind – i.e. the *principle* of works...works *righteousness*.³¹ Also, Paul doesn't explicitly say faith *alone*; but it's clearly implied. Luther, seeing that *alone* brings out the true sense of what Paul intended,³² added it – *sola fide* ("faith alone"), he said. The phrase became a "watchword" of the Reformation (and caused Luther no small amount of grief from the Roman Catholic Church for "perverting the Holy Scripture").³³ But he wasn't the first to insert *alone* in Paul's text; there's a long list of early Church Fathers who did the same³⁴...who didn't feel they were "perverting" what Paul said since he most definitely meant "without works"³⁵ – not a little bit of works; no works.

Paul now asks a question in a round-about way intended to solicit tacit agreement from the Jews. Is God (who is God of all the universe) a God of Jews only (v. 29a)? Since there's only one God (and he is God of all the universe), isn't he the God of the Gentiles as well?³⁶ Of course (v. 29b). Put in those terms, the Jews would agree. How could they not? The issue is not whether God is God of the universe (which includes Gentiles), but whether God's righteousness is universal...whether it applies to Gentiles as well as Jews.³⁷ So, with acknowledgement that there's one God over all, Jews and Gentiles, Paul continues with the *singular* theme that there's only one God, and only he justifies, and he justifies only one way: through faith. God will justify the Jews (the "circumcision") by faith, and he will justify the Gentiles (the "uncircumcision") by that same faith (v. 30).³⁸

²⁸ Stott, p. 120.

²⁹ Moo, p. 250.

³⁰ See Murray, vol. 1, p. 123.

³¹ Refer to the discussion in Lesson IV.

³² Moo, p. 251.

³³ Stott, p. 117.

³⁴ Moo, p. 250, n. 25.

³⁵ Literal translation for χωρις εργαων (v. 28).

³⁶ See Mounce, p. 119.

³⁷ See Moo, p. 251f.

³⁸ See Stott, p. 120.

Now, a big question...one the Jews most certainly asked repeatedly in response to Paul's assertion of *justification by faith*: What about the Law? ...What happens to the Law? ...The Law that God gave and we've followed for hundreds of years – is it now null and void (v. 31a)? Paul gives a resounding “no.” The principle of faith stands in opposition to the principle of works...the *works* of the Law, not the Law itself. Faith doesn't void the Law; rather, it *upholds* or *establishes* (NASB) the Law (v. 31b).

What Paul means by “Law” in v. 31b has been a matter of some debate. Just what is it that Paul says faith upholds? First, does he mean the whole of the OT, or specifically the Mosaic Law (the *Torah*)? If it's the former, then what's upheld is the testimony of the “Law and the Prophets” (v. 21) with respect to justification by faith; and therefore, v. 31 is a lead-in to Ch 4's discussion of Abraham's justification by faith.³⁹ But Moo argues rather convincingly that were v. 31 a transition to Ch 4, Paul would have used the word “for” to begin Ch 4, signaling continuation of thought for explanation.⁴⁰ He didn't. Assuming he means the Mosaic Law, then, does he refer to the Law's exposure and condemnation of sin; or, to the Law's demands which Christ fulfilled and which the Spirit fulfills in believers? Moo suggests that Paul's stress on faith upholding the Law points to the latter.⁴¹ Luther came to the same conclusion, adding it's “you who teach that works of the Law justify without faith [who] make the Law void; for you don't obey it.”⁴²

Stott points out that Paul was answering a specific criticism – one that argued that emphasizing justification by faith rather than by obedience encouraged *disobedience*, i.e. *antinomianism*.⁴³ Paul will address this criticism further in Chs. 6-8, but his simple statement here that faith *upholds* or *establishes* the Law – i.e. makes it possible, through the Holy Spirit, to meet the Law's demands – counters the antinomian argument. It's not that faith encourages *disobedience*; it's that without faith obedience is *not possible*. As Paul has stated earlier, man *can't*, of himself, obey the Law; only with help from the Holy Spirit can such be done – and that requires faith.

[e. Abraham's Example – 4:1-25](#)

In Ch 4, Paul “reassesses”⁴⁴ the then current Jewish doctrine regarding Abraham's righteousness. This doctrine held Abraham as the prime example of works righteousness.⁴⁵

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁴⁰ Moo, p. 253.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁴² Luther, p. 80.

⁴³ Stott, p. 121.

⁴⁴ Mounce, p. 121, n. 32.

“Abraham was perfect in all his dealings with the Lord,” the doctrine maintained, “and gained favor by his righteousness throughout his life.”⁴⁶ All we need note is Abraham’s treatment of his wife when they sojourned in Egypt (Gen 12:10ff), or his ordeal with Hagar and Ishmael (Gen Chs. 16 and 21) to see that righteousness didn’t come by him naturally. Nevertheless, this was Jewish doctrine. Also, the Rabbis taught that Abraham achieved righteousness by submitting to circumcision.⁴⁷ Since the OT clearly records that Abraham was circumcised (Gen Ch. 17) many years after he was credited with righteousness (Gen Ch. 15), we might think there’s not much point in arguing such an obvious error. But the Jews obviously didn’t see it as error.⁴⁸ Much the same can be said of the Law: The promise to Abraham (Gen 15:5) couldn’t have come through the Law since the Law (Ex 20:1ff) came some 400 years after the promise. Since Abraham is the great Patriarch of the Jews...the one they hold in greatest esteem...the one they would model themselves after – Paul *necessarily* must integrate Abraham into his thesis, especially since Paul proclaims that justification by faith derives from OT scripture.⁴⁹ Otherwise, his proclamation will fall on (already) deaf ears.

Paul begins with reference back to 3:27: If Abraham was indeed “justified by works” (as you Jews maintain), then indeed he has something to “boast” about (v. 2). But what does “scripture” say (v. 3)? ...*Your* scripture? Paul quotes Gen 15:6: “Abraham believed God” (15:6a, emphasis added). He had faith that God spoke truth...that what God said would come to pass. And this is what God “credited to him as righteousness” (15:6b). ...*No works. ...Belief...faith* – and that *alone*. Paul undoubtedly was well aware of the Rabbis’ teaching on this verse – the teaching that *belief* constituted Abraham’s *faithfulness* to God; and therefore, *belief* was a meritorious act.⁵⁰ For example, “Was not Abraham found faithful in temptation, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.”⁵¹ Thus, Paul introduces the verse here, and will keep referring to it as he progresses through Ch. 4, each time placing Abraham’s faith in its proper context. He will systematically address why Abraham’s justification was not through works, nor through circumcision, nor through the Law.

Paul’s been hammering hard against works. Now he presents a simple illustration. A man works and earns a wage (v. 4). The wage is owed to him...it’s an obligation. The person for whom he worked is in debt to him for the wage. By analogy, Paul implicitly raises a question: Would God

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁴⁶ Stott, p. 123, citing Jubilees 23:10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁴⁸ See Murray, vol. 1, p. 136.

⁴⁹ Moo, pp. 256f.

⁵⁰ Stott, p. 123.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, citing 1Macc 2:52.

be in debt to *you*? ...Would God oblige himself to man? ...To his creation? Be assured, God is in no way obliged to us.⁵² Let's look at it differently. The man who earns the wage has a *right* to it.⁵³ He's in a position to *demand* payment. Could we ever *demand* anything of God? If we *were* able to work for our righteousness, then, we'd be in a position to demand payment...to demand God's justification. ...Not possible, is it.

And so, the analogy of Paul's illustration: The man who works receives what he earned not as a gift, but as an obligation...a "debt," literally (and God is indebted to no man, no matter what "work" he does). *But the man not working* (for his righteousness), *but believing upon him who justifies* (v. 5a); *to that man righteousness is gifted...or, "credited" ...or, "imputed"*⁵⁴ (v. 5b). God is not looking for people to do something for *him*; he's looking for people to believe what he has done for *them* through his Son Christ Jesus. ...That's it. And Paul is attempting to phrase this truth in a way that the Jews might understand...in a way that will lead them to "reassess" their thinking and come to know true righteousness and how it's received.

Having addressed a proof text from the Pentateuch, Paul now turns from the Mosaic Law to the Prophets to show the cohesiveness of the OT in attesting to justification by faith.⁵⁵ He turns to David and his writings in Psalms. David, he says, likewise addressed *righteousness without works* in Psalm 32:1-2 where he spoke of the "blessing" upon him who receives such righteousness (v. 6). The key to connecting the Genesis passage with the Psalm passage is the verb "credited."⁵⁶ In Genesis, the emphasis was on Abraham's faith being "credited *to*" him as righteousness; in the Psalm, the emphasis is on sins being "covered" (v. 7) because God does "not credit"⁵⁷ them to us (v. 8). Moo points out that associating OT texts based on verb parallels was a common Jewish exegetical technique.⁵⁸ And posing his argument with a familiar technique may constitute a secondary thought in Paul's purpose; perhaps, the Jews will view the argument with more seriousness.

Now, Paul turns to circumcision. But first he asks: This blessing that David spoke of (vv. 7-8), is it for the Jews (the "circumcision") only, or is it for the Gentiles (the "uncircumcision"), as well (v. 9a)? Using *circumcision* and *uncircumcision* to refer to Jews and Gentiles was common

⁵² See Moo, pp. 263f.

⁵³ See Stott, pp. 125f.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁵⁵ See Moo, p. 265.

⁵⁶ Gr. λογίζομαι.

⁵⁷ Bible versions tend to use alternate wording that better captures the meaning in today's vernacular, e.g. "count against" – NIV, or "take into account" – NASB.

⁵⁸ Moo, p. 266.

practice; but still, it's a bit of a play on words leading into the topic of circumcision. He begins by reminding them of the initial premise:⁵⁹ Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness (v. 9b). *But*, Paul asks, *was it credited before or after he was circumcised* (v. 10a)? Now, the Jews know the sequence of events; by their own reckoning, 29 years passed between the two.⁶⁰ But as we discussed earlier, the Rabbis taught that Abraham displayed his (meritorious) *faithfulness* to God in Gen 15:6, and received his righteousness upon circumcision. Here, Paul is carefully leading them (if they'll follow) to the correct interpretation. We note that in reminding them of the premise (v. 9b), he led with: "For we say..." While not as strong as "we know" in establishing a point of common understanding (e.g. 3:19), the phrase carries an implication, at least, that what follows is undisputed in fact, albeit not quite so (yet) in interpretation.⁶¹

So, Paul answers the question, emphatically stating *not* after, but *before* (v. 10b). Paul doesn't immediately justify his bold statement.⁶² Rather, he proceeds to answer an unasked but readily anticipated question: *If circumcision didn't provide Abraham righteousness, what was it for?* God told Abraham at the time that it was a "sign of the covenant" between himself and Abraham (Gen 17:11). And what was the covenant? ...That God would give Abraham offspring through whom many nations would emerge. Abraham believed God when that promise was first given. The Jews know all this. But Paul now elaborates on the "sign of circumcision," saying not only was it a "sign of the covenant," it was a "seal" of the righteousness credited to Abraham when he *first* believed...a righteousness by *faith* that he received while *uncircumcised* (v. 11a).

And Paul says there was *purpose* behind Abraham's being credited with righteousness while uncircumcised: That he might be the father of all those uncircumcised (read: Gentiles) who also come to believe (v. 11b – NASB). And this, too, has purpose: That righteousness might be "credited" to them as it was to Abraham (v. 11c). *So*, Paul says, *Abraham is father to Gentile believers*.⁶³ But he doesn't stop there. Abraham is also father to the Jews (the "circumcision") "who walk in the footsteps" of faith as their *uncircumcised* father Abraham did (v. 12) – i.e. believing Jews. So, Paul is saying that Abraham is the father of *all* believers, Jew and Gentile, circumcised or not.⁶⁴ Now, how do you think all this sat with Paul's Jewish audience? ...Those

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁶⁰ Mounce, p. 125.

⁶¹ See Murray, vol. 1, p. 136.

⁶² Moo, p. 268.

⁶³ Stott, p. 129.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

full of works-righteousness and elitism? In essence he was saying the Gentiles didn't have to enter righteousness by the Jewish gateway; rather, the Jews had to enter by the Gentile gateway.⁶⁵ Paul may have been guiding, but he wasn't gentle about it.

And now the Law. If justification is not by works, nor by circumcision, neither is it by the Law.⁶⁶ Paul abandons his diatribe, here, in favor of straight-forward statements. *It wasn't through the Law that Abraham received the promise* (v. 13a). Why not? ...Because the Law came 430 years later.⁶⁷ Jewish writings maintained, however, that Abraham kept the Law before it was given.⁶⁸ Still, the promise could not have come *through* the Law if it didn't exist yet. But this discrepancy is not the only reason the promise didn't come through the Law. Something comes to us *either* by promise or by law – not by both.⁶⁹ Stott notes they are incompatible processes: Law says “you shall” and demands obedience; promise says “I will” and requires faith...*belief* that the promise will be fulfilled.⁷⁰ Thus, Paul says if it's the Law in operation, here, then not only is faith unnecessary, but the promise is no more (v. 14).⁷¹

Moreover, the Law not only can't secure the promise, it *brings wrath* (v. 15a). How so? We noted in 3:20 that the Law brings us to the full knowledge of sin,⁷² but how does the Law itself bring wrath? The answer lies in the word “transgression.” Sin existed before the Law, of course, and man stood under wrath for that sin. But the Law brought *commands*...commands to be obeyed – which, of course, we can't do. And now, when we *break* the command, we're guilty not only of sin but of “transgression” – violating the command...or the Law, in this case.⁷³ Thus, Paul points out that if there were no Law, there would be no transgression (v. 15b). But, since there is Law, and you (Jews) have violated it, the Law serves to bring wrath upon you.

So, the promise came not through the Law, but “through the righteousness that comes by faith” (v. 13b). Abraham *believed* God when the promise was made ...he *believed* God would fulfill the promise. He had *faith*. And Paul says it's through faith “for this reason” (v. 16a – NASB): *That God's grace might stand*.⁷⁴ The promise was a gift. If the Law and its works were necessary for the promise to stand, it would no longer be a gift. And there's further purpose to

⁶⁵ Mounce, p. 126, n. 57, citing Thomas, W.H.G. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953.

⁶⁶ Stott, p. 130.

⁶⁷ Gal 3:17.

⁶⁸ Moo, p. 256.

⁶⁹ See Stott, p. 131.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Cf. Gal 3:15ff where Paul elaborates on this subject.

⁷² See the discussion in Lesson IV.

⁷³ See Moo, pp. 276f.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

gifting the promise vice working for it: *To guarantee its fulfillment* (v. 16b). If its fulfillment depended on human works, it would never have come to pass.⁷⁵ And the testimony of this lies in the current situation Paul is arguing: The Jews' view of the Law and themselves is so far off-base, that the promise extending the covenant to *all* "who are of the faith of Abraham" (v. 16c) is, for them, completely out of mind.

Having explained why neither works, nor circumcision, nor Law held any basis in Abraham's justification, Paul now moves to what Stott calls the "reasonableness" of Abraham's faith.⁷⁶ Simply defined, faith is believing or trusting someone or something. The *reasonableness* of that belief or trust lies in the integrity of the person or thing. The faith I might have that a chair would hold me lies in the integrity of the chair. If the chair is a solid piece of furniture, my faith would be deemed reasonable; but if it has broken legs, I would be *unreasonable* to sit in it. So, over the next few verses Paul describes why Abraham's faith is reasonable. And in so doing, he implicitly underscores why "faith" in works, circumcision, or Law is *unreasonable*.

Two factors determine a person's integrity: Can he do what he says, and will he do what he says.⁷⁷ With humans, no matter how meaningful the intention, one or both of these is in question at any point in time. How about with God; *can* God do what he says? ...Does he have the power? Paul singles out in v. 17b the two most exemplary traits of God's power: He raises the dead (i.e. resurrection), and he brings *something* from *nothing* (i.e. creation). Of *course* he has the power. "Nothing is too hard for you" (Je 32:17). Thus, Paul says, Abraham was "fully persuaded that God had *power* to do what he had promised" (v. 21, emphasis added). And, his persuasion was wholly *reasonable*.

The question is never *can* God do something, but *will* he.⁷⁸ In our frail human expectations, we often lose sight of this. When a prayer isn't answered (at least to our satisfaction)...when things don't turn out as *we* think they should, we're often tempted to conclude maybe this is outside God's sphere of influence. *Nothing* is outside God's sphere of influence. Rather, "if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1Jn 5:14, emphasis added). In Abraham's case, he knew it was God's will since God is the one who promised. Thus again, he was wholly *reasonable* in believing God *would do* as he promised.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁷⁶ Stott, p. 132.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁷⁸ Mounce, p. 131.

So, “in hope”⁷⁹ and “against all hope” (v. 18) – referring to the *deadness* of his body and Sarah’s womb (v. 19b) – Abraham *believed*, not weakening in faith (v. 19a), not wavering in unbelief, but growing strong in faith and, thus, “giving glory to God” (v. 20, NASB). And isn’t this where the glory belongs? If we might hearken for a moment back to Ch. 1, v. 21, we learned that part of the reason for the present wrath was that men neither *glorified God* nor gave thanks to him. ...And if we work for something...if we have any input at all, who gets the glory? “This is why,” Paul concludes, Abraham was credited with righteousness (v. 22) – his *total surrender* to God’s ability and willingness to fulfill his promise.⁸⁰

In application, Paul points out that Abraham’s experience applies to “us,” as well (v. 24). Abraham believed that God would give him a son to make him father of many nations. We believe that God gave His Son for us to pay for our transgressions (v. 25a). We’re both credited with the same righteousness, for the same reason – faith.

But, how are we to understand the last phrase of Ch 4? After Paul says Jesus died for our sins, he says he “was raised...for our justification” (v. 25b). How do we reconcile this statement with what he has been emphasizing throughout this chapter (and before): That justification comes when we believe? If Jesus’ resurrection effected our justification, then why believe? If justification is already accomplished, why have faith? ...And why all the discussion about Abraham’s faith? The point has not gone unnoticed; scholars everywhere have differing views about Paul’s intended meaning, here. And they spend a lot of time discussing Greek grammar and the parallelism of the two halves of v. 25. But I think most are actually in agreement, although the words they use might suggest otherwise.

Let’s look at it from a different perspective: If Jesus was *not* raised...if there were *no* resurrection – then what? ...Would we be justified? ...*Could* we be justified? Let’s see what Paul says about this elsewhere: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1Cor 15:17). There you have it – Christ’s resurrection was just as necessary as his death in covering our sins. In essence, the resurrection *completed* the “propitiation” process, enabling God to justify without violating his holiness. And we still need to believe – have faith – that Christ’s work on our behalf is true. Thus, scholars say variously about v. 25b that Jesus was raised “with a view to our justification.”⁸¹ ...Or, “Without his resurrection there would be no

⁷⁹ Contrary to normal secular usage, Biblical “hope” carries the meaning of “confident expectation,” see Mounce, p. 129, n. 70.

⁸⁰ Mounce, p. 131.

⁸¹ Stott, p. 136.

proof of the redemptive reality of his death.”⁸² ...Or, “As Jesus’ death provides the necessary grounds on which God’s justifying action can proceed, so his resurrection...provides for the ongoing power over sins.”⁸³ As Mounce points out, Christ *died* for our sins, but both his death *and* resurrection made our justification possible.⁸⁴

f. Conclusion

Paul has introduced justification by faith. He applied scriptural testimony about Abraham to systematically explain to the Jews why neither works, nor circumcision, nor the Law can justify. He stipulated for the Jews (and us, by extension) that *nothing* they (or we) do will bring God’s justification; only by believing what *God* has done for us through his Son Christ Jesus will justification come. There is no other way.

⁸² Mounce, p. 132.

⁸³ Moo, p. 290.

⁸⁴ Mounce, p. 132, n. 86.

B. Questions

1. What's the greatest concept (doctrine) that Romans provides?
2. To whom does the saving initiative of the gospel belong?
3. Name the single, most important thing that distinguishes Christianity from all other religious systems.
4. What did Christ's crucifixion have to do with God's wrath?
5. Paul writes that God left unpunished the sins of former generations (3:25). How could God do that and remain righteous?
6. Why does Paul ask whether faith nullifies the Law? (3:31)
7. What does Paul mean by "we *uphold* the Law"? (3:31)
8. In Ro 4:3, Paul quotes Gen 15:6 – "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." What was his purpose in quoting this OT scripture?
9. Why was God's promise to Abraham *necessarily* a gift?
10. Why is faith "reasonable"?

C. Exegesis

Select a verse or passage from Ro 3:21-4:25, and write down the verse/passage from a bible version of your choosing. Following the sample outline given in Appendix A, write an inductive, expository, literary, analytical, and devotional study of your selection. Appendix A provides an explanation of these study methods. Choose a title for your study, and make concise notes as indicated. Appendix B provides a sample exegesis.

D. Classical Comments

Read what John Calvin⁸⁵ and Mathew Henry⁸⁶ had to say about Romans 3:21-4:25. Read, also, what Martin Luther wrote about the passage in the preface to his commentary on Romans.⁸⁷

Write a 1-page comparison of Calvin's and Henry's comments on Ro 3:21-4:25, including what thoughts Luther had relevant to the passage. Contrast these, where appropriate, with the exposition citing contemporary scholars, above.

⁸⁵ Available at ccel.org.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Lesson VI

Grace Comes Through Christ Alone

A. Exposition of 5:1-19

a. Introduction

Having explained to the Jews that it's God's righteousness alone that can pull us from the mire of our own *unrighteousness*, and that it's faith alone that will bring God's justification, Paul now expounds the benefits of justification by faith. Implicitly, here, Paul is contrasting the state of one who *rests* in the acceptance of God's work against that of one who continually *strives* for acceptance through his own work. ...The state of one justified through *faith* versus one striving for justification through *obedience* to the Law. The Jews themselves called their state a "yoke" – a "yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear."¹ Thus, Jesus encouraged putting on *his* yoke – because his yoke is "easy" and "will give you rest."² That's not to say the believer's life is all peaches and cream; Paul will address the point that believers suffer for Christ. But the believer's suffering is one of *endurance*, resting in the knowledge that God accepts him; it's not one of continual *striving* to be accepted.

The broader context in this and the next several chapters, however, is the role of Christ in God's grace. Paul underscores from the outset that the blessings from justification are made possible *only* through Christ's work. Again and again over the next several chapters he will repeat "in" or "through" Christ Jesus in testimony that *everything* a believer experiences of God's blessings and grace comes through Christ alone.³

b. The Fruits of Justification – 5:1-5

The lead phrase, "Therefore, having been justified" (v. 1a – NASB), sums Paul's entire argument thus far.⁴ He's given a long dissertation on the *need* for God's justification (1:18-3:20), and a lengthy treatise on God's *way* of justification (3:21-4:25). Now, he lists the blessings for those who *have been* justified God's way – the *only* way – "through faith." And by implication, he says to those who have *not* been justified God's way – those who continue to seek approval through their own merit – that they *can't* enjoy these blessings. In essence, he's saying to the Jews *these* are the blessings of true faith...blessings the works of the Law *can't* bring.

¹ Acts 15:10.

² Math 11:28-30.

³ Moo, p. 300.

⁴ Mounce, p. 132.

And the first blessing is “peace with God” (v. 1b). “Peace,” here, has in mind the “reconciliation” Paul will speak of in vv. 10f.⁵ Our former unrighteous state was at enmity with God’s righteousness. We were, in fact, God’s “enemies” (v. 10). And *still* enemies are those who seek justification through their own righteousness – even those who genuinely seek God’s approval (e.g. Paul’s Jewish audience). Why? As Paul has laid out in previous chapters, and as we’ve discussed in former lessons, only God can impute righteousness – his righteousness – to us. We cannot make ourselves righteous. And God has made a way, through the work of “our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 1c), to impute this righteousness to us...to justify us. All we need do is believe he has done this for us. If we *don’t* believe it...if we continue to think *we* need to do something for *God* – we’re still enemies. But for those who *do* believe, the barrier of hostility is broken; we are “justified by (our) faith” (v. 1a). We are now “reconciled to God” (v. 10). We are at “peace with God.”

The second blessing Paul mentions is the state of “grace in which we stand” (v. 2b). Grace embodies the entirety of the gift we’ve received from God. That entirety includes God’s initiation of a way to redeem us, the sacrifice of his Son to pay the price for our wickedness and to propitiate God’s wrath against us, and his free act of justification (*declaring* righteous) for those who believe. The *state* of grace constitutes a continuing status – the status of having been accepted by God⁶ – which is purely an unmerited gift. Paul’s use of perfect tense verbs attest to this continuing status: We’ve been given access to (v. 2a), and we now stand in God’s grace. By contrast, far different is one whose state is *under Law*...whose state is continual striving to obey that which he simply is incapable of obeying.

Third, we have “hope” (v. 2c) – the *confident expectation*⁷ that we will share in (fourth) “the glory of God” (v. 2d). And Paul says we “rejoice” in this hope. We rejoice that the *God-like-ness* man once had in the Garden may again be ours at the Last Day.⁸

But another *fruit* of justification is “suffering” (v. 3). Now, why should *suffering* be considered a *positive*? First, let’s look at this word translated “suffering.”⁹ It’s not an unusual word; it’s used throughout the NT. But it’s translated varyingly. Here, where the NIV has “suffering,” the NASB has “tribulation.” Elsewhere, in addition to these two renderings, the word is translated “trouble” (Jn 16:33), “hardships” (Act 14:22), “afflictions” (Col 1:24), and some others. While these variations don’t do violence to the word, the variety tends to obscure what it really conveys. Literally, the word means “pressure” (which no one uses), but pressure in the sense of *oppression*.¹⁰ It refers to those *external pressures* that the believer may encounter in this life.¹¹ It refers to the “opposition and persecution of a hostile world.”¹² At the risk of oversimplifying,

⁵ See Moo, p. 299.

⁶ See Stott, p. 140.

⁷ See Lesson V.

⁸ See Moo, p. 302.

⁹ Gr. θλιψις.

¹⁰ BAGD, p. 362.

¹¹ Moo, p. 302, n. 43.

¹² Stott, p. 141.

in this context it's the pressure on (or oppression of) believers to conform to an unbelieving world.¹³

Now let's look at Paul's reasoning for why we should "rejoice in our sufferings" (v. 3a). He says it produces a chain of traits which yields the "hope" he spoke of earlier. This kind of "suffering" produces "perseverance" (better translated "endurance," here¹⁴). Such *endurance* is what Jesus spoke of when he was relating oppressive things that would occur to his disciples (and by extension, to all believers) before the end of the Age: He said, "by your endurance (of these things), you will gain your lives" (Lk 21:19 – NASB). Stott points out that to learn endurance, suffering is *necessary*; without it, there would be nothing to endure.¹⁵

So, suffering produces endurance, which in turn produces "character" (v. 4). What kind of character? ...A tested character.¹⁶ ...One who has passed the test.¹⁷ ...One who has *been through the fire* and has *endured* – that kind of character. It's this character that will not be deterred...that will not be threatened or weakened by suffering; rather, it becomes ever more certain...ever more confident that what's *hoped* for will come to pass.¹⁸ In more contemporary terms, such character embodies a *contrarian* attitude – the attitude that says: *If I'm under such pressure to change my conviction, my conviction must certainly be correct.*

Thus, Paul is saying that without a tested character, hope will not sustain; and without endurance, the tested character will not emerge; and endurance cannot occur without suffering. Jesus spoke of something similar in his Parable of the Sower. He explained that the seed that fell on rocky ground represented one who rejoices at hearing the word, but who falls away "in the time of testing" (Lk 8:13)...who falls away when "trouble¹⁹ or persecution comes" (Math 13:21). ...This person *has no character*. And this is Paul's lesson for us: If we can't bear up under the pressures of this world...if we can't endure the constant beckoning of the world's way...if we shrink back from persecution – then we have no character, and our "hope" is hopeless.

Moreover, he says we "know" this chain and its yield (v. 3b). We *know* that if we endure the pressure...if we bear up under the opposition...if we overcome the obstacles, then that "hope," that *confident expectation* of God's glory is ours. But how can we know that? ..."By the Holy Spirit" (v. 5). Justification accompanies regeneration (the newness of heart *for* God), and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ And the Holy Spirit has "poured out" (perfect tense) God's love for us²¹ into our hearts. The perfect tense attests to the *permanent flood*²² of God's love that

¹³ ἄλιψις, while not disassociated from physical pain, connotes more the psychological and emotional trauma associated with oppression and distress (see BAGD, p. 362).

¹⁴ See Moo, p. 303.

¹⁵ Stott, p. 142.

¹⁶ Moo, p. 303.

¹⁷ Stott, p. 142.

¹⁸ Moo, p. 303f.

¹⁹ Gr. ἄλιψις.

²⁰ Stott, p. 142.

²¹ Most scholars; contrary to Augustine and Luther who preferred *our love for God*.

resides now within us.²³ Believers *know* God loves them, and therein lays the confidence of their hope. If they doubt that love, then they doubt their faith. Yet, how can they *truly* know? ...Just look at the testimony of the Cross: God *sacrificed* his Son for us. “He *gave* his only begotten Son” that believers might have eternal life (Jn 3:16 – NASB, emphasis added). That alone is proof of God’s unending love for believers. As Stott says, “the essence of love is giving.”²⁴

One more thing regarding Paul’s statement that *we rejoice in our sufferings*: This kind of suffering, at this time, came mostly from the hand of the Jews (it would come from Roman authority, later). The Jews were the ones most vehemently opposed to Paul’s teaching. They were the ones who dogged Paul around Asia and Greece, mounting violent opposition to the doctrine of grace. The *sufferings* Paul speaks of, here, came from the very Jews whom Paul is addressing in his diatribes...whom Paul continues to address, implicitly, in this very passage. In saying that *we rejoice* in these sufferings, Paul in essence is poking a stick in the eye of his oppressors. He’s telling them that what they mete out in fact *boosts* the hope of the very people they oppose.²⁵ And Paul himself serves as the prime example.

c. [“At Just the Right Time” – 5:6-8](#)

Some have questioned what Paul means, exactly, in reference to “just the right time” (v. 6a). Was it the right time in history for Christ to come and for the gospel to be made known? ...Or, was it just in time to stave off God’s wrath against would-be believers?²⁶ ...Or, had the time finally come to break the chains of sin?²⁷ We might argue for any or all of these. But, Murray points out that it’s hard to ignore the “fullness of time” Paul mentions elsewhere with respect to Christ’s coming (Gal 4:4). ...Or the “consummation of the ages” associated with Christ’s sacrifice (Heb 9:26 – NASB) – that time when all other times converge.²⁸ After all, isn’t this what we’d been marching toward since the Fall?²⁹ I’d say that “just the right time” in v. 6a refers to exactly this. It’s that eschatological point in time when God preordained he would fulfill the promise he had maintained throughout the OT...when he would bring the Messiah to save his people. This was that time – “just the right time” – when “Christ died for the ungodly” (v. 6b).

Embodied in the word “ungodly” is the fact that Christ died for people who hated him.³⁰ Paul underscores this truth by pointing out that while one may die for someone he considers “good” (in human terms) – perhaps a spouse or child or very close companion³¹ – would he die for a

²² Stott, p. 142.

²³ Moo, p. 305.

²⁴ Stott, p. 144.

²⁵ See Moo, p. 302.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

²⁷ Mounce, p. 136.

²⁸ Murray, vol. 1, p. 167.

²⁹ Cf. Gen 3:15.

³⁰ Moo, pp. 307f.

³¹ *Ibid.*

righteous person? ...Not hardly (v. 7). Yet Christ died for wholly *unrighteous* people...*godless* people...still *dead* in our sins (v. 8b). *This* is how God “demonstrates” his love for us (v. 8a). He loved and sacrificed and gave of himself for those who cared not a whit for him. “How then,” asks Stott, “can we doubt the love of God?”³²

Now, we come to an important point. Back in Ro 4:5, Paul says God “justifies the wicked.”³³ Paul’s Jewish audience would have found this statement quite shocking since God himself said in giving the Law, “I will not acquit the guilty” (Ex 23:7).³⁴ And it’s no great leap to assume *the guilty* includes *the wicked*. Moreover, elsewhere in the OT God commands that *man* not acquit the guilty, either.³⁵ So, how can we square God’s declaration in Ex 23:7 with Paul’s statement in Ro 4:5?³⁶ The truth is we couldn’t, and God couldn’t...except for the truth of Ro 5:6b – *Christ died for the wicked*.³⁷ ...*Christ died for the guilty*.³⁸ But, the question arises: Did God, then – in effect – “acquit the guilty” after all? ...Are the Jews justified in their *shock* upon hearing Paul declare that God “justifies the *wicked*”? ...No! God did *not* acquit the guilty. Just as he demanded in the OT that the judges punish the guilty,³⁹ so he himself indeed punished the *sins* of the guilty. But he gave that punishment to *Christ* on the Cross...*then he gave mercy to the guilty*. “Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions” (Eph 2:4-5, emphasis added). Paul will have much more to say about God’s mercy, later.

d. *Saved from the Wrath – 5:9-11*

As we’ve already discussed,⁴⁰ the *act* of Christ’s sacrifice – his “blood” (v. 9a) – is what brought justification. It’s what made justification possible. Paul stresses the truth of that again, here, underscoring the great cost at which God has redeemed us.⁴¹ And he points out that while Christ’s death paid the penalty for our sins and propitiated God’s wrath against us, it’s his resurrected *life* (v. 10d) that ensures we will indeed be spared the wrath to come.⁴²

Paul emphasizes in these verses that since God, through Christ, has already done the hard work – redemption, justification, reconciliation – “how much more” it is (vv. 9b, 10c) that he can be trusted to carry through to completion the work of final salvation.⁴³ Paul argues from the position that what has taken place is true; therefore, what is yet to take place is also true.⁴⁴

³² Stott, p. 145.

³³ We deliberately sidestepped this phrase in Lesson V to discuss it here.

³⁴ Mounce, p. 123.

³⁵ E.g. Pr 17:15, Is 5:23.

³⁶ See Stott, pp. 112f.

³⁷ Most Bible versions say “ungodly,” here, but the same Gr. word (ασεβης) is used in both 4:5 and 5:6.

³⁸ See discussion in Lesson V about Christ’s role in justification by grace.

³⁹ Dt. 25:1.

⁴⁰ See Lesson V.

⁴¹ Stott, p. 147.

⁴² See Murray, vol. 1, p. 175.

⁴³ Moo, p. 310.

⁴⁴ Murray, vol. 1, p. 169.

Christ's death has already propitiated God's wrath. The well-deserved punishment we faced for our sins against God has been executed in Christ through his death on the cross. What remains is our actual salvation from that wrath when it comes at the Last Day. Paul in essence asks a question: Would God have bothered to *reconcile us to himself* (v. 10a)...would he have sacrificed "his Son" (v. 10b) if he didn't intend ultimately to save us from his wrath?

We note, also, that these verses exemplify the *already...not yet* tension of the NT.⁴⁵ They underscore what Christ has *already* accomplished at his first coming, and what he has *not yet* accomplished but will at his second coming. Redemption, justification, and reconciliation have *already* occurred for the believer, but his actual salvation from the wrath and his full sanctification and glorification have *not yet* occurred. Moo points out that in these verses Paul has established an "unbreakable connection"⁴⁶ between what God has *already* done through Christ and what he has *not yet* completed in him. And Paul assures us, here, that God will indeed complete his work of salvation through the resurrected "life" of his Son (v. 10d).

And we "rejoice" (v. 11a) in a God who would do all this for a wicked people. We *rejoice* in "our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 11b) whose work was for a people who hated him. We *rejoice* that God, through Jesus, loved us – his enemies – enough to *give* us "reconciliation" (v. 11c). For we, of our own, would *never* have reconciled to God...we would never have *thought* to reconcile to him. Indeed, without God's unmerited grace, there we would stand – wittingly or unwittingly – condemned to eternal punishment.

Stott points out that "rejoice," here, is the same word translated "brag" in 2:17 (literally, the word is "boast"). There, Paul was addressing the Jews' *bragging* about their relationship with God in their self-perceived (but misguided) superior status in the Law.⁴⁷ "Boast" has both positive and negative connotations. And in 2:17 the connotation was negative given the Jews' perception that God belonged exclusively to them. Stott's point is that believers lay no claim to God. Rather, we marvel at what God has done for us through his Son Christ Jesus. Thus, "boast" here is positive. We don't *brag* of our privileges, but *rejoice* in God's mercy. We don't *brag* that we possess him, but *rejoice* that he possesses us. And this is the believer's hallmark: *Joy*.⁴⁸

e. "One Act of Righteousness" – 5:12-19

As Paul launches into this passage, he likely has in mind the whole of his argument thus far – sin and wrath (1:18-3:20) on the one hand, and righteousness and justification (3:21-4:25) on the other.⁴⁹ He intends, it seems, to cite the *instruments* that brought each and the *ultimate effect* from those instruments. And more importantly, he seems intent on showing, through a comparison, how the latter overcame the former. So, he begins: "Therefore, just as sin entered

⁴⁵ Stott, p. 146.

⁴⁶ Moo, p. 311.

⁴⁷ See Lesson IV.

⁴⁸ Stott, pp. 147f.

⁴⁹ Moo, p. 315.

the world through one man..." (v. 12a). But he doesn't complete the thought. Instead, he begins to digress about the consequences brought by the "one man" (i.e. Adam). Then, he further digresses to contrast these consequences with the fruits of the "gift" (i.e. Christ's work). He won't return to his original thought until v. 18. Digression notwithstanding, however, the passage holds much of theological importance.⁵⁰

So, what *were* the consequences brought by the "one man"? Paul says *Sin* entered the world, and through *Sin*, *Death* entered the world (v. 12b).⁵¹ Adam's transgression in the Garden sowed the seed of physical death.⁵² God told Adam he would die if he disobeyed,⁵³ and he did die – eventually. But beyond physical death lies a spiritual consequence: *separation from God*.⁵⁴ This separation is depicted temporally in the immediate consequence Adam suffered following his transgression: He was banned from the Garden...from the place where he daily enjoyed God's company; he was driven into the wilderness, as it were, to fend for himself.⁵⁵ This, of course, is merely a depiction of the *ultimate* separation that God's un-reconciled enemies will suffer at the Last Day. Although Paul in this passage emphasizes physical death, for the most part; what he refers to in v. 12b...what Adam's transgression unleashed, is *Death* both physical and spiritual.

What else? ..."And in this way," Paul continues, Death "came to all men" (v. 12c), "because all sinned" (v. 12d). Two questions arise here that scholars everywhere and from long past debate: (1) *Why* did death come to *all* for the transgression of *one*, and (2) What does Paul mean that "all *sinned*" (past tense)? Since one is the cause of the other, these questions are best considered together. First, the text clearly states that Death entered the world (v. 12b), and then "spread" (v. 12c – NASB) like an uncontrollable fungus or disease. Adam was the catalyst that *loosed* Death into the world where it infected all that it touched. Scholars don't disagree that this happened; they disagree on *why* and *how* it happened. And to capture the *why*, we first need to define the *how*.

The phrase "because all sinned" (v. 12d) is likely one of the most debated phrases in the Bible. First, the Greek translated "because," here, is a bit awkward.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, although alternate translations have been offered, most scholars agree that "because" or some other causal phrase is both textually and contextually correct.⁵⁷ With that part of the debate out of the way,

⁵⁰ For Moo, it rivals 3:21-26. See p. 314.

⁵¹ Mounce points out that Sin and Death "personify the powers of destruction" and "probably should both be capitalized" (p. 140, n. 123).

⁵² Mounce, p. 141.

⁵³ Gen 2:17.

⁵⁴ Mounce, p. 141.

⁵⁵ Gen 3:23.

⁵⁶ Gr. εφ ω. Lit: "upon whom/which."

⁵⁷ See Moo, pp. 321f.

then, we come to “all sinned.” And we ask: *How so?* First of all, it doesn’t say all *sin* (present tense) or all *will sin* (future) as a result of Adam’s transgression; no, it says all “sinned” *past tense*. ...How can that be?

Fundamentally, three options emerge from the debate. The first ignores the implication of the past tense and simply states all die because all do in fact sin. Those who espouse this view argue against the concept of *original sin* (which we’ll take up below). They say all die because all sin individually in and of their own accord...all merely follow Adam’s bad example.⁵⁸ While this notion is, after all, true – all do sin in and of their own⁵⁹ – it sidesteps the issue of how “all sinned” (past tense) because of Adam’s transgression.

This brings us to the second option: “All sinned” because along with Death, Sin also – like a disease –infected the world and everyone in it. We can look at Adam’s transgression as the *cause* of our sinful nature.⁶⁰ We can say that we *inherited* his depravation⁶¹...that we all derived from Adam a *corrupt nature*.⁶² This nature we call “original sin.” And the option that Paul refers to original sin, here, is rooted in Augustine and was adopted by both Luther and Calvin.⁶³ While most modern scholars concur that the concept of *original sin* is Biblical fact,⁶⁴ and that *original sin* lays at the foundation of why we *do* sin (present tense), it doesn’t explain how “all sinned” (*past tense*). Thus, scholars argue, original sin is not what Paul means in v. 12d.

So, what *does* he mean? Option three: Adam was a *corporate* figure. And what does “corporate” indicate? ...It says, what *Adam* did, *we* did. And *when* he did it, *we* did it.⁶⁵ It says that Adam *represented* the whole of mankind...his actions affected *all* who would come after him...he was the *federal head* of the human race.⁶⁶ Despite the fact that we would not physically exist for eons, we *existed* in Adam. Thus, a *corporate* understanding of the phrase “all sinned” in v. 12d would say it refers not to *original sin*, but to *imputed sin*.⁶⁷ God imputed (*credited*⁶⁸) Adam’s transgression to all people as sin...just as he imputes Christ’s righteousness to all believers as justification. The only difference is, where we need faith to receive what Christ did *for us*, we don’t need it to receive what Adam did *to us* – it’s true for us whether we believe it or not. Only this option will fit Paul’s continual emphasis in this passage on the effect

⁵⁸ This view generally stems from the thoughts of the 5th century British monk, Pelagius; see Stott, pp. 150f.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ro 3:23.

⁶⁰ Mounce, p. 142.

⁶¹ Stott, p. 151.

⁶² Murray, vol. 1, p. 184.

⁶³ See Moo, p. 325, n. 54.

⁶⁴ E.g. Eph 2:3.

⁶⁵ Moo, p. 328, n. 61.

⁶⁶ Stott, p. 152.

⁶⁷ See *What is the Difference Between Original Sin and Imputed Sin* (23 January 2006), desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles.

⁶⁸ See the discussion on “credited” in Lesson V.

of the *one* transgression by the *one* man.⁶⁹ That Paul indeed means *imputed* sin, here, will become more evident as he progresses through the passage.

So, Death “came to all men” (v. 12c), “because all sinned” (v. 12d) *in the federal headship of Adam*. This defines *how*, and thus explains *why* Death came to *all* for the transgression of *one*. And it’s this federal headship that Paul has in mind as he contrasts then compares Adam and Christ – the action of the *one* impacted the *many*.⁷⁰ ...That of Adam – negatively; that of Christ – positively.

Our somewhat lengthy treatment of vv. 12c & 12d (albeit brief by comparison with the many and varied commentaries) underscores Paul’s digression. We already noted above that he began the passage with a particular thought in mind. Now he realizes (I believe) that the short phrases of vv. 12c & 12d present a deep concept...and he stops, here, to explain (although the explanation itself is deep).

“Sin is not imputed (lit. “credited”),” he says, “when there is no law” (v. 13b – NASB). What does this say? ...Sin doesn’t *count* unless there’s some specific rule? That seems rather counter-intuitive. But this is not the first time Paul has broached the subject. Earlier in his letter he mentioned rather off-handedly, “Where there is no Law, there is no transgression” (4:15).⁷¹ Now, he elaborates: Although “sin was in the world” (v. 13a) – because Adam unleashed it (v. 12) – it wasn’t *imputed* until the Law was given. ...Why? Moreover, why was it imputed *after* the Law was given? ...Because the Law brought *commands*. And the *violation* of a command is what brings *transgression*.⁷² This is Paul’s very emphasis: Adam violated a *command* – the command to not eat of the one fruit. ...Thus, his *transgression* (and ours through his federal headship).

And now Paul reaches his point: Although people (as a whole) during the entire time from Adam to Moses didn’t violate a command as Adam did (v. 14b), they physically died anyway (v. 14a). *Everybody* died. ...Why? If sin was not imputed...if commands were not violated,⁷³ why did people die anyway? ...Because God imputed *Adam’s* transgression to *all* and the consequence of that one transgression was *Death*. Although people’s *own* sins (committed owing to *original* sin) were not imputed since they were not transgressions of command or Law, Adam’s sin *was* imputed because it *was* a transgression. And since Adam was mankind’s federal head, “death reigned” (v. 14a) over *all*.

⁶⁹ Murray, vol. 1, p. 185.

⁷⁰ See Stott, p. 149.

⁷¹ See our discussion in Lesson V.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Recognized, here, are the individual commands recorded in scripture to Abraham, Noah, and others. Paul is referring to the absence of a command structure for any of mankind until the Law was given to the Hebrews through Moses (see Stott, pp. 151f).

Paul concludes his point by saying that Adam prefigured Christ...Adam “was a pattern of the one to come” (v. 14c). You can almost imagine the recoil of Paul’s audience upon hearing him compare the one who opened the world to Sin and Death to the one who opened the world to righteousness. But his point is made. Adam’s act of transgression brought no less impact to humanity than Christ’s act of righteousness brings to believers. Paul will elaborate in v. 18.

But the similarity of Adam and Christ ends here. ...Because, “the gift is not like the trespass” (v. 15a). As “trespass” refers to Adam’s one act of defiance in the Garden, so “gift,” here, refers to Christ’s one act of righteousness on the Cross.⁷⁴ Paul contrasts the two to underscore how Christ’s positive act *overcomes* Adam’s negative act. “The many died by the trespass”; but just look at the *abundance* for the many brought by “God’s grace and the gift that came by...Jesus Christ” (v. 15b). Moreover, the *result* of the gift “is not like the result” of the trespass (v. 16a).⁷⁵ “Judgment” and “condemnation” followed Adam’s *single* trespass; but the “justification” brought by “the gift” – Christ’s single act of righteousness – “followed *many* trespasses” (v. 16b – emphasis added). What a stark contrast. The consequence of just *one* sin brought Death to all mankind; but (for believers) the *power* of just one act of righteousness wiped away the *multitude* of sins for all ages and *conquered* Death.

Paul ends his contrast with the ultimate effect of each act.⁷⁶ ...“Death reigned through that one man [Adam]” (v. 17a). But for those who receive “grace” and the “gift of righteousness,” just look at how *they* will “reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (v. 17b). The phrase *will reign in life* carries quite some significance for believers: It’s not that “the gift” has enabled the mere exchange of the realm of Death for that of Life; rather, it has enabled *rule* over Death alongside Christ.⁷⁷ Also, the future tense of the phrase seemingly carries an eschatological meaning, pointing to that time yet to come. While this undoubtedly is the case, scholars point out that it may not be exclusively the case.⁷⁸ In Jn 5:24 we read that the believer has already “crossed over from death to life.” It may just be, therefore, that our reign begins when we first believe.⁷⁹ Regardless, Paul’s contrast testifies that where the *trespass* brought condemnation and Death for all, the *gift* brought God’s grace and Life for all who believe.

So then, Paul begins in v. 18, finally resuming the comparison he left unfinished in v. 12a; *just as* “one trespass” *brought* “condemnation” to “all men,” so “one act of righteousness” *brought* “justification” to “all men.” Is this so? ...Justification for all men? Some have come to argue just that – *Universal salvation*. If “all” in Adam’s case refers to *all mankind*, they argue, shouldn’t it

⁷⁴ See Moo, p. 335.

⁷⁵ Mounce, p. 143.

⁷⁶ Stott, p. 155.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁷⁸ E.g. Mounce, p. 144; Murray, vol. 1, p. 198.

⁷⁹ Moo, p. 340.

refer to all mankind in Christ's case? ...And what about Paul's statements elsewhere? ...E.g. "As in Adam *all* die, so in Christ *all* will be made alive" (1Cor 15:22, emphasis added). Shouldn't "all" mean *all*? Isn't it disingenuous to apply different definitions to the same word in the same sentence?

But Paul does not teach universal salvation here or anywhere.⁸⁰ First of all, he teaches in this very letter⁸¹ and elsewhere⁸² that eternal punishment awaits those who do not accept Christ. Secondly, he defines what it means to be "in Adam" versus "in Christ." *Everybody* is in Adam at birth (as discussed above). *Everybody* at birth bears the state of original sin and the imputed consequence of Death unleashed by Adam's transgression. *Everybody* dies. But *not* everybody is in Christ – only those who *believe*⁸³ ...who are "born again"⁸⁴ ...who bear *faith* in Christ's work.⁸⁵ Moreover, the "all who will be made alive" in Christ in 1Cor 3:22 is defined in the very next verse as "those who belong to him." Commentators who advocate universal salvation cite, at best, *selective* evidence;⁸⁶ they ignore the bulk of evidence that argues *against* such.

So, why does Paul say "all" if he doesn't mean *all*? Why insert a measure of confusion? *Why not say what you mean, Paul?* ...Well, first, the *confusion* seems to be ours. There's little reason to believe Paul's context confused his *original* audience; *they* apparently understood (although some may not have *agreed*). But, secondly, we could ask the same question of v. 19: "Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners" (emphasis added). ...Or v. 15: "For if the many died by the trespass of the one man..." (emphasis added). ...*Many?* *Everybody* sins. *Everybody* died. Why does Paul say "many" if he means *all*? Again, it's not likely his *original* audience misunderstood. Much has been written about "all" versus "the many," and about the nuances of each in Hebrew versus Greek, and about the textual and contextual variances to consider.⁸⁷ We won't dwell on the subject here. The few points cited above suffice to show that "all men" in reference to justification (v. 18) *cannot* refer to absolutely everybody.⁸⁸ "All men" doesn't mean *everyone* will be justified any more than "the many" means *not* everyone sins...or died.

Returning to the substance of vv. 18 & 19, the comparisons show (as did the contrasts in vv. 15 & 16) a parallel in the effect Adam and Christ each had on the multitude.⁸⁹ And they show, most

⁸⁰ Mounce, p. 144.

⁸¹ See our discussion of Ro 2:12 in Lesson IV.

⁸² E.g. 2Thes 1:8-9.

⁸³ See Ro 1:16.

⁸⁴ Jn 3:3.

⁸⁵ Ro 3:22. And see Lesson V.

⁸⁶ Moo, p. 322.

⁸⁷ E.g. Stott, pp. 158f; Moo, pp. 335ff and pp. 343f; Mounce p. 143.

⁸⁸ Stott, p. 159.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

importantly, the power of Christ's obedience to overcome the consequence of Adam's disobedience.⁹⁰ As the "trespass" brought "condemnation," so the "act of righteousness" brought "justification" (v. 18). As through Adam's "disobedience" people were "made sinners," so through Christ's "obedience" those sinners will be "made righteous" (v. 19) – if they *believe*. Stott hastens to point out that the phrases "made sinners" and "made righteous" don't mean that Adam's and Christ's acts actually *made* people evil or good; rather, their acts made people be *declared* such in God's sight.⁹¹ We *became* evil all by ourselves; and as believers, we're *becoming* righteous through the power of the Holy Spirit. Adam's single act brought *Sin* into the world with *Death* as its consequence; Christ's single act brought *grace* into the world with *eternal life* as its consequence. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones notes the parallel in a way that underscores the *imputed* sin from Adam and the unmerited *gift* from Christ: "Look at yourself in Adam; though you had done nothing you were declared a sinner. Look at yourself in Christ; and see that, though you have done nothing, you are declared to be righteous."⁹²

f. Conclusion

Paul has explained the fruits of justification by faith, how Christ's coming "at just the right time" has saved us from the wrath, and how Christ's "one act of righteousness" has overcome the consequence of Adam's transgression. But in the broader context of Paul's letter, he in essence has said to the Jews: These are the things that come from grace; they don't come from the Law. And he will elaborate the contrast of grace and Law next.

⁹⁰ See Moo, p. 315.

⁹¹ Stott, p. 156.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 156f, citing Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, vol. 4, p. 274. The Banner of Truth Trust and Zondervan, 1971.

B. Questions

1. Define “justify” as used in Romans.
 2. What does the word “hope” mean in Romans Ch 5 (and elsewhere in the New Testament)?
 3. Paul says we “rejoice in our sufferings” (5:3a); define “sufferings”?
 4. And in what way do we “*rejoice* in our sufferings”?
 5. Paul says, “At just the right time...Christ died for the ungodly” (5:6). What does he mean by “just the right time”?
 6. In Ex 23:7, God says, “I will not acquit the guilty.” But in Ro 5:6, Paul says, “Christ died for the wicked [lit: ungodly].” So, then...did Christ’s dying acquit the guilty? Why or why not?
 7. What does already...not yet convey?
 8. What assurance do we have that God will indeed save us from the wrath at the Last Day?
 9. How do we explain Paul’s statement in Ro 5:12 that through Adam’s transgression “death came to all men, because all sinned (past tense)”?
 10. What did the single acts of Adam and Christ each bring, and what were the consequences?
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C. Exegesis

Select a verse or passage from Ro 5:1-19, and write down the verse/passage from a bible version of your choosing. Following the sample outline given in Appendix A, write an inductive, expositional, literary, analytical, and devotional study of your selection. Appendix A provides an explanation of these study methods. Choose a title for your study, and make concise notes as indicated. Appendix B provides a sample exegesis.

D. Classical Comments

Read what John Calvin⁹³ and Mathew Henry⁹⁴ had to say about Romans 5:1-19. Read, also, what Martin Luther wrote about the passage in the preface to his commentary on Romans.⁹⁵

Write a 1-page comparison of Calvin's and Henry's comments on 5:1-19, including what thoughts Luther had relevant to the passage. Contrast these, where appropriate, with the exposition citing contemporary scholars, above.

⁹³ Available at ccel.org.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Lesson VII

Grace vs. the Law

A. Exposition of 5:20-7:13

a. Introduction

So, where are we, now, in the broader context? Paul has explained to the Jews why they need the gospel just as much as the Gentiles, and why the Law comes up short on salvation. He's also explained God's way of salvation for both Jew and Gentile – justification by grace – and how the Messiah, Jesus, has overcome *for them* the mire that all have lived in since the Fall. But, now, the Jews have a couple of questions – seemingly good questions: (1) If grace is the way...if Christ's work is all that counts...if the Law and its works have no place in salvation, then *why* did God give the Law? ...And *why* have we been striving to obey it – and admonished severely for not obeying – all these past centuries? *What* is the Law for?¹ And, moreover, (2) this *grace* you talk about, Paul – doesn't it actually *encourage* sin? ...Doesn't it give people a *free ride*, as it were...the irresponsible freedom to do what they want since grace covers their sins? Paul takes up these issues, now.

The answer to the second question lies in the doctrine of *sanctification* – subduing the power of sin.² Justification *declares* us righteous, but *becoming* righteous is another matter. It's a long process – one that will consume the rest of our lives on earth, yet not be complete as long as we remain here. And any justification that fails to lead to sanctification (as question 2 might indicate) is no justification at all.³ Paul focuses on sanctification and the believer's growth in spiritual maturity over the next few chapters.

The subject of sanctification following, as it does, close on the heels of Paul's comparison of Adam and Christ as federal heads,⁴ underscores the spiritual status of all mankind. All people are either *in* Adam (under the power of Sin and Death), or *in* Christ (under the power of righteousness and life). There's no other option. We're either subject to the results of Adam's transgression, or we're subject to the effect of Christ's act of righteousness. We all were in Adam to begin with; Paul shows in the next few chapters that the *transfer* of believers (through justification) from being in Adam to

¹ Mounce, p. 145.

² Moo, p. 350.

³ Mounce, p. 147.

⁴ See Lesson VI.

being in Christ gives its evidence through a new way of life...a new way of life that comes through *sanctification*.⁵

b. “We Died to Sin” – 6:1-14

Paul says in 5:20a, “The Law was added so that the trespass might increase.” ...Another shocker for the Jews. The Jews looked at the Law as their way to righteousness, and Paul says it’s their way to increased sin. Paul will address the Law’s purpose (question 1, above) more in depth in Ch. 7, and we’ll take it up again, there. But he mentions it here to say that “where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (5:20b), setting his audience up to answer question 2, above, first.

Back in Ch. 3, Paul’s “critic” asked, *since our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, why don’t we simply “do evil so good may result”* (3:8)? Paul didn’t feel the question deserved an answer, then.⁶ Now, returning to his diatribe (which he had discontinued while he compared/contrasted Adam and Christ), he has the “critic” ask in 6:1: *So, if sin increases grace – and that’s a good thing – maybe we should sin more?* We might also hear in the critic’s voice: *Besides, what would it matter that we sin, anyway, if grace has got it covered?* This time Paul will answer.

The essence of the question says the doctrine of grace *encourages* sin and lawlessness...because people don’t have to *do* anything. They don’t have to obey any law, they don’t have to perform any rituals, they don’t have to act piously...grace comes free of charge. And if it doesn’t cost anything, where’s the motivation to *not* sin? On the surface, this might seem a valid concern. But it’s a concern only for those who would pursue their *own* righteousness – legalists, in other words. When relying on oneself, *motivation* is paramount, and *cost* is a prime motivator.

Taking the question a step further, however, the doctrine of grace opens a door to abuse.⁷ ...To an attitude that says, *since I’m saved by grace, my sin doesn’t matter; I can do what I want*. This abuse has a name: Antinomianism. And it *is* a valid concern – not for Jews only, but for Gentiles as well...and not only in Paul’s time, but still today. So, what is antinomianism? ...Setting oneself against moral law (Gr. *nomos* means *law*). We even find it referenced elsewhere in the NT: “Godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality” (Jude 4, emphasis added).⁸ But, again, people with

⁵ See Moo, pp. 351f.

⁶ Refer to Lesson IV.

⁷ Moo, p. 356.

⁸ See Stott, p. 167.

this attitude don't really understand God's grace...and they don't really comprehend their sin. They're not *repentant*...and without repentance, true faith is impossible.

So, how does Paul answer this charge? His immediate response is a resounding *No*. ...*No*, we shouldn't *go on sinning*...because "we died to sin" (v. 2a). And because we died to sin, how could we possibly *go on living in it* (v. 2b)? Paul's use of the first person plural shows that he's chosen not to respond to the critic, directly; rather, he's talking to believers...all believers, Jew and Gentile. He addresses them as if they're merely ignorant of the truth: "Don't you know" (v. 3a)? He assumes they haven't really understood the meaning of their baptism and conversion, otherwise they wouldn't have asked such a question.⁹ So, he explains.

Most commentators stop here and ask: What does "died to sin" really mean? ...What died? ...How so? ...And when? Many scholars feel the need to define the phrase more clearly before proceeding with Paul's explanation. And they give some variety in interpretation. To be sure, Paul's explanation is tightly packed. He assumes a lot, presumably because he's building on what his audience should already know.¹⁰ But I think his explanation – with some elaboration for us – stands on its own. So, we won't stop here.

As we go through Paul's explanation, however, let's keep in mind his earlier comparison of Adam and Christ as federal heads. We discussed in Lesson VI how God imputed Adam's transgression to all mankind, because what he did, we did. We can't say what Christ *did*, we did, but we can say what *happened* to him (on the Cross) *happened* to us (as believers)...and *when* it happened to him, it happened to us.¹¹ This is foundational to understanding Paul's explanation.

Thus Paul begins, we "were baptized into Christ Jesus" (v. 3b). First, most scholars agree that "baptized" here refers to the familiar Christian water baptism. There's no sound reason to think it's used only metaphorically.¹² Second, (again, most scholars) "into Christ Jesus" means into *union* with Christ, in consonance with the concept of federal headship. Some prefer to consider the phrase an abbreviated form of the more familiar *into the name of* the Lord Jesus,¹³ and thus conclude it's mere confirmation that Paul is indeed referring to Christian baptism.¹⁴ But baptism *signifies* union with Christ.¹⁵ It is

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁰ See Moo, p. 359.

¹¹ Piper, Ro 6:1-14: "United with Christ in Death and Life, Part 1," Sep 24, 2000.

¹² See Moo, p. 359.

¹³ E.g. Acts 8:16, 19:5.

¹⁴ Moo, while not in favor of the view, presents a discussion, p. 360.

¹⁵ See Murray, vol. 1, pp. 214f.

the sign and seal of our belonging to the “new covenant” in Christ’s blood,¹⁶ and it signifies the union we have with him through faith.¹⁷

There are those, however, who would ascribe to baptism something far more than symbolism; they would ascribe to it *efficacy*...that baptism itself *effects* the union with Christ. And, therefore, baptism is a necessary, defining element in salvation. Two points: (1) The thought that Paul would spend the greater part of his first 5 (and later) chapters emphasizing that salvation is by faith alone, then suddenly add, *Oh, by the way, you need to be baptized to be saved*, I find (along with many others) incongruous at best.¹⁸ But (2), given that Paul’s entire focus in *Romans* is on God’s way of salvation, if baptism were indeed integral, shouldn’t we expect more attention than *two verses*?¹⁹

So, if baptism is the *signifier* of union with Christ, when did the union actually occur? The answer lies in the phrase following the one we’ve just discussed. Because we were *baptized into union with Christ*, we “were baptized into his death” (v. 3c). And when did Christ die? ...2000 years ago, on Calvary. How could we have died then? ...Through Christ’s federal headship. Just as we sinned when Adam sinned, so we died when Christ died. Just as God *imputed* Adam’s sin to us, so he *applied* Christ’s death to us.²⁰ And when did this application occur? ...When we first believed and trusted in Christ...upon our conversion (Paul says more about conversion, later).

So, we died to sin. How? ...Through union with Christ in his death. And we were “therefore buried with him” (v. 4a) so that as he “was raised from the dead” to a glorious life (v. 4b), we too might be raised to “walk in the newness of life” (v. 4c – NASB).²¹ Paul emphasizes the point by adding that if we were united with him in his death and burial, we certainly are united with him in his resurrection (v. 5). And resurrection for us, here, is understood to mean resurrection to a new life.²² This is why Paul so emphatically says that believers can no longer “live” in sin; with conversion comes a *new* life. And isn’t this *resurrection to a new life* for us the essence of the phrase “born again” of which Jesus himself spoke?²³

¹⁶ 1Cor 11:25.

¹⁷ Gal 3:26-27, and see Stott, p. 173f.

¹⁸ See Stott, p. 174.

¹⁹ Moo, p. 366. For more discussion of this subject, see Piper, Ro 6:1-7: “United with Christ in Death and Life, Part 2,” Oct 1, 2000.

²⁰ Piper, Ro 6:1-14: “United with Christ in Death and Life, Part 1,” Sep 24, 2000.

²¹ See Mounce, p. 150; and cf. Eph 2:6, Col 3:1.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Jn 3:3ff.

Now, we come to the big question: Since we're still very much alive, what died? Paul says "our old self was crucified" with Christ (v. 6a). It was our "old self" that died. And who was our "old self" (lit. "old man")? ...If, as we discussed above, our *new* life is a result of our union with Christ – i.e. if the *new* man is *in* Christ – then the old man necessarily must be *in* Adam. ...Who we were before conversion, that's the "old man." The old life we lived as a consequence of Adam's transgression.²⁴ The "old man" is not to be construed as our sinful nature.²⁵ Why? ...Because of Paul's next phrase.

The old self was crucified with Christ "so that the body of sin might be done away with" (v. 6b). Note that crucifixion of the old self accomplishes this very specific purpose.²⁶ Note also, that Paul says "body of sin," not *sinful body*. It's not our body that's sinful;²⁷ it's what we *do* with our body that's sinful. And what did we do with our body when we were in Adam? ...You guessed it – *sin*. ...All the time. Why was that? Adam's transgression in the Garden brought his posterity (us) two consequences: Death, both physical and spiritual, through *imputed sin*;²⁸ and what we call a "sinful nature" through *original sin*. We not only sinned when Adam sinned, but we inherited his propensity *to* sin. And we were all born with it...imprisoned within it.²⁹ "There is no one righteous, not even one."³⁰

So, how did we break out of this prison? Our "old man" was crucified with Christ so that our *sinful nature*, which had enslaved our body – our *person* – as an instrument of sin, might be "rendered powerless" (v. 6b – NIV, alternate translation). The Greek verb³¹ translated in the NIV main text as "might be done away with" connotes a power that's lost its influence.³² The sense is not that it's been destroyed or completely removed, but that its dominance or control has been broken. Thus, the NIV's alternative. And this is an important distinction. Why? ...Because our sinful nature has *not* been completely destroyed. Though it's no longer in control, it continues to tempt us. But, praise God for his Holy Spirit who guides us away from its tempting (Paul will address the Holy Spirit's role in our sanctification in Ch. 8).

²⁴ See Stott, p. 176.

²⁵ See Mounce, p. 151, n. 18.

²⁶ See Murray, vol. 1, p. 221.

²⁷ See Stott, p. 175.

²⁸ See Lesson VI.

²⁹ See *What is the Difference Between Original Sin and Imputed Sin* (23 January 2006), desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles.

³⁰ Ro 3:10, Ps 14:3.

³¹ Καταργηθη, from the verb καταργεω.

³² Moo, p. 375, n. 116.

Thus, the ultimate reason we died with Christ: Our “old man” was crucified...so that the power of our sinful nature could be broken...so that “we should no longer be slaves to sin” (v. 6c). In Adam, we didn’t get a vote; we were slaves to the consequence of his transgression...to our sinful nature. But in Christ, we do get a vote; we’ve been freed from that slavery, and through the power of the Holy Spirit we can now choose to *not* sin. Where our body (our person) in Adam was enslaved as an instrument of sin, our body (person) in Christ is free to be an instrument of righteousness.³³

An aside, here: We read elsewhere in Paul, “You were taught...to put off your old self...and...put on the new self” (Eph 4:22-24, emphasis added). Also, “You have taken off your old self...and have put on the new self” (Col. 3: 9-10, emphasis added). And, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature” (Gal 5:24, emphasis added). How do we square these verses with Ro 6:6? It would seem that we’ve got it backward in the discussion above. Stott points out that the difference is in *who* is acting. In the verses cited from elsewhere, *we* are acting; here in v. 6, *God* is acting.³⁴ We died to sin through *union* with Christ (God’s act); we die to self through *imitation* of Christ (our act).³⁵ Paul elsewhere (and later in this passage) focuses on what *we* can do (with the help of the Holy Spirit, of course) – flee from the desires of our sinful nature...desires that very much remain with us. Here, he’s addressing what *God* has done – applied Christ’s death to our old man “so that” the sinful nature might be “rendered powerless.” And *because* God did what he did, we are now *able* to resist sin...*able* to choose to *not* sin. Our challenge now is *maturing* in this ability. As Stott says, *I died to sin (in Christ) once; I die to self (in imitation of Christ) daily.*³⁶

Now, we come to v. 7. Many bible versions say, as the NIV does, *anyone who has died has been* “freed from sin.” Thus, Paul seems to be underscoring – succinctly – what he’s said prior. Scholars quickly point out, however, that the verb translated “freed” actually means “justified.”³⁷ Yet, many discuss at length why “freed” is the better translation because the phrase construction incorporates the preposition “from.”³⁸ But I’m inclined to agree with Stott, here, that the reasoning for “freed” falls short.³⁹ First, as Stott points out, Greek supplies a verb that directly equates to “freed,”⁴⁰ and Paul uses this

³³ Piper, Ro 6:5-10: “Justified to Break the Power of Sin,” Oct 15, 2000.

³⁴ See Stott, p. 176.

³⁵ Cf. Eph 5:1.

³⁶ Stott, p. 176.

³⁷ Gr. δεδικαιωται, perfect tense of the verb δικαιω.

³⁸ Δεδικαιωται απο.

³⁹ See BAGD, p. 197, for discussion of the few instances in Christian literature where the verb is interpolated “freed” or something similar; and the some 25 instances in the NT where it’s translated “justify” or something similar.

⁴⁰ Ελευθερω.

word twice in the following passage to say specifically “free from sin” (vv. 6:18, 22). Second, the NIV translates this same Greek phrase in Acts 13:39 as “justified from.” And third, “justified from sin” does not violate the context here.⁴¹

Why is this important? ...Because it’s the climax of Paul’s explanation...the “so what” of his whole thesis...the reason why Christ’s death *must* be applied to believers: *Because only he who has died is justified from sin!* The wages of sin is death,⁴² and *we died*...our “old man” was crucified with Christ – as surely as if we had physically died ourselves. But God in his *mercy* didn’t let us die physically; rather, he resurrected us with Christ to a new life *in Christ*.⁴³ We are *born again*.

Mounce notes that Paul, as a good teacher, repeats the things he considers important.⁴⁴ And this Paul does in v. 8, saying “if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” Most scholars agree that Paul refers both to the believer’s new life here and now, and to that glorious life to come. And we “believe” that because Christ was “raised from the dead” so that death has lost its “mastery” over him – he “cannot die again” (v. 9). “I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever” (Rev 1:18). And therein resides our hope: Our union with Christ assures that we shall be, as he has been, resurrected to life everlasting.⁴⁵

Our assurance is founded upon the truth that Christ “died to sin once for all” (v. 10a). Thus we, too, by our union with him, have died to sin once for all – our “old man” is no more. So, Paul exhorts us (again) to consider ourselves “dead to sin” (v. 11a). And because Christ now “lives to God” (v. 10b), Paul urges us to consider ourselves “alive to God *in Christ*” (v. 11b, emphasis added). In these two verses, Paul underscores the lasting effect of our union with Christ: As he died a once-for-all death to sin and now lives an unending, resurrected life *with* God, we have died a once-for-all death to sin and now live an unending, resurrected life of service *to* God.⁴⁶

“Therefore,” Paul says – since our old man is dead and our sinful nature has lost its control – “do not *let* sin reign in your mortal bodies”...don’t “*obey* its evil desires” (v. 12, emphasis added). Don’t “*offer*” your body to sin...don’t *offer* your body parts as “instruments of wickedness” (v. 13a, emphasis added). Paul underscores here our new status: We have a *choice*, now...we can choose to *not* sin (with the help of the Holy

⁴¹ Stott, p. 177.

⁴² Ro 6:23.

⁴³ See Stott, p. 177.

⁴⁴ Mounce, p. 151.

⁴⁵ See Stott, p. 178.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Spirit, of course). So, Paul exhorts us to *make* that choice...to *offer ourselves to God*...to *offer our body parts* “as instruments of righteousness” (v. 13b).

Stott points out that in these verses of exhortation, Paul in essence implores us to *remember who we are*. As an analogy, Stott asks *can a married woman live as though she were still single?* ...Of course. *But let her remember who she is* – united to her husband. Likewise, *can a believer live as though he were still in his sins?* ...Of course. *But let him remember who he is* – united to Christ. Just as marriage severs the single life, so union with Christ severs the sinful life. So, how can we think of returning to it? ...Why would we *want* to?⁴⁷ Actually, these are valid questions that Paul will address in Ch. 7.

Paul ends this passage by returning to the contrast that began it: Grace vs. the Law. His statements about grace and the Law in 5:20-21 prompted the criticism that grace encourages sin, so he took the time to explain why that’s not true...for either legalists/moralists or antinomians.⁴⁸ “You are not under Law,” where sin has its hold on you, “but under grace,” where you’re free to *not* sin (v. 14).

c. Free from Sin’s Slavery – 6:15-23

Paul’s final statement in the previous passage (v. 14) doesn’t sit well with his Jewish audience, of course. The Jews, whether converted or not, object to Paul’s associating sin with the Law (Paul will have his “critic” raise this objection directly in Ch. 7). Here, the critic has a follow-up question that actually rephrases the original from v. 1: So, shall we sin, then, *because* we’re “not under Law but under grace” (v. 15)? Again, Paul doesn’t answer the critic directly, but speaks to believers as a whole. This time, however, he takes a different tack – he addresses *slavery*. In the last passage, he addressed baptism, assuming his audience didn’t fully understand what their baptism meant. Here, in addressing slavery, he’s assuming the same regarding conversion...they just haven’t grasped the full meaning of their conversion.⁴⁹ He builds upon the main points he made in the previous passage: Our union with Christ broke the power of original sin so that we’re no longer slaves to sin (v. 6), and that being the case, sin is no longer our master (v. 14).

Something to understand about slavery: Although we, today, find the concept of slavery repugnant, we’re all slaves to something.⁵⁰ We’re quite fond of saying we have freedom to do what we want. But the fact is we *put* ourselves in slavery – slavery to bad things,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 179f.

⁴⁸ See Moo, pp. 359ff.

⁴⁹ See Stott, p. 182.

⁵⁰ See Mounce, p. 156.

like possessions, power, pleasure...or to good things, like service, generosity, hospitality. And these are the only choices: We're either slaves to the bad things – the things of Adam; or we're slaves to the good things – the things of Christ. There are no other options. And in the *final* analysis, there is no in-between.⁵¹ Jesus himself referred to this latter point: “No one can serve two masters” (Math 6:24). At the Last Day, we'll find ourselves on one side or the other. And this distinction forms the foundation of Paul's discussion.

First, Paul states the obvious: *When you offer yourself as a slave, you become a slave* (v. 16a). The phrase *offering yourself*, here, doesn't carry the same weight for us as it did for those in Paul's day. Then, it was quite acceptable and not all that uncommon to sell oneself into slavery as a means of livelihood.⁵² This practice gave Paul a readily recognizable parallel from which to launch his argument – because once the commitment to sell oneself was made, there was no turning back.⁵³ Having pointed this out, then, Paul says it's no different for the topic at hand: It doesn't matter whether you've put yourself into slavery to disobedience (“sin”) or to “obedience” – you're a slave (v. 16b)!

Second, he repeats his conclusion from v. 6: “You used to be slaves to sin” (v. 17a), but you've broken that slavery. How? ...“You wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted” (v. 17b). Now, what does that mean? ...Especially: “to which you were entrusted” (lit. “handed over”)? Wouldn't you think that *teaching* would be handed over to the *student*? Most scholars agree that the “teaching” Paul has in mind here likely refers to the fundamentals that every new convert would have been taught. The seemingly odd thing is the convert being entrusted to vice entrusted with these fundamentals. Most scholars further agree, though, that the fundamentals would have constituted the truth of the gospel message. *Entrusted to*, then, captures the truth that *God* brings converts (he *hands them over*) to the gospel message – conversion is *God's* action.⁵⁴ The message can be *taken to* anyone; i.e. anyone can be entrusted with the truth. But as we well know, merely hearing the message (the truth) does not a convert make; many who hear still refuse to believe. When someone is entrusted to the truth, however...when *God* brings someone to the gospel – now we have a convert.⁵⁵

Moo adds that the “form” of teaching likely contrasts the body of *truth* taught to believers with the body of *tradition* taught to Jews. Thus for his Jewish audience

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 155, n. 43.

⁵³ Stott, p. 183.

⁵⁴ Moo, p. 401.

⁵⁵ See Mounce, p. 157.

specifically, Paul addresses the critic's question by pointing out that though he's free of the Law's dominion, he's still bound by an authority of truth – the gospel.⁵⁶ And as with the letter of the Law, the gospel makes no allowance for sin. On the contrary, in being set free from sin, Paul says, "you have become slaves to righteousness" (v. 18). Stott writes that herein is the essence of Paul's point: Conversion constitutes "an exchange of slaveries."⁵⁷ Far from being free to sin, as the critic implies, we now belong to a new master. We have been freed from the things of Adam and enslaved to the things of Christ.

Now, while we were indeed slaves to sin before our conversion, we're not really "slaves" to Christ. We were shackled to Adam's sin, but we've not been re-shackled to Christ's righteousness – we can, and do, wander off (our sinful nature, after all, is still very much with us). Since the slavery metaphor breaks down in this respect, Paul inserts a parenthetical comment (v. 19a).⁵⁸ He acknowledges that he's drawing from a worldly experience to make his point – he's speaking "in human terms." Why? ... "Because you are weak." *Weak*, here, refers to our difficulty in grasping spiritual concepts...concepts that eclipse our worldly knowledge. Therefore, we need explanations that draw upon our experience...visualizations that parallel the familiar...analogies that remain within our human understanding. Without such analogies, imperfect though they are, we just won't get it.⁵⁹

Following his comment, Paul again emphasizes, in essence, *remember who you are*. Offering yourselves as slaves to sin and wickedness is something you *used* to do – before your conversion. Offer yourselves to righteousness, now (v. 19b). What good did you derive from your former slavery? "What benefit did it reap...those things result in death!" (v. 21). But the benefit you reap now "leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life" (v. 22). You're in Christ, now; *remember who you are*. And that's the lesson for us: We must *always* remember who we are...we must *always* be preaching the gospel to ourselves.⁶⁰ We must *never* forget that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 23).

d. Released from the Law's Bondage – 7:1-6

Thus far in answering the critic's question (asked twice, now), Paul has addressed his broader audience to explain the deeper meaning of baptism (dying to sin in union with

⁵⁶ Moo, p. 402.

⁵⁷ Stott, pp. 183f.

⁵⁸ Moo, p. 403.

⁵⁹ See Murray, vol. 1, p. 233.

⁶⁰ See Stott, pp. 187f.

Christ) and the true meaning of conversion (exemplified as an exchange of slaveries). Here, he returns to addressing the Jews directly – those “who know the Law” (v. 1)⁶¹ – to point out that for them *dying* and *exchanging* applies not only to sin, but to the Law as well. And dying to both goes hand in hand.

Again, he begins by stating the obvious: *When a man dies, the Law’s authority over him ends* (v. 1). Then he gives an example from everyday life that Jews quite well understand: The marriage bond. A married woman is bound to her husband for life (v. 2a). But if he dies, the bond is broken; the marriage no longer exists, in essence, and she is “released” from her bond (v. 2b). And having been so released, she is free to marry another (v. 3). Even the example seems rather obvious. Then he says to his (Jewish) audience that in like manner you “died (lit: have been put to death⁶²) to the Law” (v. 4a) “that you might belong to another” (v. 4c), specifically, to Christ – “to him who was raised from the dead” (v. 4d).

The parallels entice one to think Paul develops in vv. 2-3 an allegory for v. 4. The woman bound to her husband parallels someone bound to the Law...her release from the marriage bond parallels one dying to and being released from the Law...her freedom to marry another parallels one free to belong to another. But the one dying in the marriage example is the husband; the woman, who allegorically would represent the convert, didn’t die to anything. This has caused no small amount of consternation among some scholars who deride Paul for selecting such a poor example.⁶³ But Paul does not intend allegory; his only point in the example is to show how *death* breaks a bond.⁶⁴ The example provides a real-life illustration of v. 1 as *preparation* for v. 4.⁶⁵

Verses 4-6 may not find (intended) parallel in vv. 2-3, but they do almost certainly in Ch. 6.⁶⁶ There, we (Jew and Gentile) died to sin – i.e. our old man was crucified with Christ on Calvary – that we might be raised with him to a new life free of slavery to sin. Ch. 6

⁶¹ Despite the seemingly obvious reference, the view that Paul narrows his audience to the Jews here is by far in the minority. Many scholars prefer to attribute a more universal application to “law” in v. 1 to support a view that Paul continues to address his broader audience (e.g. Mounce, p. 160; Stott, p. 192). Others acknowledge that Paul indeed refers to the Mosaic Law, but they allow for the broader audience by holding that converts –whether Jew or Gentile – know something of the Law (e.g. Moo, pp 411f; Murray, vol. 1, p. 240). I find these arguments disingenuous. The *Jews* (including converts to Judaism) are the ones challenged by the reconciliation of Law and grace – not the Gentiles (refer to the earlier discussions of Paul’s audience in Lessons I and IV).

⁶² The passive form of θανατω, *to put to death*.

⁶³ See discussion in Stott (who is not among those deriding Paul), pp. 194f.

⁶⁴ Murray, vol. 1, p. 242.

⁶⁵ Moo, p. 413.

⁶⁶ See Stott, p. 194.

defined *what* died (the old man), *how* (through union with Christ in his death), *why* (to break the power of our sinful nature), and toward what *end* (to walk in a new life free of sin's slavery, now *able* – through the Spirit – to serve God).

Here in vv. 4-6, the Jew dies (in addition) to the Law. How? ...In the same way at the same time that he died to sin – “through the body of Christ” (v. 4b). Why? ...To break his bond to the Law – “to what once bound us” (v. 6a). To what end? ...To belong to Christ, having been “released from the Law” (v. 6b) – from “the old way of the written code” (v. 6d) – to be now *able* to “serve in the new way of the Spirit” (v. 6c) to “bear fruit to God” (v. 4e). But the burning question regarding the Law is *what*, specifically, was died to? ...All of the Law? ...Part of it? ...Which part?

We introduced *antinomianism* above. The interpretation of vv. 2-3 as allegorical fuels the fires of antinomians. It is they who would argue that Paul means “all of the Law” was died to. In allegory, the husband is matched to the Law...and he *died*. Therefore, their logic goes, the Law died to *us* – it no longer has application, and we needn't pay it mind because we're “not under Law but under grace” (6:14). But most scholars reject this interpretation of 6:14, as well as the allegorical interpretation of 7:2-3. Moo says that to reach an allegory here requires interpolating concepts that aren't in the text.⁶⁷ (We already discussed the “abuse” of antinomianism, above...and I hasten to point out that not all scholars who favor the allegory are antinomian.⁶⁸)

Opposite antinomians, we have legalists. Where antinomians *dispense* with all of the Law, legalists *cling* to all of the Law. Only by continuing to fulfill the Law's works can legalists please God...and despite what Christ has done for them, *they* must please God to earn his acceptance.⁶⁹ These are the people who accuse Paul of preaching antinomianism. And these are the very people Paul is addressing in these verses – people with whom he identifies...from his own background – people whose mindset he understands intimately well. In this vein, we note that Paul begins v. 4 addressing them in second person plural (*you* died), but ends the verse in first person plural (that *we* might bear fruit) which he carries through the rest of the passage. I believe the change, here, signals a more personal exhortation from Paul to his fellow Jews; he very deliberately modifies his tone from pointedly talking *to* them to empathetically speaking *with* them – and he will continue to do so through the remainder of Ch. 7. He's been in their shoes, and he very much wants them to grasp what he's come to know.

⁶⁷ Moo, p. 413.

⁶⁸ E.g. Mounce holds to the allegory, pointing out its imperfection, but nowhere suggests the Law is abrogated, pp. 160ff.

⁶⁹ See Stott, p. 191.

And what is it about the Law that Paul's come to know? ...That "we" can't of our own obey it. No matter how much we might cling to it, obedience is beyond grasp. And *this* is what Paul says was "died to" – the legalist mindset that we must obey the Law for acceptance.⁷⁰ Is Paul saying we don't need to obey the Law? ...Not at all (as we'll see in Ch. 8) – that's the antinomian attitude. God's moral Law stands;⁷¹ it's not that we needn't obey God's Law, it's that we can't do it without help. And to get that help, we need to surrender our vanity...our self-reliance; we need to give up any thought that we can do it ourselves.

Most scholars emphasize that what was "died to" was the Law's condemnation. No question. Still, many point out that it's more than that.⁷² To be "not under Law" is to be free from obedience to it for acceptance.⁷³ To achieve such freedom – to be released from the Law's bondage – is to die to the legalist mindset. Moreover, legalism attempts to serve two masters: Christ and oneself. Paul subtly refers to this in v. 3: Marrying another while the original marriage bond remains intact is adultery. Likewise, attempting to belong to Christ while still bound to the Law...while maintaining a legalist mindset – amounts to adultery.

One more thing about dying to the Law: Paul says that the Law *arouses* sinful passions (v. 5). So, not only can we not fulfill the Law, but it fights against us. For the Jews, this is yet another disturbing statement. Realizing it as so, Paul elaborates in the next passage. Moreover, the remainder of Ch. 7 amounts to an elaboration of why Paul insists the Jews must be free of the Law.⁷⁴

e. The Law's Purpose – 5:20-21; 7:7-13

Now Paul addresses question 1 (see *Introduction*, above). He gave a short version of the Law's purpose in 3:20: *The Law brings the full knowledge of sin.*⁷⁵ In 5:20, he says "the Law was added that the trespass might increase." What does that mean? ...It means that the Law makes sin a *transgression*.⁷⁶ And when it becomes a transgression, death follows (5:21). Moo points out that contrary to Jewish thinking, the Law was not brought

⁷⁰ Cf. Gal. 3:10.

⁷¹ See Stott, p. 191.

⁷² See Moo, pp. 414ff.

⁷³ Stott, p. 191,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁷⁵ Refer to Lesson IV.

⁷⁶ Refer to Lesson VI. Also, cf. Gal 3:19 where the literal translation of the preposition $\chi\alpha\rho\iota\nu$ says the Law "brings about" transgressions (BAGD, p. 877).

in to *alleviate* the situation Adam caused, but to make it *worse*.⁷⁷ And as Paul concludes, the commands made sin “utterly sinful” (7:13d).

So, given this view of the Law, the “critic” asks a seemingly logical question: “Is the Law sin” (7:7a)? The answer, of course, is *no*, and Paul will now explain by personal example that through the Law, which is “holy, righteous, and good” (v. 12), God intended for man to *see* his sin.⁷⁸ “Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the Law” (v. 7b). “For apart from the Law, sin is dead” (v. 8b); i.e. without the Law, there’s no transgression (cf. 4:15), and without transgression, there’s no violation. Mounce compares the Law to a target: “No matter how swift and straight the arrow [i.e. sin], without a target, there’s no bulls-eye.”⁷⁹

The example Paul gives relates to the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet...” (Ex. 20:17). He says if it weren’t for this command, he wouldn’t have known what coveting “really was” (v. 7c). He says this command “produced in me” coveting of all sorts (v. 8a). How so? ...Stott points to our reaction to a sign that reads, “Private – do not enter.”⁸⁰ What immediately comes to mind? ...*I wonder what’s in there? Why can’t I know? What if I just take a peek?* The words “do not” conjure up an intrinsic human response: *Why not?* Sin leaps into action and entices us to violate the command. Eve unleashed this intrinsic response during that fatal encounter with the serpent in the Garden (Gen 3:1ff) – the serpent enticed Eve to ask *why not*, and the rest is history. Augustine wrote of once stealing pears. He didn’t need them...he didn’t even eat them. He just stole them – precisely because he *shouldn’t* have.⁸¹

So, Paul says, “Once I was alive apart from the Law; but...the commandment came...and I died” (v. 9). This verse is likely most responsible for the controversy over whom Paul is really representing in this passage – who is “I” here? If it’s really himself, then what does he mean by *once alive apart from the Law*? ...When was *he* apart from the Law? ...And what does he mean that *he* died? Thus, alternate suggestions for “I” range from Adam (before and after the Fall), to Israel (before and after the giving of the Law), to several combinations of Adam, Israel, and Paul.⁸² But many scholars agree that we shouldn’t stray too far from the evident: Paul is indeed referring to himself, relating his experience...how he felt.⁸³ Most propose that Paul refers to his experience before and

⁷⁷ Moo, p. 347.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁷⁹ Mounce, p. 164.

⁸⁰ Stott, p. 203.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, citing Augustine’s *Confessions*, Book II, p. 29.

⁸² See Stott, p. 201.

⁸³ E.g. Mounce, p. 164.

after coming of age, or before and after his conversion.⁸⁴ Given that Jews tend toward self-righteousness,⁸⁵ and that even Paul describes himself as “faultless” while under the Law,⁸⁶ I lean toward the latter.

So then, he once was alive, but became convicted of his sin and realized how covetous he actually was.⁸⁷ This is the point we all reach during (or just prior to) conversion. Whenever and however it might come, we (often suddenly) realize the sin we bear. We find ourselves starring straight into visions of the bad things we’ve done or caused...and we *die*. Of course, we were already dead; we died when we first sinned. But when we become *conscious* of our sin, it’s then that we *realize* we’re dead. The commandment “was intended to bring life” (v. 10a); i.e. it tells us what we need do to avoid sin – *don’t covet*. But, “controlled by the sinful nature” (7:5) we freely ignore the command and it *brings death* (v. 10b). Sin “deceived me [as the serpent did Eve], and through the commandment put me to death” (v. 11).

One more question: *Did the good thing* – the Law and its commandment – *in actuality cause my death* (v. 13a)? ...*No way*, says Paul. The *Law* is not responsible for death, *sin* is.⁸⁸ Sin is violation of the Law. It’s the *violation* that causes death. The commandments stand as instruments that *make sin recognizable* (v. 13b). And when sin is (finally) recognized, we realize it has “produced death” in us (v. 13c). Then we have two choices: Justify our actions (and man can justify anything) and remain unconsciously dead; or, repent – the first step toward *dying to sin* (6:2).

f. Conclusion

Paul, here, has answered a couple of good questions. If salvation is by grace, what’s the purpose of the Law? ...To show us our sin and our *need* for grace. And, if grace is free, why doesn’t it encourage sin? ...Because far from giving license *to* sin, grace gives freedom to *not* sin. In answering these, he addressed baptism as signifying our dying to sin in union with Christ, and conversion as exchanging our slavery to sin for “slavery” to (union with) Christ. And he’s pointed out for his Jewish brethren that dying to sin means also dying to the Law. Next, Paul will take up the means by which we have ability to not sin: The indwelling Holy Spirit.

⁸⁴ E.g. Stott, p. 199.

⁸⁵ Refer to Lesson IV.

⁸⁶ Phil 3:6.

⁸⁷ See Murray, vol. 1, p. 251.

⁸⁸ Stott, p. 204.

B. Questions

1. What is “antinomianism”?
2. God’s grace brings us justification; what does it also bring that keeps us from antinomianism?
3. What does baptism *signify*?
4. What does the phrase “we died to sin” (6:2) really mean?
5. What “died”? ...How and why?
6. In exhorting us to remember that we’re “dead to sin” (6:11), Paul stresses our new ability to do what?
7. What does the concept of slavery (6:15-18) teach us about our conversion?
8. In saying the Jews must also die to the Law (7:4), to what – specifically – is he referring?
9. What is the Law’s purpose, and how does it accomplish its purpose?
10. Paul says, “apart from the Law, sin is dead” (7:8). What does he mean by that?

C. Exegesis

Select a verse or passage from Ro 5:20 – 7:13, and write down the verse/passage from a bible version of your choosing. Following the sample outline given in Appendix A, write an inductive, expository, literary, analytical, and devotional study of your selection. Appendix A provides an explanation of these study methods. Choose a title for your study, and make concise notes as indicated. Appendix B provides a sample exegesis.

D. Classical Comments

Read what John Calvin⁸⁹ and Mathew Henry⁹⁰ had to say about Romans 5:20 – 7:13. Read, also, what Martin Luther wrote about the passage in the preface to his commentary on Romans.⁹¹

Write a 1-page comparison of Calvin's and Henry's comments on 5:20 – 7:13, including what thoughts Luther had relevant to the passage. Contrast these, where appropriate, with the exposition citing contemporary scholars, above.

⁸⁹ Available at ccel.org.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Lesson VIII

Indwelling Sin vs. Indwelling Spirit

A. Exposition of 7:14-8:27

a. Introduction

Paul is nearly half-way through his letter addressing the Jew/Gentile conflict. He has shown that Jew and Gentile alike are guilty in God's sight, deserving of God's wrath and condemnation, and indeed destined for eternal punishment...except for the Cross of Christ. He has explained that *only* by believing what God has done for them through Christ can they possibly escape eternal condemnation. And he has explained to the Jews, especially, that the Law is not their friend – it cannot justify them, it will not sanctify them, and moreover, it *provokes* sin within them. Harsh words for a people that has leaned for so long on the Law that God himself gave them.

Now, Paul will put finality to his thesis of why the Law works *against* rather than for its keepers (last half of Ch.7), and he will address God's way of keeping those who have died to the Law and to sin (Ch. 8). As he has already explained, the problem is indwelling sin; the solution, he will explain, is the indwelling Holy Spirit.

b. Identity of the "Wretched Man" – 7:14ff

In the previous passage, Paul addressed his audience in first person singular, past tense, to share how the Law had formerly affected him personally. Here in v. 14, however, he shifts to present tense. This shift has spawned a controversy that's lasted for centuries.¹ The fundamental question: Is Paul speaking as *regenerate* or *unregenerate*...is this *before* his conversion, or *after* it? The knee-jerk response: *That's me! That's how I often feel...desiring to do God's will, but falling back into old habits...striving to please him, but all too often straying from the path.* ...A believer, in other words, lamenting the fact that he's still a sinner. But does Paul's description really capture a believer's feelings, or does it depict the morass of a non-believer? ...Or is it something else?

Augustine fostered the *knee-jerk response*, and it came to be adopted by most of the Reformers.² The passage seemingly conveys every indication that Paul is expressing what he feels *now*; that the inner conflict he describes is what he *presently* experiences as a regenerate man, filled with the Holy Spirit, yet still living in "the flesh." But we have a challenge: Back in

¹ Mounce, p. 166.

² Moo, pp. 443f.

Ch. 6 Paul explained that union with Christ, our conversion, means freedom from slavery to sin.³ Here, in v. 14b (and again in v. 25b) he stands “sold as a slave to sin.” So what are we to conclude?

Scholars are divided – and widely so. Complicating this division is lack of consensus (surprisingly) on what should be fundamental terms like *regeneration* and *conversion*...and even *unregenerate*. Our exposition cannot be clear without clear definitions. So, to be clear, *unregenerate* must be defined as *hostility toward God and his Law*.⁴ Just look at Ro. 8:7: “The sinful mind (lit. *The mind of the flesh*⁵) is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s Law, nor can it do so.” That’s an *unregenerate* person. Thus, the person in this passage is not *unregenerate* because he “delights in God’s Law” (v. 22); in his “mind” he is a “slave to God’s Law” (v. 25).

But he’s still “sold as a slave to sin.” What are we to make of that? ...Well, let’s review what it takes to *no longer be a slave to sin* (6:6c). What did Paul say? ...Our sinful nature must be “rendered powerless” (6:6b). What’s the sinful nature’s source of “power”? ...The “old man” ...our “old self” – who we were in Adam. To break the power of our sinful nature, our “old self” must die. How? ...It’s *crucified with Christ* (6:6a). Through Christ’s federal headship, we die and are buried in union with him (6:3-4b). And as Christ was raised, we too – in union with him – are raised to walk in a new life (6:4c).⁶ So, what about the person in our present passage who’s still “sold as a slave to sin”? ...He doesn’t appear to have experienced *any* of this. His sinful nature is still very much in power. Thus, while he may be regenerate, he doesn’t appear to be in *union with Christ*...he doesn’t appear to be *converted*. Can that be?

Indeed. The very statement that attests to his regeneration also discloses the *reason* he doesn’t appear to be in Christ: He’s a *slave to the Law*...a *legalist* through and through. And *because* he’s a slave to the Law, by default he’s (still) a slave to sin. As Paul discussed earlier in 7:1-6, conversion includes dying to the Law. As long as one persists in clinging to the Law (or to a legalist mindset), he will never be free of his slavery to sin.⁷

I tend to agree with Stott who says 7:14ff describes the state of an Old Testament believer – an Israelite living under the Law.⁸ OT believers were indeed regenerate – just look at the psalms: “I

³ Refer to Lesson VII.

⁴ See Murray, vol. 1, pp. 257f.

⁵ “Flesh” in this context embodies the sin-prone self – the self focused on worldly things (Moo, p. 478)...our fallen selfish nature (Stott, p. 219)...the “old self” dominated by indwelling sin (cf. discussion of “sinful nature” in Lesson VII).

⁶ Refer to Lesson VII.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Stott, p. 209.

delight in your commands because I love them” (Ps 119:47); “Oh how I love your Law” (Ps 119:97). These are not the words of unregenerate people. So, what was the problem? ...While they may have *loved* the Law, they couldn’t *keep* the Law. Why not? ...They lacked the one instrument that could *enable* them to keep the Law: The Holy Spirit. You’ll notice that the Spirit is totally absent from this passage. And as Paul will address later, without the Spirit we’re nowhere.

So then, you might ask, did OT believers somehow become regenerate without the Spirit? ...Not at all. They were indeed *born* of the Spirit (as any regenerate person is), but they were not *indwelt* by the Spirit⁹ – that was a promise for the future...for the Messianic age.¹⁰ And as Paul will address later, this indwelling constitutes the heart of our union with Christ...the heart of our sanctification and the assurance of our salvation. Without the Spirit’s indwelling, there is no sanctification...or assurance – only futile effort, as Paul shows in this passage.

If 7:14ff does address the state of an OT believer, then what is the application of this passage to believers today who do live in the Messianic age? Can believers today be regenerate but not converted? What would be the point – why would God regenerate someone but not convert him to Christ? The answer must be: He wouldn’t. Nevertheless, the fundamental problem within 7:14ff stands as much today as it did then. Whether living under *the* Law as the Jews did, or living under *a* law – a set of rules – as many do today, it’s the same problem: *Legalism* – the thought that one can sanctify (and even justify) himself through his own Law-abiding effort.

Earlier in his letter (beginning half-way through Ch. 3) Paul addressed the error of believing that the Law (or a legalist mindset) can save and justify.¹¹ Here, he’s focusing on the same error, but more within the context of sanctification. During the earlier discussions, Paul also was addressing people who adhered to the Law...people who also *delighted in God’s Law*, seemingly...who also had a *heart for God*, seemingly. But the truth is those people demonstrated, through their doubting of Paul’s teaching, that they really didn’t believe God’s word in scripture. And while they didn’t believe or understand a lot of things,¹² most importantly they didn’t believe what scripture said about the Messiah. They had their own ideas of what and who the Messiah should be. Consequently, they didn’t believe Jesus was Lord and Savior. And *unbelief* is the hallmark of an unregenerate person. Those people in reality were *hostile* to God.

Here in our present passage, Paul is addressing his believing Jewish brethren – people who *do* believe Jesus is the Messiah...people who indeed have a heart for God. Their challenge is not

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See Ezk 36:27.

¹¹ Refer to Lessons IV and V.

¹² *Ibid.*

unbelief, it's legalism. It's their mindset that although the Messiah died for their sins, they still must *work* to please God...they still must follow the do's and don'ts of the Law for acceptance. They have yet to grasp the true concept of God's grace and mercy...that it's *not* about what they can do for God (because they can do *nothing for* God); rather, it's all about what God has already done for them through Christ Jesus.

Do we see such today? ...Of course. In the earlier case, we call it "false profession" – people who profess faith and trust in Christ, but who display no evidence of life change, no evidence of dying to their "old self," and no perception of the *need* for change. In reality, they're still hostile to God. "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him" (Tit 1:16). In the present case, we simply call it "legalism" (or "moralism") – people who hold the same mindset as the believing Jews of Paul's day...people who feel that, although Jesus died for their sins, they still must work and follow rules to please God – rules that they *cannot* follow...rules that condemn them every time they sin (just like the person Paul describes). They, too, have yet to grasp the true concept of God's grace and mercy. Consequently, they're not truly *in* Christ; that is, *trusting* in him – they're trusting in themselves.

We could argue the finer points of, among others, whether a regenerate person grappling with legalism today is not yet converted (but certainly will be); or, whether he's indeed converted, but fails to *understand* his conversion (as Paul addressed in Ch. 6);¹³ or, whether he's failing to follow the Holy Spirit's leading (which we'll address during discussions of Ch. 8, below); or, whether in reality a legalist is not regenerate at all. We can find scholars who fall on all sides of the argument. Our aim is not so much to address the *circumstances* under which legalism occurs, but to point out that it *does* occur; and thus, the dilemma found in 7:14ff indeed has application for us today.

Yet, Paul's treatment of the subject in Ch. 6 carries a lot of weight. And his emphasis on dying to the Law in the first part of Ch. 7 adds to that weight. As we mentioned above, the legalist's fundamental challenge is *ignorance* – ignorance of the true meaning of God's grace and mercy. Thus, the legalism issue for a believer is not conversion; it's how he *acts* – *as if* he's not converted...*as if* he's not in union with Christ. And he acts this way because he holds the mindset of an OT believer – he's in bondage to law...to rules and do's and don'ts. He's what Stott calls an "Old Testament Christian," a contradictory expression to be sure, but one that well describes the anomaly of the legalist.¹⁴

Luther, before his enlightenment, exhibited this very thing. Luther certainly believed Jesus was the Messiah who died for his sins, but he was plagued with how to *get right* with God. Why?

¹³ Refer to Lesson VII.

¹⁴ Stott, p. 210.

Because he had no *understanding*, then, of the true meaning of God's grace. Instead, as nearly everyone at that time, he pursued his own righteousness...he pursued a legalistic regimen: *He* had to compensate for his unjust state...*he* had to work out his salvation...and his sanctification. And this monumental task *tore* at Luther. How he could possibly *do enough* to appease God's wrath?¹⁵

Was Luther regenerate? ...No doubt. No one at that time had a heart *for* God more than Luther. Was Luther converted? ...He didn't *act* that way. Instead, he exhibited all the traits of 7:14ff – an "Old Testament Christian" enslaved by rules, and thus, entrapped by the stark reality that he was a sinner before God. Yet, God had a plan for Luther, which we all know played itself out in the Reformation. And it was then, we might say, that Luther "converted" (to use the term loosely) from legalism to grace...when he truly became "not under Law, but under grace" (6:14).

What about closer to home...closer to our present day? Let me draw from my own experience.¹⁶ The Lord drew me to himself in 1985. I became convicted of my sin and earnestly sought to please God. I had truly lost my former hostility toward God and his ways. Clearly, I was a *new* person, something readily recognizable by old (and new) acquaintances. But when asked a few years later about where I put my trust for salvation, I gave a works answer. I was trying to be good, now...trying to do good things and all that – you know, to make up for all the bad I'd done. So, how can we define my state? ...I was no longer *unregenerate* since I "delighted" in pleasing God. But was I *in* Christ? Was I converted? ...I sure didn't act that way. I believed Christ died for my sins – but what was missing? ...I was not *trusting* in him...not *resting* in him. Instead, I had become a *legalist*, trusting that now I had become a "believer" I would and could do the good things that I refused to do before; and moreover, that God would be *pleased* with my newfound effort. I had absolutely *no* understanding of God's grace, and it would be several years more before I did.

After his enlightenment, Luther wrote of the earlier tension he experienced– tension that arose from outwardly leading a pious life, but inwardly knowing it was not enough. "However irreproachable my life as a monk," he said, "I felt myself, in the presence of God, to be a sinner with a most unquiet conscience."¹⁷ I don't remember much about my own years in this *half-belief*, but I do remember the tension. I didn't recognize it as such at the time, but I was quite unsettled. In hindsight, I was not unlike Luther – trying to lead a pious life (that I was *convinced* was pleasing God), yet uncertain whether it was pious enough. And all that time (about 5-6

¹⁵ Preface to Luther's Latin Writings, Martin Luther Page, ccel.org.

¹⁶ This was not my idea. Credit for using oneself as explanation goes to an anonymous individual who did so while participating in an on-line blog discussion of this very subject.

¹⁷ Moo, p. 450, n. 22, citing a comment from Luther in 1519.

years) I was not in Christ; I was in *myself*. I was doing the work. And I was not at peace. *This* is the person Paul describes in 7:14ff.

So, who is the “wretched man”? He’s the regenerate, but *pre-conversion* Paul. Stott says Paul is relating his personal experience as an OT believer (and by extension, anyone mired in legalism) living “according to the law instead of the gospel, according to the flesh instead of the Spirit.”¹⁸ And Paul’s message is to his believing Jewish brethren who may have grasped that they are “not under Law” (6:14) for justification, but who still cling to the Law for sanctification.¹⁹ They haven’t yet “died to the Law” (7:4). They haven’t yet exchanged the “old way of the written code” for the “new way of the Spirit” (7:6).²⁰ They have yet to find the *indwelling* Holy Spirit.²¹

But how do we square all this with Paul’s use of the present tense? We’ll address that in the next section.

c. *The Plight of Self-Reliance – 7:14-25*

So, what’s Paul’s purpose in describing the “wretched man”? The answer to this question is almost as controversial as the identity of the man himself. We must begin by looking at how the passage fits into the overall context of what precedes and what follows. Dwelling as it does on life controlled by sin, the passage stands in stark contrast to what follows – life filled with the Spirit (Ch. 8). But let’s review what precedes. Paul began addressing the subject of sanctification in Ch. 6. There, he used the objections posed by his “critic” to explain to his broader audience that believers die to sin in union with Christ; their old life is crucified with him so they may be raised to walk in a new life; and they exchange a life controlled by sin for a life guided by the Spirit. In Ch. 7, Paul turned to his believing Jewish brethren to tell them, specifically, that in addition to sin they die to the Law for the same reasons – to belong to Christ, to bear fruit for God, and to serve in the new way of the Spirit. He also told them that the Law they hold so dear actually provokes sin, and he used a personal experience (coveting) to exemplify how and why it does so.²²

Now, we have to ask: Would Paul jump out of context here to address, for example, the bleak outlook of an unbeliever, as many scholars contend?²³ ...Or the inner tensions of an otherwise normal believer, as others contend?²⁴ ...And then jump back into the subject of sanctification in

¹⁸ Stott, p. 210.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

²² Refer to Lesson VII.

²³ E.g. Moo, pp. 442ff.

²⁴ E.g. Mounce, pp. 166ff.

Ch. 8? Moreover, having begun to address the need for his believing Jewish brethren to die to the Law (7:1ff), would he suddenly drop the subject?

I contend that *the need to die to the Law* is the subject of 7:14ff. For me, continuity of thought – especially in Paul – carries a lot of weight. And the mere flow of the text screams continuity from the previous passage – continued elaboration of the detrimental effects brought by clinging to the Law. The opening verse, “the Law is spiritual but I am unspiritual [lit. *fleshly*²⁵]” (v. 14a), continues thoughts from the earlier passage: “The Law is holy” (v. 12), “but sin...produced in me every kind of covetous desire” (v. 8). And Paul’s description subsequent to v. 14 fits the inner conflict of one laboring under legalism...of one striving on his own to fulfill the Law. He knows what is right, but he has no power to *do* what is right. Thus, we must (I believe) conclude that Paul in the present passage persists in pressing his Jewish brethren to re-think their reliance on the Law...to re-define their perceptions of the Law and its purpose.

Now, imagine Paul addressing the Jews in person. Imagine him face to face with fellow believers – his brethren who are yet skeptical of abandoning their allegiance to the Law. Imagine him, one of them – indeed, a former Pharisee – using the experience they all have in common to gently persuade: *I know how you feel; I’ve been through this myself. I, too, wrestled with abandoning the practices we’ve kept for so long...practices that God himself gave us. Just let me tell you what I’ve found.* But, of course, he’s not face to face – he’s writing a letter. So, what does he do? ...He slips into the *present tense*: *I’m with you...I’m one of you...let me help you through this...let me help you understand.*

And thus he begins: *Look, we Jews know the Law is spiritual. But we’re not. Like you in this situation, I am unspiritual (fleshly) – I’m sold as a slave to sin* (v. 14). And he continues in this vein, conveying the thoughts he knows they have...thoughts that he himself once experienced. *I don’t understand...I keep doing things I don’t want to* (v. 15). *And if I don’t want to, I must be agreeing that the Law is good* (v. 16). *So, why do I keep it up? ...Sin. I know that’s what it is. Sin lives in me* (v. 17). *I want to do good, but I just can’t get there* (v. 18).

After v. 20, Paul shifts from identifying with their thoughts (*I know how you feel*) to showing them the way out (*let me tell you what I’ve found*). He says: *I find that the sin in me has its own law – whenever I start something good, sin’s right there to distract me* (v. 21). *It wages war against the good I have in mind; it holds me prisoner* (v. 23). *So, in my mind I want to serve God’s Law, but in my flesh I’m a slave to sin* (v. 25b).

Now, he makes a succinct proclamation of the *problem* and the *state of mind* of his believing brethren (if they will admit it to themselves): *How wretched I am in this duality. How can I*

²⁵ Gr. σαρκινος.

escape? Who can help (v. 24)? Then, the solution: “Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 25a).²⁶ *Because through Christ Jesus, the indwelling Spirit set me free from this indwelling sin* (8:2).

Stott points out that Paul presents four *dualities* in this passage, three illustrating the problem and one – the solution: 1) I want to do good, but I end up doing bad; 2) the good intent of my mind (law of my mind) provokes the bad intent of indwelling sin (the law of sin within me); and 3) I’m a slave to God’s Law in my mind, but a slave to the law of sin in my flesh. Then, 4) I am a wretched man in this state; but thank God I can be rescued through Christ Jesus.²⁷

Moo points out that *through* the Law, God tells us what we need to do; but *in* the Law God provides no tool to bring it about. As good as it may be, Moo adds, the Law encounters people when they are filled with indwelling sin.²⁸ And indwelling sin taunts us into thinking we can fulfill the Law *without* a tool. But, of course, that’s futile; it’s like trying to dig a hole without a shovel. The futile effort only drives the *division* deeper – the division between our willing and our doing...between the “mind” and the “flesh.”²⁹

Nevertheless, while indwelling sin is what prevents us from keeping the Commandments, it’s our self-reliance that’s at the heart of the issue. And that applies to anyone who would go it alone, Jew or Gentile. Self-reliance is what allows us to so easily adopt a legalist mindset. Our sinful human nature allows us to tell ourselves that we can do it...that we have the power – in essence, that we can sanctify (and even justify) ourselves. And our present culture *teaches* that all we need do is apply ourselves and the thing we want is ours. It’s this very attitude that puts us at odds with *God’s* way of sanctification...with his *intent* in making the Holy Spirit available. The fundamental lesson so blatantly demonstrated by the Israelites’ continual failure to keep the Law during all those centuries past is that we *cannot* do it...we *don’t* have the power. But the Holy Spirit does. His is the real power; ours is but imaginary. The Spirit is God’s intended *tool* for fulfilling the Law.

Through his discourse in Ch. 7, Paul has vividly described for the Jews what he does and doesn’t mean by *dying to the Law*. He *doesn’t* mean the Law is the problem; the Law is holy and good. He *does* mean is that the *flesh* is the problem...our sin-dominant self.³⁰ He *does* mean that as long as they (and we by extension) persist in relying on *self* to keep the Law, sin will remain in control and cause them (and us) to *fail*. And he *does* mean that only by breaking the power of

²⁶ I presented v. 25a and v. 25b in reverse order only for ease of explanation. For Paul, the thesis ends at v. 25a, and in v. 25b he provides a summary conclusion before moving on to address the Spirit’s remedy to the issue.

²⁷ Stott, pp. 213f.

²⁸ Moo, p. 443.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See Stott, p. 212.

sin through union with Christ and relinquishing reliance on self to guidance by the Holy Spirit can they (and we) ever hope to succeed. This he will elaborate on next.

d. *The Peace of the Holy Spirit – 8:1-18*

Where life under the Law produces tension and turmoil, life in the Spirit brings peace and tranquility. Such was my own experience after 5-6 years in futile effort to make myself right with God. When I finally came to truly understand grace...when I finally understood that *my* efforts were futile...when I at last relinquished my steadfast hold on self and allowed the Spirit to lead – peace flooded me. And this is the emphasis that Paul puts forth in this climactic chapter.³¹ Where the previous passage emphasized the *defeat* found in going it alone, this passage emphasizes the *victory* found in joining forces with the Holy Spirit.

After previously elucidating the division between Adam and Christ (Ch. 5); after illuminating how the unrighteousness of Adam is exchanged for the righteousness of Christ by dying with Christ to both sin (Ch. 6) and reliance on the Law (Ch. 7, part 1); and after exemplifying the futility of relying on *self* for obedience (Ch. 7, part 2) – Paul now says: “Therefore”...*those of you who are in Christ Jesus no longer stand condemned* (v. 1). For those who yield their imagined power for God’s real power, the slate is wiped clean. As Mounce says, this opening verse sets forth one of the most important truths of the Christian faith.³²

And how is this so? “The *law* of the Spirit of life set me free from the *law* of sin and death” (v. 2, emphasis added). Paul captures the essence of two opposing forces by citing them as two opposing laws. Scholars debate what Paul means by “law” in this verse. But since Paul in the opening verse steps back to again stress our justification (*condemnation* being the opposite of *justification*³³) I see him also stressing the two opposites that are fundamental in justification – the two mutually exclusive states: Christ on the one hand vs. Adam on the other...the effect of being in Christ vs. the consequence of being in Adam. But moreover, he stresses the *active agent* that brings us out of Adam and into Christ...the agent who *sets us free* from the state of death and brings us to the state of life: the *Holy Spirit*. Thus, Paul in v. 2 emphasizes that “through Christ Jesus” the *power* (the “law”) of the Holy Spirit overcomes the *power* of sin. It’s God’s Spirit coming with power and authority who brings liberation from the power of sin.³⁴ And it’s only through being in union with Christ that believers can access the Spirit’s power.³⁵

Paul states directly why God’s good and holy Law can neither justify nor sanctify: Our unbridled sinful nature...our sin-dominant self – “the flesh” – *weakens* the Law (v. 3a). *Controlled by the*

³¹ Many scholars cite Ch. 8 as a pinnacle in Paul’s letter, e.g. Stott, p. 216; Mounce, p. 173.

³² Mounce, p. 174.

³³ Murray, vol. 1, p. 274.

³⁴ Moo, p. 476.

³⁵ See Mounce, p. 175.

flesh (7:5), we're compelled to *break* the Law vice keep it (7:14ff). The Law is "holy, righteous, and good" (7:12); *we* are not. "The Law is spiritual" (7:14); *we* are not. *We* are the problem. Controlled by the flesh, we can do *nothing good* (7:19). In such a state, all we do is *violate...transgress* God's Law (7:7ff). And above all, he wants us to *keep* his Law.³⁶ God gave his Law for us to *obey*, as the set of fundamental rules to *live* by; he never intended it as means to justify and sanctify those *dead* in their sins.³⁷

For those means, God sent his very own Son "in the likeness of sinful man [lit. *sinful flesh*]" (v. 3b). What does that mean...*likeness*? It doesn't mean that he only *seemed* human, as some have taught. Nor, does it mean he was *in* sinful flesh – i.e. having a fallen nature as we do – because he knew no sin.³⁸ Rather, it means he was *like* us...really human; but *unlike* us, he was without a sinful nature.³⁹ His likeness was such that he was *exposed* to sin as we are,⁴⁰ but not *disposed* to sin as we are. He *obeyed* God's Law; he *did* the good he intended and evil did not overpower him;⁴¹ he *did* what the person in 7:14ff *cannot* do.

Thus, God gave his *sinless* Son as a "sin offering" (v. 3c), and through his Son's sacrifice he "condemned sin" *in the flesh*⁴² (v. 3d.). The Father sent the Son to deal with – once for all (6:10) – the problem of *Sin* unleashed into the world by Adam so long ago.⁴³ And the way the Son dealt with it was *in the flesh*⁴⁴ – the very physical essence ("likeness") within which mankind has struggled since the Fall. Christ assumed a body of flesh, and God condemned Sin in that body of flesh.⁴⁵ "He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf" (2Cor 5:21 – NASB), then he judged that sin; God's righteous judgment against Sin fell upon Christ on the cross.⁴⁶

But why? Why did God send the Son and condemn sin in him? Why did he put his Son through that torment? ...Was it just to condemn sin? ...To break sin's power over us? ...To save us from eternal damnation? ...To declare us righteous? All of these things, to be sure. But what was the ultimate reason? Verse 4a: "...in order that the righteous requirements of the Law might be fully met in us." So that we might have the ability to *not* sin and, thus, *obey* God's Law, the Commandments. Why is this so important? ...Holiness. God's objective is that we become

³⁶ See Stott, p. 220.

³⁷ See Moo, p. 478.

³⁸ E.g. 2Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15.

³⁹ See Stott, p. 219.

⁴⁰ Moo, p. 479.

⁴¹ Cf. Math 4:1-11.

⁴² "Flesh," here, refers to Christ's *sinless* humanity as opposed to our *sinful* humanity (see Moo, p. 480; Stott, p. 220).

⁴³ See Murray, vol. 1, p. 280.

⁴⁴ The NIV's "in sinful man" is not the best rendition. See Mounce, p. 176.

⁴⁵ See Murray, vol. 1, p. 282.

⁴⁶ Stott, p. 220.

holy.⁴⁷ And we can't be holy if we can't obey God's ten rules for life. So, through our faith – through believing what God has done for us in his Son, Christ Jesus – God graciously justifies us and *enables* us to obey his Law and walk the road toward holiness...the very meaning of *sanctification*.⁴⁸

And how can we do this? How can we imperfect, sin-prone (albeit no longer sin-controlled) people walk a path toward holiness? ...We “walk...according to the Spirit” (v. 4b – NASB). Only by the Spirit's power can we hope to obey God's Law; the Spirit *empowers* us to obey.⁴⁹ And this is what Paul has been aiming toward over the past several chapters. Christ's work overcame the state that held us captive...overcame the dominance of indwelling sin, making room in us for the Holy Spirit. But unlike sin, the Spirit does not dominate...he doesn't make us obey...he doesn't *make* us do anything. We have to *let* him.⁵⁰ That's the lesson for us from Paul's treatise in 7:14ff – it's what happens when we *don't* let the Spirit work in us...when we persist in doing it ourselves. And we must keep in mind that having been given freedom to *not* sin inherently means we still have freedom *to* sin. Thus, Paul's discussion through the remainder of this passage and exhortations found elsewhere in the NT which caution us again and again to focus on the Spirit and away from the flesh. We must avail ourselves of the Spirit's power, or succumb to the mire of 7:14ff.

I must point out that some prefer to attribute v. 4 to Christ's work...to the fact that he lived a sinless life in fulfillment of the Law, and the Law is then fulfilled in us when we are united to him.⁵¹ Entirely true. “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). But, let's not overlook Paul's point, here, of *walking according to the Spirit* in reference to fulfilling the Law. And Paul is quite specific in saying the Law might be fulfilled *in* us...not *for* us.⁵² The primary argument asks how we *imperfect* people can possibly fulfill God's *perfect* Law. Obviously, we can't...not in this life. But isn't that the whole point of walking with the Spirit? Isn't that the whole point of sanctification? It's a road...a path toward an end. God *means* it as a learning experience. And this is why the NT is full of exhortations to walk this path. God could have gone beyond *declaring* us righteous to *making* us righteous; but he didn't. He's leaving that for our glorification in the next life. Meanwhile, our job is to walk the path...to listen to the Spirit...and to learn.

Paul emphasizes in v. 4b that the Law might be fulfilled in those *who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*. This statement introduces a prolonged contrast of flesh

⁴⁷ Murray, vol. 1, p. 283.

⁴⁸ Stott, pp. 221f

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ See Moo, p. 485; Stott, p. 231.

⁵¹ E.g. Moo, pp. 283ff; Mounce, pp. 176f.

⁵² Piper, Ro 8:3-4: “What Does it Mean to Fulfill the Law in Ro 8:3-4,” Dec 9, 2001.

and Spirit...an elaboration of the states of indwelling sin vs. indwelling Spirit. Paul addresses these as *mindsets*.⁵³ And in doing so, he presents a stark reminder of who, ultimately, is responsible for our state – *we* are. We may have inherited this sinful nature; we may be enslaved to sin; we may be controlled by what the flesh desires – but we are *still* without excuse (1:20).

Paul says those who *are* of the flesh, *set their minds* on things of the flesh (v. 5a) – what the sin-dominate self *wants*. He reminds that the flesh-oriented mindset is *death* (v. 6a); it's hostile to God, it cannot and will not submit to God's Law (v. 7), and in no way can it please God (v. 8). Those being of the Spirit, however, set their minds on what the *Spirit* desires (v. 5b); and the Spirit-oriented mindset is "life and peace" (v. 6b). Why are unregenerate people unregenerate?⁵⁴ ...It's a mindset. It's who they are.⁵⁵ The choices they make determine how they think,⁵⁶ and how they think expresses their basic nature.⁵⁷ And, as Mounce puts it, "People do not think themselves into the way they act, but act themselves into the way they think."⁵⁸ And so it is with those who yield to the Holy Spirit...who give up their legalistic self-reliance (the mire of 7:14ff) and allow the Spirit to lead – their mindset changes (over time) from fleshly to spiritual.

Having made his point about personal mindsets, Paul now gets to the heart of the matter: There is no *half-way*. He changes from the abstract "they" to the pointed "you" (addressing again his broader audience), and stresses that you have transitioned from being "in the flesh" to being "in the Spirit" – "*if indeed* the Spirit of God dwells in you" (v. 9a – NASB, emphasis added).⁵⁹ The hallmark of an authentic believer is the indwelling of the Spirit.⁶⁰ Paul then underscores that anyone *not* having the "Spirit of Christ...does not belong to Christ" (v. 9b). You either live *with* the Holy Spirit, or live *without* Christ. What about the person in 7:14ff? By Paul's definition, he is *without* Christ because he is *without* the Holy Spirit (recall the absence of the Spirit in that passage). And herein is Paul's connection back to that passage ("Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!" – 7:25): The *solution* to that person's inner conflict lies in *surrendering* his self-reliance and *yielding* to reliance on the Spirit.

A point needs to be made, here. We've discussed the legalist as someone who is still coming to grips with grace...who hasn't quite "got it" yet, and thus unwittingly lives in the mire of 7:14ff. But considering Paul's statements in v. 9 – however regenerate the legalist may seem...however

⁵³ Stott, p. 223.

⁵⁴ Aside from the Spirit's regeneration, of course.

⁵⁵ Stott, p. 223.

⁵⁶ Mounce, p. 177.

⁵⁷ Stott, p. 223.

⁵⁸ Mounce, p. 177.

⁵⁹ The NIV's use of the verb "controlled" is, again, not the best rendition.

⁶⁰ Stott, p. 225.

certain his heart may be *for* God...however repentant he may feel...however strong his desire to obey – he stands perilously close to an unsaved state. Why? ...His focus on *self*. He’s self-absorbed. Therefore, when he does occasionally obey, who gets the glory? ...He does. And where is Christ in this picture? ...Just as Paul indicates, Christ is not here.

You may ask whether Paul is talking about different Spirits in v. 9 – the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ. ...Not at all. His language only serves to emphasize the Three in One. The Spirit is of the Father, of the Son...of God...*is* God. Wherever one is, the others are there also.⁶¹

And if Christ *is* in you (v. 10a), your *body* might be dead (v. 10b), but your *spirit* is alive (v. 10c). Most scholars agree that *body*, here, refers to our physical body, and *dead* refers to our mortal state.⁶² Believer and non-believer alike are destined to die physically because of Adam’s transgression.⁶³ There’s somewhat less agreement, however, on whether Paul means *your spirit* or *the Spirit*. The text literally says “the spirit is life,”⁶⁴ which sways the argument toward the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵ But the context, then, seems askew. Literally, v. 10 reads: “On the one hand, the body is dead because of sin, on the other – the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” Doesn’t it make more sense to say “*your spirit is alive* because of righteousness”? Perhaps. But, making more sense *today*, 2000 years later – and in a different language – may not be a good reason to be so free in our translation. Moo, who favors the literal translation, says Paul in this verse teaches that although we’re in a mortal body (which *will* die) we have life through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit;⁶⁶ and that being so, our spirit will *not* die. Thus, in defense of those who favor *your spirit is alive*, don’t both versions in essence convey the same truth?

And if you’re indwelt by the Holy Spirit – “the Spirit of him [i.e. God the Father] who raised Jesus from the dead” (v. 11a) – then he, God the Father, will also raise *you* from the dead (v. 11b). And this he will do by the same means...through the same agent who raised Christ from the dead: *The indwelling Holy Spirit* (v. 11c). The Spirit is both the Spirit of life (v. 2) *and* the Spirit of resurrection.⁶⁷ And Paul makes clear that resurrection means resurrection in body – the Spirit will “give life to your mortal bodies” (v. 11b). We’re not to be freed from our body as if it’s some evil thing to be discarded (as some have taught), but our mortal body is to be made immortal, free of the frailty, disease, and pain it once suffered – a new and glorious vehicle of

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² E.g. Moo, p. 491.

⁶³ Refer to Lesson VI.

⁶⁴ Gr.: το...πνεθμα ξωη.

⁶⁵ E.g. Mounce, p. 179, n. 143; Murray, vol. 1, p. 289.

⁶⁶ Moo, p. 492.

⁶⁷ Stott, p. 226.

our very personality.⁶⁸ Christ was raised *in body*, and *his* resurrection is the pattern of *our* resurrection.⁶⁹

Paul describes living according to the Spirit (vice the flesh) as an *obligation* (v. 12). God the Father, through God the Son, has ended sin's control over us, and he now offers God the Holy Spirit to lead us along the path to holiness. The *Triune God* has stooped to open for us the pathway to holiness...to our ultimately *becoming* righteous before God. Thus, we are obliged to *not* live according to the flesh...to *not* respond to sinful desires...to *not* have a flesh-oriented mindset. Rather, we are obliged, with the Spirit's help, to "put to death the misdeeds of the body" (v. 13). What does this mean? The process has a name, "mortification," little used in this day and age. But it constitutes our path to holiness...the gradual change in mindsets...the restraining of our sinful nature – our *sanctification*. It's the process of turning our backs on fleshly desires (Gal 5:19-21) and embracing what the Spirit desires (Gal 5:22-23).

So, what does "mortification" entail? ...First, what it does *not* entail: Neither doing all the work ourselves (the error of legalism), nor letting the Spirit do all the work (the error of "let go and let God").⁷⁰ Mortification is something we must do, but without the Spirit we will fail to do;⁷¹ thus, Paul's emphasis on "by the Spirit" in v. 13. We've already addressed the pitfalls of legalism. At the other extreme is the thought that the Spirit alone sanctifies us...that once he indwells us, he takes over, righting our wrongs and keeping us on the straight and narrow. If that were the case, we would have no more bouts with sin...we could easily avert temptation. But that's not the case, is it. Indeed we must "let go" – let go of our self-reliance; yet, *we* must take the initiative,⁷² following the Spirit's *prompting* (what I like to call listening to the *still, small voice*). ...And if we fail to listen? It's then that we *grieve* the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30).

In a graphic illustration of what mortification entails, Jesus said *if your eye offends you, gouge it out* (Math 5:29). He didn't say the Spirit will gouge it out – he told *you* to do it. But mortification isn't all negative; it also entails setting our minds on the Spirit (v. 5) and the things of the Spirit (Gal 5:22f)⁷³...gradually replacing fleshly desires with a spiritual mindset. Murray puts it succinctly: "The activity of the believer is the evidence of the Spirit's activity, and the activity of the Spirit is the cause of the believer's activity."⁷⁴

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁷⁰ Moo, p. 495f.

⁷¹ Stott, p. 228.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Murray, vol. 1, p. 295.

And if you are *led by the Spirit*, then you are a *son of God* (v. 14). Mounce says this may be the most concise definition of who a child of God is.⁷⁵ Just as only those who are *indwelt* by the Spirit belong to Christ (v. 9), only those who are *led* by the Spirit are sons of God.⁷⁶ How much more assurance could we have? If we recognize the progress in our spiritual walk...if we see that the person we used to be is gradually changing...if the old desires are beginning to fade, being replaced by peaceful contentment with what is *noble, right, pure, and lovely* (Phil 4:8) – then we can be assured that we “will live” (v. 13). These are the promptings of the Spirit, and if we’re following these promptings, we can be assured of our right standing before God. We’re doing what he wants – becoming holy...becoming able to obey his Law. We are *making our calling sure* (2Pet 1:10).

Now, some may ask why all this doesn’t define a works mentality. ...Mortification...following the Spirit – why aren’t these *works*? ...Well, they *are* works, but they have nothing to do with *salvation* which is the concern behind the question. When we come to believe *and* trust in Christ (vice ourselves)...when we truly come to be *in union* with him, it’s then – at that very moment – that we become justified...declared righteous in God’s sight...*saved*, in other words. Our belief and trust have *everything* to do with our salvation. But, now comes the path to holiness – not to secure salvation, but to develop our ability to obey...to meet the righteous requirements of the Law (v. 4). And how do we do this? ...At that very moment when we become justified...when we come to be in union with Christ – right then we receive the indwelling Holy Spirit.⁷⁷ And the *Spirit* gives us the ability to *not* sin...to walk the path toward holiness...the path of *sanctification*. And the process of sanctification – the “work” of mortification and following the Spirit – is the *fruit* of justification. It’s the *evidence* of our salvation, not the essence of it.

Paul underscores his statement that we are sons of God (v. 14) by further stating we should regard ourselves as *adopted* (v. 15). He contrasts adoption, which gives us the right to call God “Father,” with slavery which conjures up an air of “fear.” His contrast emphasizes the *belongingness* of adoption vice the *dread* of bondage.⁷⁸ Adoption, says Mounce, severs all previous relationships; “the new father exercises authority over the new son, and the new son enters into the privileges and responsibilities of the natural son.”⁷⁹ Thus, in v. 15 Paul stresses that the Spirit we have received is one of adoption, not slavery; i.e. the Spirit’s actions promote the loving state of adoption, not the fearful state of slavery.⁸⁰ And it’s the Spirit himself who

⁷⁵ Mounce, p. 181f.

⁷⁶ Stott, p. 231.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁷⁸ Paul’s image of slavery, here, refers to one’s state under Law, which he earlier dealt with at length (refer to Lesson VII). Also cf. Gal 4:1ff.

⁷⁹ Mounce, p. 182.

⁸⁰ See Murray, vol. 1, p.297.

“testifies with our spirit” (v. 16) – i.e. who assures our inward self⁸¹ – that we are, indeed, sons of God, or “children of God.”⁸²

And if we are sons (children), then we are *heirs* – heirs of God and *with* Christ (v. 17a). Heirs to what? ...Well, since we are heirs *with* Christ, we might look at what Christ is heir to. First, he is heir to the promises...the promises made to Abraham (Gal 3:16f). What were these promises? ...The one most applicable to Christ is likely the first one – “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3) – which was reiterated to Isaac (Gen 26:4) and to Jacob (Gen 28:14). Heb 1:2 says he’s “heir to *all* things” (emphasis added).⁸³ Murray points to Jn 17:5 in saying Christ’s preeminent reward was glorification with the Father.⁸⁴ In all this we are heirs with Christ, and specifically *heirs of God*. Just what does this mean? ...It’s difficult to suppress the thought, says Murray, that “God himself is the inheritance.”⁸⁵ And why should we suppress it? Stott cites the example of the Levites who had no inheritance except God himself (Deut 18:2).⁸⁶ Thus, perhaps we should take it at face value – we are “heirs of God.”

But (there’s always a *but*) we are heirs with Christ *only* if we suffer with Christ (v. 17b). Paul has mentioned suffering before, and we addressed suffering and its positive aspects in Lesson VI. Suffering⁸⁷ here, however, refers not only to the pressure to conform to this world,⁸⁸ but to all that believers endure physically and emotionally in following Christ⁸⁹ – and some in this world (e.g. in many developing countries) endure far more than others. Paul points out that suffering is a byproduct of our union with Christ. If indeed we are in union with him, we should experience some of the unpleasanties he did – not his redemptive suffering, of course, but the opposition from the world⁹⁰ (cf. 2Cor 11:23ff). If we don’t...if we’re comfortable in this world – perhaps too comfortable – then we may need to check where we are in our spiritual walk.

Suffering is the path to glory.⁹¹ It was for Christ (Lk 24:26), and it is for us: “We share in his sufferings *in order that* we may also share in his glory” (v. 17b, emphasis added). No suffering, no glory. Suffering is the condition upon which we may attain glory...upon which we may attain adoption...and Sonship. If we suffer – if we feel the opposition of this world – we may be

⁸¹ See Stott, p.234.

⁸² Paul is not distinguishing between “sons” and “children”; if we are *sons*, then inherently we are also *children* (see Moo, p. 504, n. 41).

⁸³ Moo interprets this as heir to all God’s promises (p. 505).

⁸⁴ Murray, vol. 1, p. 298.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Stott, p.235.

⁸⁷ Gr. παθηματα.

⁸⁸ Refer to Lesson VI.

⁸⁹ Moo, p. 511f; Stott, p. 237; and see BAGD, p. 602.

⁹⁰ Mounce, p. 183.

⁹¹ Stott, p. 235.

assured that the Holy Spirit indwells us...that we are sons, and heirs, and assured of glory with Christ.

Paul concludes this passage with reassurance that the things we go through on this earth – the sufferings we endure for this relatively short period of our eternal existence – cannot even *compare* with the glory we will enjoy (v. 18). Be assured, he says in essence, that in following the Holy Spirit we rest firm in the knowledge that we *are* sons...we *are* heirs...with Christ and of God, and the path along which the Spirit leads ends only in our holiness...our eternal glorification. Though suffering for some may indeed be severe, it will in no way undermine the eventual eternal state of glory with God.

e. All Creation Groans and Waits – 8:19-27

Paul in this passage captures the state of what we call the “already” and the “not yet.” Those in union with Christ *already* experience freedom from sin’s dominion, but they have *not yet* attained the perfection that will keep them from sinning. *Already*, those led by the Spirit are sons of God...*already* they stand as heirs with Christ – but they have *not yet* received that inheritance. *Already* true believers may rest assured that they will indeed receive their inheritance, that Christ will return as he promised (e.g. Lk 21:27), and that on that day all believers will come into their glory – but that day has *not yet* come. Meantime, the Spirit indwells us and continuously reassures us that the day will come. Moo says the Spirit is our *connection* between the already and the not yet.⁹² And the Spirit’s indwelling is our source of comfort and peace in this world while we wait for that day.

Paul says creation⁹³ itself longs “for the sons of God to be revealed” (v. 19). Because after the Fall, not only Adam and his posterity but *all* creation felt the effects of the curse. And where Man was subjected to the consequence of Sin, creation was “subjected to frustration” (v. 20a). What does this mean? ...The word translated “frustration”⁹⁴ carries the sense of futility and purposelessness.⁹⁵ It’s the same word used in the Greek Septuagint to render the concept of “meaningless” in the Book of Ecclesiastes. As he did for Man, God had definite purpose and meaning for creation before the Fall; but now, as Man cannot fulfill his purpose because of Sin, creation is *frustrated* since it cannot fulfill its intended purpose.⁹⁶

And where believers now cling to Christ and the gospel in the *hope that does not disappoint* (5:5), creation clings to the “hope” in which it was subjected (v. 20b)⁹⁷ – the same *confident*

⁹² Moo, p. 509.

⁹³ Creation in this context is understood by most scholars to include all that subhuman part of the created universe (see Moo, p. 513f).

⁹⁴ Gr. ματαιότης.

⁹⁵ BAGD, p. 495.

⁹⁶ Moo, p. 515.

⁹⁷ Many scholars cite this “hope” as Paul’s referring to the *protoevangelium*, the clear indication (in Gen 3:15) given along with the curse that a remedy would one day come (e.g. Moo, p. 516).

expectation to which believers hold. And that hope is that God will indeed glorify his redeemed people and *un-subject* creation from its frustration and “decay” (v. 21a). Thus, creation “groans” in anticipation of the day it will be free (v. 22a), and the revelation of the sons of God will be the sign to creation that the day has come.⁹⁸

Moreover, creation will not only be freed *from* its bondage to decay, but it will be freed *into* “the freedom of the glory of the children of God (v. 21b, NASB). What does that mean? ...It means that *all* creation will enjoy the same glory.⁹⁹ Creation will enjoy the same glory that the sons of God will enjoy.¹⁰⁰ It means that at the last day, when God’s children are glorified, creation itself will be glorified. It means that creation will not be destroyed or annihilated, but transformed¹⁰¹ – *renewed* (see Math 19:28)...returned to its original state before the Fall.

So, creation groans as a woman in childbirth (v. 22b), knowing that soon the *birth* will occur and the joy of the *new life* will greatly overshadow the present pain.¹⁰² And as creation groans, so we groan...we who have the “first-fruits of the Spirit” (v. 23a). What do *first-fruits* here signify? ...The *first installment* of salvation. The indwelling Holy Spirit is the *pledge* to believers...the *guarantee* that God will carry salvation to its final conclusion. We hold the *down payment* for our “adoption as sons” and the “redemption of our bodies” (v. 23b), and we groan along with creation eagerly awaiting that day.¹⁰³

Paul’s use of the word *groan* captures the essence of the believer’s (and creation’s) state in this present world. We’re caught in the tension between the *already* and the *not yet*...between Christ’s first coming and his second coming...between the Kingdom inaugurated and the Kingdom consummated.¹⁰⁴ We groan in this tension – free to not sin, yet unable to *freely* not sin. The *flesh* remains. But we have hope; and “in this hope we were saved” (v. 24a). We were saved from the bondage to sin, but not yet not saved from the wrath to come. But *in this hope*, we confidently expect that we *will* be totally liberated¹⁰⁵ – liberated from the flesh and the wrath. We don’t see our final salvation; for if we did, then why hope (v. 24b)? It’s *because* we can’t see it that hope stands. And our faith is our “assurance” that hope stands, and our “conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1 – NASB).

So, how do believers weather this tension? How do we cope with the state we find ourselves in? ...We wait patiently (v. 25) and we *pray*. We pray for that day to come...the day when the tension is eliminated...when the Kingdom is consummated...when Christ returns. “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20). But our meager prayers, replete with human frailty and distracted by the ever-present flesh, don’t quite hit the mark – for “we do not know what we ought to pray for”

⁹⁸ Stott, p. 238.

⁹⁹ Mounce, p. 185.

¹⁰⁰ Murray, vol. 1, p.304.

¹⁰¹ Stott, p. 241.

¹⁰² See Moo, p. 518.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 520.

¹⁰⁴ See Stott, p. 242.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

(v. 26b). So, what to do? ...As always, we can't *do*; God in the person of the Holy Spirit *does*. Just as our hope sustains us, "in the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness" (v. 26a).¹⁰⁶

And how does the Spirit help us? Verse 26c: He "intercedes for us with groans." What kind of "groans"? Translations here vary, but they all render the same commonality: e.g. "groans that words cannot express" (NIV), "groanings too deep for words" (NASB). They imply some kind of audible expression too difficult to capture with mere words. But this is not altogether accurate.¹⁰⁷ The Greek adjective¹⁰⁸ actually means "wordless," or "unexpressed."¹⁰⁹ In other words, the Spirit's groans are inaudible, unspoken communications with God the Father. And God the Father, of course, "knows the mind of the Spirit" (v. 27a), and the Spirit's "groans" for us are interpretations poised exactly as the Father wants to receive...are in accordance with his will (v. 27b).

But why would the Spirit "groan"? We and creation groan from our state of imperfection. The Spirit's not imperfect. So why should he groan? ...The Spirit groans not of himself, but in identification with our groaning.¹¹⁰ Our groans become his.¹¹¹ Such a thought places the Spirit's indwelling in a much more personal context. It's not that he merely resides with us as the independent entity that he is, but that he becomes a part of us – living as we live, rejoicing as we rejoice, and groaning as we groan. With this in mind, Paul's reference elsewhere that we can "grieve" the Spirit (Eph 4:30) now becomes a deep, personal cause-and-effect relationship. When we go astray, the Spirit's right there with us...grieving.

Paul, here, is underscoring our assurance.¹¹² Even though our prayers may be feeble, we need not fear. God has arranged for our feeble prayers to be transformed into something holy and acceptable to him. He's given believers the indwelling Holy Spirit – God dwelling in us (think about that)...God praying for us to himself. How could we possibly be *more* assured?

f. Conclusion

Paul has pointedly explained to the Jews (and to us, by extension) that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is *the* solution to tensions arising from legalism and from the *already...not yet* state we experience. He graphically illustrated through self-example the fruitlessness of going it alone, and he repeatedly pointed to the peace enjoyed by those who relinquish their self-reliance and walk with the Spirit. Most importantly, he emphasized that those who don't walk with the Spirit walk without Christ.

¹⁰⁶ Murray, vol. 1, pp. 310f.

¹⁰⁷ Stott, p. 245.

¹⁰⁸ Αλαλητος.

¹⁰⁹ BAGD, p. 34.

¹¹⁰ Stott, p. 245.

¹¹¹ Mounce, p. 187.

¹¹² Murray, vol. 1, p. 313.

B. Questions

1. What is noticeably absent from Paul's narrative of the "wretched man" (7:14ff)?
2. Throughout the 7:14ff passage, and even in Ch. 8, Paul implicitly addresses an issue fundamental to the inner conflict he describes. What is it, and what is the primary reason for its existence?
3. The person in 7:14ff *knows* what is right, but he has no power to *do* what is right (v. 18). Why?
4. What's the remedy for this person's bleak estate?
5. How can we imperfect, sin-prone people hope to obey God's perfect and holy Law?
6. What does "mortification" mean, and who does it?
7. Paul says that believers are sons, and heirs, and assured of glory with Christ. But only if...what?
8. Paul also says creation will be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (8:21). What does this mean?
9. What is it that Paul captures by using the word "groan" in reference to the anticipation all creation endures?
10. We groan from our imperfection. So, why should the perfect Holy Spirit "groan"? ...And what are his groans like?

C. Exegesis

Select a verse or passage from Ro 7:14 – 8:27, and write down the verse/passage from a bible version of your choosing. Following the sample outline given in Appendix A, write an inductive, expositional, literary, analytical, and devotional study of your selection. Appendix A provides an explanation of these study methods. Choose a title for your study, and make concise notes as indicated. Appendix B provides a sample exegesis.

D. Classical Comments

Read what John Calvin¹¹³ and Mathew Henry¹¹⁴ had to say about Romans 7:14 – 8:27. Read, also, what Martin Luther wrote about the passage in the preface to his commentary on Romans.¹¹⁵

Write a 1-page comparison of Calvin’s and Henry’s comments on 7:14 – 8:27, including what thoughts Luther had relevant to the passage. Contrast these, where appropriate, with the exposition citing contemporary scholars, above.

¹¹³ Available at ccel.org.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Part I Admonition for Believing Jews

Conclusion

In this first part of his long letter addressing the Jew/Gentile conflict, Paul focused mainly on his believing Jewish brethren, painstakingly detailing for them the gospel message as it applies to all believers. His primary aim was to show the Jews that the gospel message in no way conflicts with the Law, yet the Law in no way substitutes for the gospel. And he started at the beginning – with the problem of Sin.

Paul thoroughly described for the Jews why Sin was as much their problem as the Gentiles', and why they needed a Savior no less than the Gentiles. Righteousness comes not through the Law, Paul pointed out, but through faith in what God has done through his Son Christ Jesus. The Law cannot avert God's wrath; rather, it brings God's wrath. Only Christ's work on the Cross propitiates God's wrath. The Law cannot take away sin; moreover, the Law provokes sin. Only Christ's work on the Cross pays the penalty for sin. The Law does not give the Jews advantage over the Gentiles, but it does put them first in line – salvation and wrath both come “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

Paul described at length why the Law cannot justify, despite centuries of tradition holding that the Jews' great patriarch, Abraham, was justified through the Law. Justification comes apart from the Law...through believing – and only through believing – what Christ has done on the Cross. *Sola fide* (faith alone), as Luther put it. ...And the reason? So no one can boast that salvation somehow includes one's own effort.

Neither can the Law sanctify. Paul went to great lengths to show how Christ's “one act of righteousness” on the Cross – and only that one act of righteousness – releases believers from bondage to Sin and Death, and from bondage to the Law or legalism of any sort. As self-reliance plays no part in justification, neither does it in sanctification. One cannot successfully rely upon self to obey God's Law; no one ever has (other than Christ) and no one ever will.

Throughout this first part of his letter, Paul meticulously explained – and from personal experience – why the Law stands contrary to all the Jews believed it stood for. God did not give the Law to rectify the consequence of Adam's transgression, and he did not give the Law as a set of rules to follow in order to please God. But God did give his “holy, righteous, and good” Law to be obeyed – perfectly. And Paul put great effort into explaining to the Jews that their

very inability to obey the Law was God's intended way of showing them their sin. It was intended to drive them to their knees in search of a savior. And that savior has come, Paul emphasized, in the person of Christ Jesus.

Yet, God demands that his Law be obeyed. So, Paul explained for the Jews (and for us) how Christ fulfilled that demand on behalf of believers. But he also defined the only instrument through which believers themselves become enabled to obey the Law – the indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul concluded this first part of his letter by describing the personalness (to coin a word) of the Holy Spirit...the closeness that believers enjoy with the Spirit of God. The Spirit actually “groans” for us in our weakness. He brings us peace in a tumultuous world. He comforts us while we await our promised inheritance. And he gives us assurance that all God has promised will come to pass.

Next, Paul will dwell on God's sovereign choice in salvation. He will emphasize that God's sovereignty overrides everything...that even our belief in what God has done for us is not of our own doing. Thus, he will continue focusing on his Jewish brethren, but his tone will change significantly. He will turn from admonishing believers to anguishing for unbelievers...an anguish that derives from his full acknowledgement of God's sovereign choice. This subject will begin our exposition in Part II of Paul's Letter to the Romans.

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APPENDIX A

Bible Study Methods for Exegesis

The following describes the 5 methods of Bible study used to exegete your selected verse or text: inductive, expositional, literary, analytical, and devotional. The MINTS course *Practical Hermeneutics* provides an explanation of principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) and an exegetical format.

Inductive Method

Inductive study allows you to examine what the bible says about your text prior to consulting commentaries and appealing to doctrinal statements.

The first step is to make a list of cross reference texts. These texts are usually found at the foot of the page in your study bible, or in a column alongside your selected text. Write down the reference texts, look them up, and read them aloud. You will be surprised at how other biblical texts give definition and clear up questions about your selected text of study. It is very important to interpret scripture with scripture.

The second step in the inductive method is to look at the important information contained in the text. This may include:

- key words and definitions (use Strong's Concordance, Vine's, or a study bible dictionary)
- grammatical observations (sentence structure, time, variant readings)
- figures of speech (comparisons, associations, representations)
- whether the text explicitly or implicitly says anything about God, or salvation
- the translation method used (literal, dynamic equivalence, paraphrase)
- translation variances among bible versions (i.e. King James, New King James, New International Version, New American Standard Bible, English Standard Version, etc.)
- who the human author of the text is, and how we know (look at the introduction, pay careful attention to the pronouns)
- the occasion that prompted the human author to write the text (look for references to condition of the intended readers)
- the original audience; why would they read the text? (Are they identified in the introduction, or conclusion?)
- geographical context (what difference does the place, region, or climate make?)
- cultural and social contexts (what relevance might the text have to a reader's situation in life, class standing, ethnic background, language, cultural values, etc.)
- historical context (note the era in which readers live – is it relevant to the text?)

- religious context (does the text impact existing religious conflicts?)

At the end of your inductive study, write a summary statement (one sentence) of what you think the text is saying.

Expositional Method

Exposition interprets the text within its passage, verse by verse, in chronological order. The same can be said of a single verse, interpreting its text phrase by phrase. Read a verse (or phrase) and make a summary statement of teachings in the verse/phrase. After each verse/phrase has been read and summarized, write an overall, concise summary.

Literary Method

The literary method looks at the literary as well as thematic structure of the text. The following information is relevant:

- to what literary genre does the text belong? (doctrine, ethics, history, gospel, epistle, parable, prophecy, wisdom literature, teaching, law, song, poetry, proverb, etc.)
- what figures of speech are used? (allegories, anthropomorphisms, colloquialisms, hyperboles, humor, idiomatic expressions, metaphors, sarcasms, parallelism, similes, subjectives, etc.)
- is the text part of a thematic structure of the book or passage? (introduction, salutation, conclusion, benediction, prayer, song, saying, etc.)

After identifying the literary content of the text, diagram a concise, one-sentence thematic outline that encompasses the text: identify the theme of book from which the text is taken, consider the outline of book, include the theme of the passage which contains the text, provide a title for the text and list subtitles, as appropriate.

- Example: I Peter 1:1-2 is part of the doctrinal introduction to the first epistle of the Apostle Peter written to the elect in the name and work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Analytical Method

One of the purposes of bible study is to logically test the claims of scripture. A good means for such test is a system of logic that identifies thesis, antithesis, synthesis, and syncretism.

The thesis is what is being affirmed. The antithesis is what is being denied. The synthesis is the solution of the thesis to overcome the antithesis. Syncretism occurs when the synthesis is not applied, and the thesis co-exists with the antithesis. In biblical terms, the thesis is the truth, the antithesis is the lie, the synthesis is the gospel solution (truth overcoming the lie), and syncretism is idolatry (the truth and the lie co-existing).

Thesis	Antithesis	Synthesis	Syncretism
Affirmation	Negation	Solution	Unresolved issues
The truth	The Lie	The Gospel	Idolatry

For example, Romans 1:17:

Thesis (the truth)	Antithesis (the lie)	Synthesis (the gospel)	Syncretism (idolatry)
The righteous become so only through faith in God's righteousness	The unrighteous are saved through their own righteousness	God justifies those who believe in Christ's redemptive work	The unrighteous believe in their own righteous works, and so claim to be justified before God

Devotional Method

How does the text help you to adore God, confession your sins, give thanks to God, and serve him? The bible is God's Word for man, and through devotion man presents fruit of the Word back to God in the form of praise, confessions, thanksgiving, and practicing what the Word teaches.

Sample Form

The next page displays a form you might use for your exegesis. The form itself emphasizes brevity. Write short, bullet statements. Appendix B gives a partially filled-in example of this form.

Text:	Title:
Inductive Method [Drawing Information from the biblical text itself] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reference texts.</i> How do other biblical texts influence your reading of this text? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (book, chapter, verse) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (pertinent information) ○ Etc. • <i>Explanation of important information in the text:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ key words and definitions: 	

- grammatical observations: (sentence structure, variant readings)
- figures of speech: (comparisons, associations, representations)
- does the text explicitly or implicitly say anything about God, about salvation?
- translation method used in your bible version:
- how do other bible versions differ in translation?
- human author. How do we know?
- what occasion prompted human author to write?
- original audience intended. Why would they read the text?
- geographical context:
- cultural, societal context:
- historical context:
- religious context:

- *Write a one sentence summary of what you think the text means.*

Literary Considerations

- *literary genre: (gospel, history, legal, parable, poetry, prophecy, proverb, etc).*
- *how does the text/verse relate to surrounding verses?*
- *how does the text relate to the theme of the chapter and book?*

Analytic Method

Identify the fundamental thesis, antithesis, synthesis and syncretism in the text

Devotional Method

Consider how the text helps you adore God, confess your sins, give thanks to him, and serve him

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX B

Sample Exegesis

Romans 1:17

Below are examples of information that can be gleaned from scripture about any particular passage or verse (in this case, Ro 1:17). This sample exegesis is intended to be not comprehensive, but illustrative. A sample form containing these examples is included at the end.

Inductive Method

- **Cross-reference texts**
 - Ro 3:21 contains additional information about the righteousness of God
 - That it's apart from the Law
 - That the Law and the Prophets testify about it
 - Gal 3:11 contains another reference to Habakkuk 2:4, and together with v. 12 provides additional information about faith vs. the Law
 - That no one is justified by the Law
 - That the Law not based on faith
- **Important data in the verse**
 - *Key words/phrases* – Following is a list of the more prominent words/phrases in Ro 1:17 that might bear researching. Superficial research is provided for one phrase (righteousness of God) as an example.
 - Gospel
 - Righteousness of God
 - Strong's Concordance lists nearly an entire page of OT and NT verses containing the word "righteousness"
 - Most of the listed verses reference God's righteousness in one way or another...
 - ...and thus could provide a plethora of information about the phrase
 - Revealed
 - By faith
 - The righteous
 - *Figures of speech*
 - The phrase "from faith to faith" is an unusual construct, used only by Paul
 - Even he used the construct sparingly, and in only one other place (2Cor 2:16)
 - Here, it referred to an aroma "from death to death," and "from life to life"
 - The NIV interprets these rhetorically:

- “the smell of death,” and “the fragrance of life”
- ...and in Ro 1:17, “faith from first to last” (i.e. by faith alone)
- *Etc.*
- **Summary statement**
 - The gospel reveals God’s righteousness (as opposed to man’s righteousness) which man obtains thru faith and faith alone.

Expositional Method

- Ro 1:17 can be divided into 3 phrases:
 - For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed
 - From faith to faith
 - As it is written, “the righteous will live by faith”
- Summary statements for each:
 - The gospel reveals God’s righteousness
 - God’s righteousness is obtained by faith [in Christ] alone
 - As Habakkuk wrote, only he who obtains righteousness by faith will live
- Overall summary statement:
 - (in this case, it could be not much different from the summary statement under the Induction Method)

Literary Method

- **Literary content of the verse**
 - *Genre* of the verse:
 - Doctrine
 - Gospel
 - Teaching
 - *Figures of speech* contained in the verse:
 - One (see above)
 - Probably a colloquialism
 - Place in *thematic structure* of the book:
 - It’s part of the introduction
- **Thematic statement:**
 - Ro 1:17 concludes the introduction of Paul’s letter to the Romans, and introduces the doctrine of justification by faith which will be the primary focus of the letter throughout.

Analytical Method

Thesis (the truth)	Antithesis (the lie)	Synthesis (the gospel)	Syncretism (idolatry)
The righteous become so only through faith in God's righteousness	The unrighteous are saved through their own righteousness	God justifies those who believe in Christ's redemptive work	The unrighteous believe in their own righteous works, and so claim to be justified before God

Devotional Method

- What does the verse say to *you*, personally?
- For me...
 - I praise God and thank him for his *mercy* and *grace* in the gospel
 - ...that He would even *think* of looking at me
 - It prompts me to confess everything I ever did,
 - ...knowing that it's purely by his mercy that I have any hope
 - I know that it's only thru my *believing* in God's righteousness...
 - ...believing (i.e. having *faith*) that what he says is *true*
 - ...believing that he gave his Son for my redemption
 - ...and having *faith* in the work of his Son, Christ Jesus...
 - that I have any hope of salvation

Sample Form

The following page displays the sample form filled in with the information discussed above.

Text: Ro 1:17	Title: God's Righteousness
Inductive Method [Drawing Information from the biblical text itself]	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reference texts.</i> How do other biblical texts influence your reading of this text? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ro 3:21 – The righteousness of God is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Apart from the Law ▪ Attested to by the Law and the Prophets ○ Gal 3:11-12 – (in reference to Habakkuk 2:4): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No one is justified by the Law ▪ The Law not based on faith • <i>Explanation of important information in the text:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ key words and definitions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gospel 	

- Righteousness of God
 - Revealed
 - By faith
 - The righteous
 - grammatical observations: (sentence structure, variant readings)
 - figures of speech: (comparisons, associations, representations)
 - From faith to faith
 - Likely definition: By faith alone
 - does the text explicitly or implicitly say anything about God, about salvation?
 - translation method used in your bible version:
 - how do other bible versions differ in translation?
 - human author. How do we know?
 - what occasion prompted human author to write?
 - original audience intended. Why would they read the text?
 - geographical context:
 - cultural, societal context:
 - historical context:
 - religious context:
- *Write a one sentence summary of what you think the text means.*
 - The gospel reveals God's righteousness (as opposed to man's righteousness) which man obtains thru faith and faith alone.

Expositional Study

Identify the main teachings of your selected text/verse, in chronological order

- The gospel reveals God's righteousness
- God's righteousness is obtained by faith [in Christ] alone
- Only he who obtains righteousness by faith will live

Literary Considerations

- *Literary Content*
 - Literary genre: (gospel, history, legal, parable, poetry, prophecy, proverb, etc).
 - Doctrine, gospel, teaching
 - Figures of speech: (allegories, colloquialisms, idioms, etc.)
 - One likely colloquialism
 - How does the text/verse relate to surrounding verses?
 - Concludes the introduction
 - How does the text relate to the theme of the chapter and book?
 - Introduces the doctrine of justification by faith
- *Thematic Statement*
 - Ro 1:17 concludes the introduction of Paul's letter to the Romans, and introduces the doctrine of justification by faith which will be the primary focus of the letter throughout.

Analytic Method

Identify the fundamental thesis, antithesis, synthesis and syncretism in the text

- Thesis: The righteous become so only through faith in God's righteousness
- Antithesis: The unrighteous are saved through their own righteousness
- Synthesis: God justifies those who believe in Christ's redemptive work
- Syncretism: The unrighteous believe in their own righteous works, and so claim to be justified before God

Devotional Method

Consider how the text helps you adore God, confess your sins, give thanks to him, and serve him

- I praise God and thank him for his *mercy* and *grace* in the gospel
 - ...that He would even *think* of looking at me
- I'm compelled to repent of my every sin
 - ...knowing that it's purely by his mercy that I have any hope
- I know that it's only thru my believing in *God's* righteousness
 - ...that I have any hope of salvation

Additional Comments:

- Likely the most powerful verse in Romans

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Part I Admonition for Believing Jews

Instructor's Manual

Answers to Questions

Lesson I

1. What is the fundamental occasion and purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans?
 - a. *Occasion: pending visit*
 - b. *Purpose: to address the schism between Jew & Gentile believers*
2. What is the schism in the church between Jew and Gentile?
 - a. *Jews believed that Gentiles must adhere to the Law of Moses to complete their salvation.*
3. How is Paul's letter to the Romans similar/different from his letter to the Galatians?
 - a. *Similar: Same fundamental theme – against “judaizers”*
 - b. *Different: Galatians was reactionary, Romans – more winsome & methodical*
4. Whom does Paul address in this initial section of his letter?
 - a. *Opening – Jewish believers*
 - b. *...then – to “all” the saints in Rome*
5. From where would the Jews have first learned of the gospel?
 - a. *OT scripture*
6. What does Paul “prove” from OT thought?
 - a. *That Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah foretold in scripture*
7. What new thought emerges when contrasting Jesus' incarnation with his resurrection?
 - a. *Progression from “old” (the Law) to “new” (grace)*

8. What's the significance of "obedience of faith"?
 - a. *Stands in opposition to "obedience of Law"*
9. What's the one thing that defines the people of God post-resurrection?
 - a. *Faith*
10. Since Paul did not found the church in Rome, why does he seek to "have a harvest" there?
 - a. *"Indebtedness" – Jesus charged Paul (put him "in debt") with carrying the gospel into the world, especially to the Gentiles*

Lesson II

1. Why does Paul say he's not ashamed of the gospel?
 - a. *It's likely a statement of confidence – confidence in the truth of the gospel.*
2. What does Paul mean when he says the gospel is "the power of God" unto salvation?
 - a. *It's God who does the saving. It's his power that brings it about in us.*
3. Why would a statement that salvation is for "everyone" be somewhat of a shock to the Jews?
 - a. *For centuries, they (the Hebrews) had been God's chosen people. Thus in their minds, salvation must be for them only.*
4. Regarding the Jews, what are the two biggest challenges facing Paul?
 - a. *Overcoming the Jews reluctance to accept the Gentiles*
 - b. *Overcoming the Jews opposition to Christ's work as superseding the works of the Law*
5. Why is faith not a "work"?
 - a. *Faith is a response, the acceptance of a gift – the gift of God's grace.*
6. Why "first for the Jew," and how should we regard this statement today?
 - a. *The Jews were God's chosen people; the Law & the Prophets were given to them; Jesus was their Messiah – he came for them first (Math 15:24).*
 - b. *It's as true today as it was then. The promise of the gospel is to the Jew.*

7. What is the “righteousness of God”?
 - a. *God’s righteousness (the only true righteousness), imputed to us through the work of Jesus Christ.*
8. How would the Jews know about the righteousness of God?
 - a. *O.T. prophecies.*
9. How is the righteousness “revealed” in the gospel so different from the conventional wisdom understood before the gospel?
 - a. *Before the gospel, man largely understood “righteousness” as his own effort; the gospel “reveals” that man’s effort is in vain.*
10. What does Paul’s reference to Habakkuk 2:4 really mean?
 - a. *He who obtains righteous by faith – he may be assured of life.*

Lesson III

1. What is God’s wrath?
 - a. *His holy hostility to evil*
2. What is it that man does in his wickedness, especially, that invokes God’s wrath?
 - a. *He suppresses the truth (or the knowledge) of God (v. 18).*
3. Why can’t man – even unregenerate man – claim ignorance of God?
 - a. *General revelation.*
4. What is “suppressing the truth,” ultimately?
 - a. *Unbelief.*
5. What does Paul say about unregenerate man and God’s glory?
 - a. *Unregenerate man takes God’s glory and places it upon himself.*
 - b. *And how does he do that? Through inventing (and taking credit for “discovering”) things like evolution*
6. Who, ultimately, does Man worship through his idols?
 - a. *Himself.*
7. What is “the lie” (1:25), ultimately?
 - a. *Man’s desire to be God*

8. What's the difference between God's wrath "being revealed" (1:18) and the eschatological wrath at the last day?
 - a. *Present day wrath: God handing sinners over to themselves*
 - b. *Eschatological wrath: the Judgment*
9. What is the main consequence of God's present wrath?
 - a. *Depravity (moral & ethical)*
10. How does the long passage about God's wrath (1:18-32) relate to the Jew/Gentile conflict within the church?
 - a. *Essentially, the Jews are guilty of the same sins listed in the passage.*

Lesson IV

1. Why did the Jews of Paul's time believe that God's wrath didn't apply to them?
 - a. *They were the chosen people; the wrath spoken of in scripture was for the pagans (Gentiles).*
2. What was God's intention in giving the Law, and how did the Jews of Paul's time perceive the intention of the Law?
 - a. *God intended to show the need for a savior*
 - b. *The Jews perceived the Law was their savior*
3. What do we derive from the early part of Ch. 2 that makes it almost certain Paul was addressing the Jews from the outset?
 - a. *One of the main issues in the Jew/Gentile conflict was Jews passing judgment on Gentiles; not the other way 'round.*
4. Why does Paul say, "First for the Jew," whether for wrath or salvation?
 - a. *Because God gave them special revelation of himself, and he hold them especially accountable.*
5. How does Paul's reference to law written on the hearts of Gentiles (2:15) differ from the Law written on hearts under the new covenant (Je 31:33)?
 - a. *Here, it's innate knowledge of moral law given every man by his Creator*
 - b. *New covenant: product of indwelling Holy Spirit*

6. Is God's wrath part of the gospel?
 - a. *"...on that day when God judges the hidden things of men, according to my gospel." (2:16)*

7. In the section that begins, "If you call yourself a Jew..." (2:17), what is Paul's main point and why?
 - a. *To show that the Jews don't obey the Law they profess protects them*
 - i. *...through exposing their hypocrisy*
 - b. *Thus, the Law won't keep them from the wrath*

8. What does Paul mean by: *Won't the uncircumcised be regarded as circumcised (2:26)?*
 - a. *Anyone (Jew or Gentile) who keeps the Law, if that were possible, would be considered righteous.*
 - b. *(i.e. circumcision, like baptism, is not a requirement for righteousness)*

9. What, in essence, does Paul convey in citing the OT scriptures in 3:10-18?
 - a. *Man's total depravity*
 - b. *(message to Jews that they are among this depravity)*

10. What does Paul mean by "works of the Law"?
 - a. *Works righteousness*

Lesson V

1. What's the greatest concept (doctrine) that Romans provides?
 - a. *Doctrine of justification*

2. To whom does the saving initiative of the gospel belong?
 - a. *God the Father*

3. Name the single, most important thing that distinguishes Christianity from all other religious systems.
 - a. *Doctrine of justification*
 - b. *(all others teach some form of self-justification)*

4. What did Christ's crucifixion have to do with God's wrath?
 - a. *Christ's blood propitiated God's wrath for us*

5. Paul writes that God left unpunished the sins of former generations (3:25). How could God do that and remain righteous?
 - a. *He intended all along to punish those sins in the death of his Son*

6. Why does Paul ask whether faith nullifies the Law? (3:31)
 - a. *To respond to the Jews' charge that he preached faith as replacing the Law*
 - b. *What was Paul saying? [that Jew's faith in works of the Law was misplaced (he didn't preach against the Law itself)]*

7. What does Paul mean by "we uphold the Law"? (3:31)
 - a. *Faith (thru the Spirit) enables obedience to the Law*

8. In Ro 4:3, Paul quotes Gen 15:6 – "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." What was his purpose in quoting this OT scripture?
 - a. *To give the Jews scriptural testimony of the true source of Abraham's righteousness.*
 - b. *[And to use as reference to counter erroneous Jewish teaching that Abraham's righteousness came through obedience (works), circumcision, and the Law.]*

9. Why was God's promise to Abraham necessarily a gift?
 - a. *Because if its fulfillment depended on human works, it would never have come to pass.*

10. Why is faith "reasonable"?
 - a. *Because of God's integrity; he can do what he says, and he will do what he says (he has the power, and he keeps his word).*

Lesson VI

1. Define "justify" as used in Romans.
 - a. *To declare or pronounce righteous*
 - b. *Why not "make righteous"? [that's sanctification]*

2. What does the word "hope" mean in Romans Ch 5 (and elsewhere in the New Testament)?
 - a. *Confident expectation*

3. Paul says we "rejoice in our sufferings" (5:3a); define "sufferings"?
 - a. *Oppression or pressure to conform to the non-believing world*

4. And in what way do we “rejoice in our sufferings”?
 - a. *They serve to confirm that what we believe is right...they confirm our “hope.”*

5. Paul says, “At just the right time...Christ died for the ungodly” (5:6). What does he mean by “just the right time”?
 - a. *That preordained point in history when God brought what he had promised since the Fall – the Messiah.*
 - b. *And God’s time is always the “right time”*

6. In Ex 23:7, God says, “I will not acquit the guilty.” But in Ro 5:6, Paul says, “Christ died for the wicked [lit: ungodly].” So, then...did Christ’s dying acquit the guilty? Why or why not?
 - a. *No. Christ died in their place. God had mercy on the guilty.*

7. What does already...not yet convey?
 - a. *What Christ has already accomplished at his first coming, and what he has yet to accomplish at his second coming.*
 - b. *...i.e. redemption, justification, and reconciliation have already been accomplished; we await salvation from the wrath at the Last Day, as well as full sanctification and glorification.*

8. What assurance do we have that God will indeed save us from the wrath at the Last Day?
 - a. *Christ’s resurrected life.*

9. How do we explain Paul’s statement in Ro 5:12 that through Adam’s transgression “death came to all men, because all sinned (past tense)”?
 - a. *Since Adam was the federal head of the human race, what he did we did; thus, his transgression was imputed to all mankind after him.*

10. What did the single acts of Adam and Christ each bring, and what were the consequences?
 - a. *Adam’s one trespass brought sin into the world, and death as its consequence*
 - b. *Christ’s one act of righteousness brought grace into the world, and eternal life as its consequence*

Lesson VII

1. What is “antinomianism”?
 - a. *An attitude that says, “I’m saved, so I can do whatever I want.”*
2. God’s grace brings us justification; what does it also bring that keeps us from antinomianism?
 - a. *Sanctification*
3. What does baptism signify?
 - a. *Union with Christ*
4. What does the phrase “we died to sin” (6:2) really mean?
 - a. *We (our “old self”) died in union with Christ (6:3),*
 - b. *...were buried in union with Christ (6:4a), and*
 - c. *...were raised in union with him to walk in a new life (6:4c).*
5. What “died”? ...How and why?
 - a. *Our “old self” was crucified with Christ (6:6a), so that...*
 - b. *Our sinful nature may be “rendered powerless” (6:6b), so that...*
 - c. *“We should no longer be slaves to sin” (6:6c).*
6. In exhorting us to remember that we’re “dead to sin” (6:11), Paul stresses our new ability to do what?
 - a. *Choose to not sin (with the help of the Holy Spirit)*
7. What does the concept of slavery (6:15-18) teach us about our conversion?
 - a. *We’re all slaves to something, either to the things of Adam or to the things of Christ – no other options*
 - b. *Conversion constitutes an exchange of slaveries*
8. In saying the Jews must also die to the Law (7:4), to what – specifically – is he referring?
 - a. *Dying to a legalist mindset*
9. What is the Law’s purpose, and how does it accomplish its purpose?
 - a. *To show man his sin (7:7),*
 - b. *...through arousing sinful passions (7:5)*
10. Paul says, “apart from the Law, sin is dead” (7:8). What does he mean by that?
 - a. *The Law brings transgression. Without a law, there’s no violation...no sin*

Lesson VIII

1. What is noticeably absent from Paul’s narrative of the “wretched man” (7:14ff)?
 - a. *Any mention of the Holy Spirit*

2. Throughout the 7:14ff passage, and even in Ch. 8, Paul implicitly addresses an issue fundamental to the inner conflict he describes. What is it, and what is the primary reason for its existence?
 - a. *Legalism* – the thought that one can sanctify (and even justify) himself through his own Law-abiding effort
 - b. *Legalism stems from ignorance* – ignorance of the true meaning of God’s grace and mercy. Grace is all about what God has done for you, not what you can do for God.
3. The person in 7:14ff knows what is right, but he has no power to do what is right (v. 18). Why?
 - a. *Indwelling sin* – “it is sin living in me” (v. 17)
4. What’s the remedy for this person’s bleak estate?
 - a. *The indwelling Holy Spirit*
5. How can we imperfect, sin-prone people hope to obey God’s perfect and holy Law?
 - a. *We “walk...according to the Spirit” (8:4) – the Spirit empowers us to obey.*
6. What does “mortification” mean, and who does it?
 - a. *To “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (8:13)*
 - b. *We do it, but only with the help of the Spirit*
7. Paul says that believers are sons, and heirs, and assured of glory with Christ. But only if...what?
 - a. *“If we indeed share in his sufferings” (8:17)*
8. Paul also says creation will be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (8:21). What does this mean?
 - a. *That all creation will enjoy the same glory*
 - b. *That creation will not be destroyed, but transformed...returned to its state before the Fall*
9. What is it that Paul captures by using the word “groan” in reference to the anticipation all creation endures?
 - a. *The tension of the already...but not yet*
10. We groan from our imperfection. So, why should the perfect Holy Spirit “groan”? ...And what are his groans like?
 - a. *He groans in identification with our groans*
 - b. *His groans are “wordless,” unspoken communications*