Romans Resources

“Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans” by John Calvin (translated and edited by John Owen) in Calvin’s Commentaries, volume 19 (1539)

“An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans” by Matthew Henry in Volume 6 of Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible

The Epistle to the Romans by John Murray (1959 and 1965)

Romans by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“Romans” by Everett Harrison in Volume 10 The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (1976)


Romans: A Shorter Commentary by C. E. B. Cranfield (1985)

The Epistle to the Romans by Leon Morris (1988)


Romans: Righteousness from Heaven by R. Kent Hughes in Preaching the Word (1991)

Romans Class Notes by Dr. William Combs (1993)

Romans by R. C. Sproul (1994)


Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural citations are from the NASB.
Introduction to the Book of Romans

The book of Romans is found among the Epistles (see Romans 16:22, where “letter” is the rendering of the Greek noun, epistle, from which we get our English word, “epistle”) of the New Testament.¹ More specifically, it is one of the Pauline Epistles.²

Amongst Paul’s epistles, Romans is arguably the pinnacle, the crème de la crème, Paul’s magnum opus. Martin Luther (quoted in Combs, p. 2) called Romans “the true masterpiece of the New Testament”; William Tyndale (quoted in Combs, p. 2) called it “the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1:3) has written: “There is a sense in which we can say quite truthfully that the Epistle to the Romans, has, possibly, played a more important and a more crucial part in the history of the church than any other single book in the whole of the Bible.”

Romans has had an inestimable impact throughout church history.⁴ Augustine was converted after reading Romans 13:13-14; Luther was converted after reading Romans 1:17; John Wesley was converted after hearing the preface of Luther’s commentary on Romans read. “I really do believe that if there is any one individual book, out of the sixty-six, which God has used to change lives more than any other, it is the book of Romans” (Sproul, p. 9). Hughes (p. 15) calls Romans “one of the most powerful and influential books ever written.” The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (quoted in The New Open Bible’s introductory comments on Romans) called Romans “the most profound book in existence.” “No letter in the history of the world has had a greater impact than Paul’s letter to the Romans” (John Piper in a November 2, 2003 sermon on Romans 11:1-6, entitled “Has God Rejected His People?”; from www.desiringGOD.org).

Romans is the largest of Paul’s epistles, some 7,114 words in length (in the Greek original); it is for this reason that it is the first Pauline epistle found in our New Testaments.

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¹The New Testament can be subdivided as follows: Gospels (Matthew-John), History (Acts), Epistles (Romans-Jude), and Prophecy (Revelation).
²The Epistles can be subdivided as follows: Pauline Epistles (Romans-Philemon) and General Epistles (Hebrews-Jude). D. Edmond Hiebert (Vol. 2 of An Introduction to the New Testament, p. 23) subdivides the Pauline Epistles as follows: Soteriological Group (Romans-Galatians), Christological Group (Ephesians-Colossians and Philemon), Eschatological Group (1 & 2 Thessalonians), and Ecclesiological Group (1 Timothy-Titus).
³This quote was taken from the preface to Luther’s commentary on Romans. In the same preface, Luther (quoted in Moo, p. 22) also states: “[Romans] is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.”
⁴Lloyd-Jones (1:3-6) gives several historical examples.
Author
The human author of Romans is clearly the apostle Paul (1:1). Paul used an “amanuensis” (= secretary) named Tertius (16:22) to record the contents of the epistle as Paul dictated them to him.

Place and Date of Writing
Most agree that Paul wrote the book of Romans during his 3-month stay in Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey (see Acts 20:1-3). Assuming this to be correct, the date for the writing of Romans was likely in the 55-58 A.D. range. In terms of the order in which Paul’s epistles were written, Romans was probably right in the middle.

Recipient
The book of Romans is so named because its recipient was the church in Rome (1:7; cf. 1:15). The bearer of the epistle was most likely Phoebe (16:1-2).

At that time, Rome was the world’s greatest city, with a population exceeding one million (Nelson’s, p. 384). It was also the capital city of the Roman Empire.

The church of Rome was not started by Paul, at least not directly. It may have been started by Romans converted on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:10). If not, perhaps it was started by converts (of Paul?) from other parts of the Roman Empire who had moved to Rome. Ultimately, “secure knowledge about the origin of the Roman church eludes us” (Schreiner, p. 11).

5 That Corinth was the place of writing is surmised from the following 2 “clues”: 1) The bearer of the Roman epistle, the one who delivered it to the Romans, was most likely a woman named Phoebe (see Romans 16:1-2), whom Paul identifies as being from Cenchrea (Romans 16:1). Cenchrea was in the vicinity of Corinth, being its eastern seaport; and 2) In 16:23, Paul sends the Romans greetings from a man named Gaius. Paul baptized a man from Corinth named Gaius (1 Corinthians 1:14).

6 Morris and House say 55 A.D.; Gromacki 55-56 A.D.; Cranfield 55-57 A.D.; Schreiner 55-58 A.D.; Combs, Wiersbe, MacArthur, and Henry 56 A.D.; Bruce 56-57 A. D.; Carson and Moo, as well as Nelson’s 57 A.D.; Witmer, Hendriksen, Ryrie, and John Owen (in the preface of Calvin) 57-58 A.D.; Hiebert and Lloyd-Jones 58 A.D.

7 The order was most likely: Galatians (late 40s); 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians (early 50s); 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians (mid 50s); Romans (mid to late 50s); Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and 1 Timothy (early 60s); Titus (early to mid 60s); and 2 Timothy (mid to late 60s).

8 Assuming that some of the thousands saved on that Day were from Rome.
Apparently, Paul had never been to Rome. In the Roman epistle, he expresses a desire to visit the church at Rome on his way to Spain (1:10-15, 15:23-24, 28-32; cf. Acts 19:21). Before doing so, however, he had to first go to Jerusalem to deliver an offering he had been collecting from Gentile believers on behalf of needy Jewish believers (15:25-27; cf. 2 Corinthians 8-9). When Paul made it to Jerusalem, he was arrested on the trumped-up charge that he had brought a Gentile into the “inner court” of the temple, an area that Gentiles were forbidden to enter (Acts 21:27ff). After spending over two years (Acts 24:27) imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 23:23) over this issue, Paul appealed his case to Caesar (Acts 25:11-12). After arriving in Rome, he was placed under house arrest (Acts 28:16) for two years (Acts 28:30). Thus, Paul did make it to Rome, but many years later than he had originally hoped and under much different circumstances.

The church at Rome was world-renowned (see 1:8 and 16:19). Undoubtedly, the Roman road system, with the city of Rome at its hub (all roads did, in fact, lead to Rome), was a contributing factor. Though Paul had never been to Rome, he was acquainted with many of the believers there (see 16:3-15, where he greets over two dozen of them by name). As was the case during the early centuries of the church, believers in Rome met in “house-churches” (see 16:5; cf. Romans 16:23, 1 Corinthians 16:19, and Colossians 4:15).

The church was apparently composed of both Jews (2:17, 4:1, chps. 9-11) and Gentiles (1:5-6, 13, 11:13, 15:15-16), though Gentiles were likely in the majority. Jewish-Gentile relations play a significant role in the book.

**Key Verses**
The key verses of the book of Romans are 1:16-17.

**Theme**
The theme of the book of Romans is the gospel. As Moo (p. 29) states: “What then, is the theme of the letter? The gospel. The word ‘gospel’ and the cognate verb ‘evangelize’ are particularly prominent in the introduction (cf. 1:1, 2, 9, 15) and conclusion (15:16, 19) of Romans—its epistolary ‘frame.’ And this is the word that has pride of place in Paul’s statement of the theme of the letter: 1:16-17.” The two Pauline Epistles that mention the gospel the most are Romans and Philippians, 9 times each.

**Purpose**
Why did Paul write what he wrote to the Romans? There is little consensus amongst commentators in answer to this question. In my opinion, the best answer to this question is that Paul’s purpose in writing

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9The reason why the Gentiles were likely in the majority is because in the late 40s A.D. the Roman Emperor, Claudius had evicted the Jews from Rome (according to Acts 18:2, Aquila & Priscilla were among those evicted). The Jews were apparently allowed to return in the mid 50s A.D. after Claudius’s death (according to Romans 16:3, Aquila & Priscilla had returned to Rome).

10Morris (pp. 8-17) groups the answers into 12 different categories.
Romans was to help lay the foundation for a westward expansion of the gospel. By God’s grace, over the course of 3 missionary journeys Paul had successfully planted the gospel in the eastern half of the Roman Empire, as evidenced by the planting of local churches in the major population centers in the East, such as Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Ephesus (see Romans 15:19 and 23). At the time he wrote Romans, Paul had his sights set on the western half of the Empire, Spain in particular (Romans 15:24, 28). As the local church at Antioch had been his “base” during his labors in the eastern half of the Empire (see Acts 11:26, 13:1-3, 14:26-28, 15:35, and 18:22-23), so it is reasonable to assume that the local church at Rome would be a strategic base from which to launch a fourth missionary journey into the western half of the Empire. That Paul wanted the church at Rome to support such an endeavor is clearly stated in 15:24. Paul’s purpose in writing may have been to give the Romans, a church that Paul was relatively unfamiliar with, and vice versa, a thorough presentation of the gospel he had been preaching in the East for over two decades in order to lay the groundwork both for his visit to them and for any role he might ask them to play in his future missionary endeavors in the West.

Another interesting possibility is that Paul, sensing that his trip to Jerusalem might prove dangerous (Romans 15:31; cf. Acts 21:10-14, where Paul, after writing Romans, was foretold that his trip to Jerusalem would result in his arrest), wrote the book of Romans as a “last will and testament” of sorts.

### Two Outstanding Features of Romans

1. **Its soteriology.** Soteriology is the doctrine of salvation. Romans is renowned for being soteriologically-soaked. “... [N]owhere else in Scripture is the subject of salvation dealt with in such breadth and thoroughness” (Harrison, p. 8). Accordingly, the “Romans Road” (Romans 3:10, 23, 5:8, 6:23, 10:9, 13) has been an evangelistic expressway for many. Morris (p. 527) perceptively points out: “[Romans] was a letter to real people and, as far as we can see, to ordinary people; it was not written to professional theologians . . . . Clearly Paul expected this kind of person to be helped by what he wrote . . . .”

2. **Its use of the Old Testament.** Paul, due to his pharisaic upbringing (Acts 26:5 and Philippians 3:5; also compare Acts 5:34 with Acts 22:3), was undoubtedly an Old Testament expert. Not surprisingly, he makes frequent reference to the Old Testament in his writings, especially in Romans (notice the frequency of ALL CAPS in Romans in the KJV and NASB, especially in 3:10-18 and 15:9-12 and, to a lesser degree, in chapters 9-11.). In fact, over half of the Old Testament quotations found in Paul’s epistles are found in the book of Romans (Gromacki, p. 184). In Romans 1:2, Paul declares that the gospel, his theme in Romans, was promised in “the holy Scriptures,” i.e., the Old Testament; his frequent use of the Old Testament in Romans is designed to prove this very point (cf. 16:25-26).

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11There are 10 major divisions of theology: Bibliology (Bible), Theology Proper (God), Christology (Christ), Pneumatology (Holy Spirit), Angelology (angels), Anthropology (man), Hamartiology (sin), Soteriology (salvation), Ecclesiology (church), and Eschatology (last things).
Overview of Romans

Paul begins the book of Romans with a lengthy introduction (1:1-17), consisting of a salutation (1:1-7) and prayer report (1:8-15) and culminating with the book’s “thesis” (1:16-17).

The body of the letter (1:18-15:13) begins with the bad news that all are sinners under condemnation (1:18-3:20), then heralds the good news that condemned sinners can be justified by faith (3:21-4:25) and enjoy the benefits of justification (chp. 5). Moving on from justification past, Paul discusses sanctification present (6:1-8:16) and glorification future (8:17-30) before concluding chapter 8 with a flourish (8:31-39). Chapters 9-11 deal with the past riches (chp. 9), present rejection (chp. 10), and future restoration (chp. 11) of Israel.13 The remainder of the letter’s body (12:1-15:13) practically applies the doctrinal truths presented in chapters 1-11.14

The conclusion (15:14-16:27) consists of an explanation of Paul’s missions strategy (15:18-23a) and how such strategy impacted his writing of Romans (15:14-17) and his future plans (15:23b-29), a prayer request (15:30-32), a benediction (15:33), a commendation (16:1-2), some greetings (16:3-16), a concluding exhortation (16:17-19), a declaration (16:20a), another benediction (16:20b), some more greetings (16:21-23), and a doxology (16:25-27).

Other Sources Consulted for This Lesson

An Introduction to the New Testament by D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris
An Introduction to the New Testament (Volume 2: The Pauline Epistles) by D. Edmond Hiebert
New Testament Survey by Robert Gromacki
The New Open Bible, Study Edition
The Zondervan NASB Study Bible
The Ryrie NIV Study Bible
Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts
Eerdmans’ Handbook to the Bible

12 As Morris (p. 19) calls it.

13 I am indebted to Wiersbe (p. 513) for this breakdown of chapters 9-11.

14 The book of Ephesians follows a similar pattern, doctrinal (chps. 1-3) giving way to practical (chps. 4-6), with 4:1 being the “hinge.” Speaking to the practical conclusion of Romans, Carson and Moo (pp. 86-87) rightly write: “… [T]he gospel Paul presents in Romans is a life-transforming message. Faith in Christ must always be accompanied by obedience to him as Lord. Chapters 12-16 are not an afterthought or appendix to Romans; they are present precisely because the gospel is not truly understood or responded to unless it has changed the people it addresses.”

15 Besides the commentaries listed earlier.
The following overview of Romans is taken from Nelson’s (p. 381):

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<tr>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>REVELATION OF GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS</th>
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Romans 1:1-17

The first 17 verses of the book of Romans are introductory. This introduction consists of three parts: a salutation (vs. 1-7), a prayer report (vs. 8-15), and a statement of the book’s thesis (vs. 16-17).

Salutation (1:1-7)\(^{16}\)
The typical ancient letter began with a salutation consisting of three elements: the naming of the writer, the naming of the recipient(s), and a greeting (for examples, see Ezra 7:12, Daniel 4:1, Acts 15:23, and 23:26). In Romans, these elements are found in 1:1 and 1:7. In between, Paul launches into a lengthy digression precipitated by the word, “gospel” (Witmer, p. 440).

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, (1:1)

Paul begins his epistle to the local church at Rome by calling himself a “bond-servant” (the noun comes from a Greek verb meaning “to bind”), as he does elsewhere (in Galatians 1:10, Philippians 1:1, and Titus 1:1). All believers are bond-servants of Christ (Romans 6:22, 1 Corinthians 7:22, Ephesians 6:6, Colossians 3:24\(^{18}\), and 1 Peter 2:16); salvation is a change of slave masters (Romans 6:16-22). The significance of this title is magnified in light of the fact that slaves accounted for a significant percentage (as much as 50%, according to some) of the populace of Rome in that day.

Vocationally\(^{19}\), Paul identifies himself as an “apostle.” An apostle was a messenger, someone sent to deliver a message on behalf of another (the verbal form of the Greek noun translated “apostle” means “to send”). Wiersbe (p. 514) writes: “This word means ‘one who is sent by authority with a commission.’ It was applied in that day to the representatives of the emperor or the emissaries of a king.”\(^{20}\)

\(^{16}\)The salutation in Romans is the lengthiest in any Pauline epistle (93 words in the original). It is one sentence in the original.

\(^{17}\)Hebrews and 1 John are exceptions.

\(^{18}\)“Serve” in Colossians 3:24 is the verbal form of the Greek noun translated “bond-slave” in Romans 1:1.

\(^{19}\)Our English word, “vocation” comes from the Latin verb vocare, meaning “to call.” “Each one of us has a ‘vocation,’ a calling from God that we are to carry out to his glory . . . .” (Sproul, p. 23).

\(^{20}\)There seems to be two categories of apostle in the New Testament. Paul and the Twelve were apostles in an official sense, others (such as Barnabas in Acts 14:14 and James in Galatians 1:19) in a secondary sense. According to Robert Thomas (Understanding Spiritual Gifts, p. 77), to be an apostle in the official sense, one had to meet three criteria: personal contact with Christ while on earth [see Acts 1:21], a witness of Christ’s resurrection [see Acts 1:22], and
Paul, who had been a “set apart one” (what the title, Pharisee means) prior to his conversion (Acts 23:6, 26:5, Philippians 3:5), was “set apart” prior to (Galatians 1:15) and subsequent to (Acts 13:2) his conversion “for the gospel of God.”21 The Greek noun translated, “gospel” etymologically means “good news” (the NASB translates the word this way in Romans 10:16; the KJV translates the verbal form of this word “bring good tidings” in Luke 2:10).22 Morris (p. 40) rightly writes: “. . . [T]here is no good news to compare with the news of what God has done in Christ for man’s salvation.” Paul spends most of this epistle expounding this theme (the gospel23).

which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, (1:2)

The gospel (“which”) Paul preached was good news, but it wasn’t new news. God (“He”) had used the Old Testament writers (“His prophets”; cf. Hebrews 1:1) and their writings (“the holy Scriptures”) to foretell the historic events upon which the gospel is based and their salvific significance (see, for example, Isaiah 5324). See the following texts in this regard: Luke 24:44-47, Acts 8:26-39, 17:1-3, Romans 3:21, 16:25-26, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, and 2 Timothy 3:1525.

concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, (1:3)

The gospel for which Paul was set apart (v. 1) was a gospel “concerning His Son” (cf. Mark 1:1, Romans 1:9, 15:19, 1 Corinthians 9:12, 15:1-4, 2 Corinthians 2:12, 4:4, 9:13, 10:14, Galatians 1:7, Philippians 1:27, 1 Thessalonians 3:2, and 2 Thessalonians 1:8). Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) is rooted in direct appointment by Christ. “Secondary apostles” (such as James) didn’t meet the third requirement. For Paul, all three requirements were met at the same time on the road to Damascus in Acts 9.

21Commenting on the phrase, “set apart for the gospel of God,” Murray (p. 3) states: “All bonds of interest and attachment alien or extraneous to the promotion of the gospel have been cut asunder and he is set apart by the investment of all his interests and ambitions in the cause of the gospel.”

22The English word, “gospel” etymologically means virtually the same. It comes from the Old English word “godspel,” from “god,” meaning “good” + “spell,” meaning “tale.”

23Of the 76 occurrences of the Greek noun translated “gospel” in the New Testament, 60 are found in Paul’s writings. The only Pauline epistle that does not mention it is Titus. The Pauline epistles that mention it the most are Romans and Philippians (9 times each). I am indebted to Morris (p. 40) for these figures.

24Lloyd-Jones (1:72-74) gives many other such examples from the Old Testament.

25In discussing this verse, Hendriksen (p. 40) recites a few well-known sayings on the interrelationship between the Testaments: “The Old is by the New explained, The New is in the Old contained” and “The New is in the Old concealed, The Old is by the New revealed.”
Christology (the doctrine of Christ); salvation is based upon the person and work of Christ (see Romans 10:9). As Moo (p. 51) states: “. . . [T]hese verses [Rom 1:3-426] remind us that the gospel cannot be understood without reference to the person of Christ . . . .,” later adding (p. 55): “It is what Jesus has done, not just who he is, that makes the gospel the ‘good news’ that it is. But make no mistake: what Jesus has done cannot be severed from who he is. Ours is an age not too much interested in theology; but correct theology—in this case, the person of Jesus—is vital to salvation and to Christian living.”

“Born of a descendant of David [cf. Matthew 1:1 and 2 Timothy 2:8] according to the flesh” is a reminder of the full humanity of Christ, which is essential to salvation. Christ had to become a man in order to live the substitutionary sinless life (Romans 8:3-4) and die the substitutionary infinitely-valuable death (Hebrews 2:14-17) God required for man’s salvation.

who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, (1:4)

Later in the epistle (in 10:9), Paul will stress the necessity of belief in both the person (epitomized by His lordship27) and work (epitomized by His resurrection) of Christ in order to be saved. These corresponding realities (lordship and resurrection) are the focus of this verse, as well.

Whereas the previous verse (v. 3) speaks of the humiliation of Christ (cf. Philippians 2:7-8), this verse speaks of His exaltation (cf. Philippians 2:9-11). Christ’s (“who … Jesus Christ our Lord”) resurrection was an integral part of His exaltation.28

26 Cranfield (p. 4) calls Romans 1:3-4 “two of the most difficult verses [to interpret] in the whole epistle … ,” adding: “The unusual accumulation of difficulties in these verses is notorious.”

27 Lloyd-Jones trumpets this truth: “This idea that you can believe in Christ first as your Saviour only, and then perhaps years later, go on to take Him as your Lord, is a denial of Scripture” (1:34-35); “There are people today [these words would have been spoken in the 1950s] who seem to teach and to believe that you can take Christ as your Saviour without taking Him as your Lord. They say you can take justification without sanctification. They say you can get forgiveness of sins without holiness. It is a lie” (1:94); “And if you think that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ without realizing that He is your Lord, I would not hesitate to say that your belief is of no value … You cannot be in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ unless He is your Lord” … “[T]o teach specifically that you can take Him as Saviour without taking Him as Lord is nothing but sheer heresy” (1:134-135).

28 Christ’s exaltation began, paradoxically (it was also the last stage of His humiliation, Philippians 2:8), with His crucifixion (“lifted up” in John 3:14, 8:28, 12:32, and 34), continued with His resurrection (Ephesians 1:20) and ascension (Acts 2:34), and culminated with His coronation/session as He took His place at the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:33-34, 5:31, Ephesians 1:20, and 1 Peter 3:22).
His resurrection didn’t change His essence; He wasn’t *made* the Son of God by His resurrection, for He eternally exists as such. Rather, He was *declared* [Ryrie NIV Study Bible: “designated”] the Son of God ... *by the resurrection from the dead*). His resurrection, through the Holy Spirit (“*according to the Spirit of holiness*”; cf. 1 Peter 3:18), gave Him an exalted/more powerful (*with power*) status or position.29

Based upon this verse, some have heretically taught an “adoptionist” Christology, i.e., that Christ became the Son of God/divine at His resurrection, not that He has eternally been the Son/divine. However, Christ was already the Son (v. 3) before His resurrection (v. 4); furthermore, verse 4’s modifier, “with power” is conspicuous by its presence (Paul does not say that Christ was declared the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead, but that he was declared the Son of God *with power* by the resurrection from the dead).

Scriptural support for the interpretation that Christ’s resurrection enhanced His status or position, leaving His divine essence unchanged, includes Acts 2:32-36, 13:32-33, 17:3130, and Philippians 2:9-11.

See also 1 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Timothy 2:8 in conjunction with Romans 1:3-4.

through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name’s sake, (1:5)

Through Christ (“through whom”) Paul (the “we” is probably an “editorial” one) had graciously been granted his apostolic office (“*have received grace and apostleship*31”). See Romans 15:15-16, 1 Corinthians 3:10, 15:9-10, Galatians 1:15-16, Ephesians 3:1-2, 7-8, 4:11, and 1 Timothy 1:12-14 in this regard.

The specific apostolic task given to Paul was the conversion of the Gentiles (“*among all the Gentiles*32”; cf. Acts 9:15, 22:21, 26:17, Romans 11:13, 15:16, Galatians 1:16, 2:7-9, Ephesians 3:8, and 1 Timothy 2:7).

Paul describes such conversion as “*the obedience of faith*” (cf. Romans 16:26). This phrase likely means either the obedience that comes from faith (so NIV) or the obedience which is faith, with the latter being the

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29“[Jesus] was exalted to a level of power and authority that he did not have previously” (Schreiner, p. 42).

30In Acts 17:31, the same Greek verb translated “declared” in Romans 1:4 is translated “appointed.” “Appointed” would probably be a better rendering of the verb in Romans 1:4 also.

31“Grace and apostleship” is likely a “hendiadys” (literally “one by means of two”), i.e., describing one concept by means of two words joined by an “and.” What Paul had received was the grace of being an apostle.

32Lloyd-Jones (1:147-150) makes a case for translating “nations,” rather than “Gentiles” (so KJV).
better option, based on such passages as Acts 6:7, 17:30; Romans 6:17, 10:3, 16; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17; and 1 John 3:23a). Obedience and faith are inseparable (compare Romans 1:8 with Romans 16:19, Romans 2:8 with 2 Thessalonians 2:12, and Romans 10:16a with Romans 10:16b). Saving faith is an obedient faith. “It is not without interest that this epistle, which puts such stress on the free salvation won for us by Christ’s atoning act, should also stress the importance of obedient response” (Morris, p. 49).

The ultimate motive for Paul’s apostolic labor was the glory of God ("for His name’s sake"; cf. 3 John 7).

among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; (1:6)

In verse 5, Paul alluded to his commission as the apostle to the Gentiles. Here in verse 6, he implies that the Romans are within this sphere (“among whom you also are”), thus giving Paul the divine authorization to minister to the Romans through this epistle and through a future personal visit.

Paul calls the Romans “the called of Jesus Christ.” “Called” is a reference to what is theologically called the “effectual call,” the summons to salvation that Christ’s own will hear and to which they will respond (cf. John 10:27, Romans 8:28, 30, and 9:24).

to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1:7)

Paul finally gets around to naming his recipients, “to all who are beloved of God in Rome.” Believers are certainly “beloved of God” (cf. Romans 5:8, 8:31-39, Ephesians 2:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, and 1 John 3:1).

Just as Paul was “called as an apostle” (v. 1), so the Romans were “called as saints” (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:2). The purpose of their call to salvation (see v. 6 and comments on) was that they might be saints, i.e., set apart/separated/holy (Ephesians 1:4). Just as Paul was set apart for the gospel of God (v. 1), so the Romans were set apart. Contrary to Roman Catholic theology, a “saint” is not a special class of believer, but a “rank-and-file Christian” (Sproul, p. 28). Believers are saints positionally the moment they are

33Hendriksen (p. 45) calls them “inseparable identical twins.”

34“Ultimately, Paul ministers not for personal gain or even the benefit of his converts, but for the glory and benefit of Jesus Christ his Lord” (Moo, p. 53). “The highest of missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is . . .), but rather zeal—burning passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ” (John Stott, quoted in Schreiner, p. 36).

35In a similar vein, the Greek word for church, ekklesia comes from kaleo, “to call” + ek, “out.” Believers are those who have been called out of the world by Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9).

36Notice what S. Clive Thexton (quoted in Morris, p. 53) states in this regard: “When Paul writes to ‘all God’s beloved in Rome who are called to be saints,’ he is writing, not to
converted (the reason why Paul could call even the carnal Corinthians “saints” in 1 Corinthians 1:2); they ought to be acting like saints practically.

Paul concludes his salutation with his typical greeting, “grace to you and peace” (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, Titus 1:4, and Philemon 3), though it was an atypical one for his day. The typical greeting was chairen (“greetings”—Acts 15:23, 23:26, and James 1:1). Paul, however, was fond of using charis (“grace”) instead37, coupled with “peace” (Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, Titus 1:4, and Philemon 3)38 or “mercy” and peace (1 Timothy 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:2). Commenting on the connection between grace and peace, William Hendriksen, on page 71 of his commentary on Ephesians, commenting on Paul’s identical greeting to the church at Ephesus, states: “Grace is the fountain. Peace belongs to the stream of spiritual blessings which issues from this fountain.” The believer is positionally at “peace with God” (Romans 5:1). He experiences the “peace of God” (Philippians 4:7).

The significance of the conjoining of the Father and the Son (“from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”) is aptly pointed out by Murray Harris, on page 246 of his commentary on Colossians & Philemon, commenting on Paul’s identical greeting to Philemon: “Of no mere human being could it be said that, together with God, he was a fount of spiritual blessing; the deity of Christ is thus implicitly affirmed.” Cranfield (p. 10) likewise states: “The striking juxtaposition of God and Christ, while clearly not by itself a proof that Paul believed Christ to be divine in the fullest sense, is a strong pointer in that direction.”

people likely to figure in stained-glass windows, but to a somewhat motley collection of shopkeepers, minor civil servants, converted prostitutes, prize-fighters and slaves. These are the people called to be God’s ‘holy ones.’”

37 Gordon Fee, on page 70 of his commentary on Philippians, commenting on Paul’s identical greeting to the church at Philippi, states: “Here is a marvelous example of Paul’s ‘turning into gospel’ everything he sets his hand to.”

38 One almost wonders if Paul had Numbers 6:24-26 in mind when he penned this greeting: “The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.”
Prayer Report (1:8-15)

In the introductions to his epistles, Paul typically tells his readers that he is praying for them (cf. Ephesians 1:16, Philippians 1:4, Colossians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 2 Timothy 1:3, and Philemon 4). The book of Romans is no exception.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. (1:8)

Paul typically thanked God for his readers (cf. Ephesians 1:16, Colossians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:3, and Philemon 4).

Notice that Paul did not thank the Romans ("I thank you"), but rather thanked God for the Romans ("I thank my God . . . for you"). "... [H]is thanksgiving is not directed to them; it is directed to God. The faith of the saints is the evidence of God's grace and the first reaction must therefore be thanking to God" (Murray, pp. 18-19). Lloyd-Jones (1:176) adds: "We are not to be praised, my friends. It is God who is to be praised for what we are."

Notice also that Paul thanked God for the Romans "through Jesus Christ." The significance of this phrase is brought out by F. F. Bruce (quoted in Morris, p. 56): "As it is through Christ that God's grace is conveyed to human beings (verse 5), so it is through Christ that their gratitude is conveyed to God."

When Paul thanks God for his readers in his epistles, he typically gives the specific reason why he does so. The specific reason why he thanks God for the Romans is their faith ("because your faith ..."; cf. Ephesians 1:15, Colossians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:5, and Philemon 5). The church at Rome was famous for its faith (Henry, p. 366; "is being proclaimed throughout the whole world"; cf. Romans 16:19 and 1 Thessalonians 1:8, as well as comments under “Recipients” in the Introductory Lesson). What is your church known for? What would cause others to thank God for your church? Lloyd-Jones (1:180) makes it more personal: "Are you advertising Christianity? Is your faith spoken of? Do they speak of it in your home? Do they speak of it in your office? Do they speak of it in the works, the factory, wherever you are?"

For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, (1:9)

Perhaps because Paul and the Romans were relatively unfamiliar with each other, Paul, as he does elsewhere (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:23, 11:31, Galatians 1:20, Philippians 1:8, 1 Thessalonians 2:5, and 10), invokes God as a witness to his prayers for the Romans ("For God ... is my witness ...”). In doing so, Paul says that he serves God “in [his] spirit,” a somewhat mysterious phrase, which the NIV translates “with my whole heart.”
Paul’s wholehearted service for God was “in the gospel of His Son” (see v. 3’s “concerning His Son” and comments on). The gospel was the driving force behind Paul’s ministry (see footnote 21).

Paul prayed for the Romans “unceasingly” (cf. Ephesians 6:18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17), “not that Paul did nothing else but pray, but he kept up stated times for the solemn performance of the duty, and those very frequent, and observed without fail” (Henry, p. 366). He prayed at frequent and regular intervals (Peter O’Brien, cited in Schreiner, p. 50). Do we pray for others this way?

always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. (1:10)

As Paul prayed for the Romans, one of the things for which he prayed was an opportunity to visit the Romans in person (“I may succeed in coming to you”). Paul made this request continually (“always”) and in a spirit of submission to God’s will in the matter (“if perhaps … by the will of God”; cf. Acts 18:21, Romans 15:32, 1 Corinthians 4:19, 16:7, Hebrews 6:3, and James 4:15). The tenuous nature of travel in that day likely made believers more apt to acknowledge that they would not reach an intended destination unless the Lord was willing.

For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; (1:11)

Paul longed to see the Romans (“For I long to see you”; cf. 15:23), as he longed to see others elsewhere (Philippians 1:8, 1 Thessalonians 2:17, 3:6, and 2 Timothy 1:4).

One of the reasons (“so that”) Paul wanted to see the Romans so badly was so that he could “impart some spiritual gift” to them. “Spiritual gift” here is probably not a reference to the supernatural endowments of the Holy Spirit spoken of later in the epistle (in 12:6-8), as Paul says “gift,” not “gifts.” Rather, “spiritual gift” likely means Paul’s potential ministry to them (cf. v. 12).

The result (“that”) of such ministry would be the strengthening (“established”) of the Romans. Notice that even though their faith was famous (see v. 8 and comments on), it still needed to be fortified.

39The words “preaching of the” are not in the original, but have been supplied by the NASB translators and are, thus, italicized.

40This submissive spirit, characteristic of every true Christian, characterized Paul from the moment he became a Christian (Acts 9:6).

41The Greek verb translated “long” is epipotheo, an intensified form (intensified with the Greek preposition, epi) of the Greek verb potheo, meaning “to desire.”
that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. (1:12)

Paul did not want his words in verse 11 to be misconstrued ("that is") to mean that his potential visit to the Romans would be merely for their benefit. The benefit would be mutual ("together with you ... each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine"; cf. Proverbs 27:17). Just as Paul had something to share with the Romans (v. 11), so the Romans had something to share with him ("that I may be encouraged"; cf. 15:32). In commenting on this verse, Calvin (p. 58) states: "... [T]here is no one so void of gifts in the Church of Christ, who is not able to contribute something to our benefit 

I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. (1:13)

Paul informs the Romans ("I do not want you to be unaware, brethren") that he had planned to visit them on many occasions previously ("that often I have planned to come to you"; cf. v. 10's "at last"; cf. Acts 19:21), but had been hindered ("and have been prevented so far"). Who or what hindered him? The Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6-7)? Satan (1 Thessalonians 2:18)? Based on what Paul says in Romans 15:19b-24, the best answer to this question seems to be that Paul was hindered by the demands of his work in the eastern half of the Empire.

Paul gives yet another (cf. his reasons in vs. 11 & 12) reason ("so that") why he wanted to go to Rome (not to "see the sights"), namely, to "obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles," i.e., to reach unbelievers in the Gentile region of Rome with the gospel (cf. v. 15).

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. (1:14)

Paul viewed his commission to take the gospel to the Gentile world as an "obligation" (literally a "debt"). See also his words in 1 Corinthians 9:16. "Obligation to him who died produced obligation to those for whom he died" (Paul Minear, quoted in Morris, p. 63). The gospel imposes "a debt on all who receive it, a debt which calls for repayment by passing the gospel on to someone else" (Morris, p. 63).

Paul's obligation to take the gospel to the Gentiles was an indiscriminate one. It did not matter whether one was cultured ("Greeks") or uncultured ("barbarians"), educated ("wise") or uneducated ("foolish").42 Paul took the gospel to everyone, regardless of status. Are we? And what does this verse say to the modern church-growth strategy of limiting our "target audience" to a single demographic group?

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42v It does not matter whether people are good or bad, morally speaking; they all need the gospel. So you need to preach it and to talk about it to the most respectable as well as to the most profligate and dissolute. The same gospel! And the learned people and the philosophers stand in exactly the same need of this as the most ignorant person conceivable. This is something which is asserted everywhere in the Scriptures, and if we fail to make it known, to that extent we fail as Christians. Everybody needs the gospel" (Lloyd-Jones, 1:248).
So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. (1:15)

Paul’s commission to take the gospel to those in Rome was not only a duty (v. 14’s “obligation”), but also a delight (v. 15’s “eager”).
Thesis (1:16-17)
In verses that Moo (p. 63) calls “theologically dense” and Hughes (pp. 26-27) calls “two of the most powerful [pun intended?] in all of the Bible,” Paul states his thesis for the book of Romans.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (1:16)

Paul gives the reason why (“For”) he is eager to preach the gospel in Rome (v. 15). It is because he is “not ashamed of the gospel”43 (cf. Mark 8:38, 2 Timothy 1:8 and 12). Are we?

The reason why (“for”) Paul was not ashamed of the gospel is because the gospel is dynamic (“it is the power of God for salvation”).44 The gospel mediates the power of God leading to salvation (cf. Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:4-5, and 1 Thessalonians 1:5). In charismatic circles today, there is a movement called “power evangelism,” the belief that signs and wonders (i.e., miracles) are needed (in addition to the preaching of the gospel) in order to bring about saving faith. Notice, however, that, according to this verse, the gospel is powerful enough in and of itself to bring about salvation. Could it be that a hesitancy to share the gospel is due to a lack of confidence in its ability to do the job?45 The famous 18th century evangelist, George Whitfield, once said: “Other men may preach the gospel better than I, but no man can preach a better gospel.” Meditate long and hard on this verse, Christian.

The salvation for which the gospel is the power of God is salvation from the penalty of sin, salvation from the power of sin (Ephesians 1:19-20, 3:20), and salvation one day from the presence of sin.

The gospel is so powerful it is capable of saving anyone who believes (“to everyone who believes”), whether Jew or Gentile (cf. Romans 10:11-13). “To the Jew first and also to the Greek” (cf. 2:9-10) is an allusion to the fact that the gospel was given to the Jews first, then to the Gentiles (cf. Matthew 10:5-6, Acts 1:8, 13:46, 18:6, and 28:28).

43Lloyd-Jones (1:57) writes: “...[This] is an example of what we may call litotes [according to the Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition, litotes is “understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary”]: ‘I am not ashamed of,’ by which he really means, I take pride in, I boast of it; nothing else to me is so great as this. It is one of those positive statements which is given a negative form. He says, ‘I am not ashamed,’ and he means, I am absolutely thrilled by it, I can scarcely contain myself.”

44The Greek noun translated “power” is first in the sentence, for emphasis (literally: “power for of God it is”). The word is dunamis, from which we get our English words, “dynamite” and “dynamic.”

45Murray (p. 26) writes in this regard: “The emotion of shame with reference to the gospel, when confronted with the pretensions of human wisdom and power, betrays unbelief in the truth of the gospel and the absence of shame is the proof of faith.”
For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE
RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” (1:17)

This verse, concerning which Lloyd-Jones (1:298) says, “there is no more vital verse in the whole of
Scripture,” emphasizes two key concepts in soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) and two key concepts in
the book of Romans, righteousness and faith.46

Paul begins this verse by giving the reason why ("For") the gospel mediates the power of God leading to
salvation (v. 16). It is because “in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed” (cf. 3:21).

“Righteousness of God” could mean the righteousness that God possesses (one of His attributes).47
More likely, it means the righteousness that comes from God (cf. Romans 5:17 and Philippians 3:9). When
a person gets saved, God “imputes” (impute means to credit or to place on the account of; see Romans
4:3ff) the righteousness of Christ (Christ’s sinless life) to him (cf. Romans 3:22 and Philippians 3:9, where
“faith of Christ” may be understood as “faithfulness of Christ”). As a result, the believer has a righteous
standing, status, or position before God (cf. Isaiah 61:10, Romans 3:21-4:25, and 2 Corinthians 5:21b). On
this basis, God judicially declares the believer to be righteous (i.e., “justifies” him). Commenting on the
significance of this truth, Lloyd-Jones (1:301) writes: “… [U]nless you have got something that enables you
to stand before God, now, and in the day of judgment, you are not only not a Christian, you have never
understood the gospel. This is the central purpose of the gospel—to make a man just with God, to enable
us to stand with righteousness in the presence of God.”

This righteousness (and the justification that results, Romans 5:1) can be obtained only one way—by faith
(cf. Romans 3:22 and Philippians 3:9).48 The phrase, “from faith to faith” is translated by the NIV as “by
faith from first to last,” i.e., by faith from start to finish/by faith and nothing but faith/entirely by faith.
Salvation is through faith49 alone50 (Ephesians 2:8).

46 According to Wiersbe (p. 517), there are over 60 mentions of the righteousness word
group in Romans and over 60 mentions of faith and unbelief.

47 Lloyd-Jones (1:298) points out how good it is that this is not the meaning at this point:
“… [I]f the gospel of Jesus Christ were merely a revelation of the holiness and the justice and the
righteousness of God and no more, far from being good news, far from being a gospel, it would
be the most terrifying and the most alarming thing that we could ever discover.”

48 Commenting on this point, Henry (p. 368) states: “The medicine prepared will not cure
the patient if it be not taken.” Wiersbe (p. 517; emphasis his) states: “God does not ask men to
behave in order to be saved, but to believe.”

49 Saving faith has three elements: 1) an intellectual element/cognition; 2) an emotional
element/conviction; and 3) a volitional element/commitment. It is this third element that is
decisive (according to James 2:19, even demons believe intellectually and emotionally).

50 Sola fide (“faith alone”) was one of the battle cries of the Protestant Reformation.
To support his point that the righteousness of God necessary for salvation is appropriated by faith alone, Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4 (also cited by Paul in Galatians 3:11 and by the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 10:38), “as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” As mentioned in the introductory lesson, Martin Luther was converted as a result of meditating upon this verse.
The gospel is good news (see comments on 1:1), but before the good news of the gospel can do its saving work (1:16), the bad news of man’s sinfulness must first be addressed. Thus, Paul begins the body of his letter to the Romans with a lengthy section on the sinfulness and condemnation of all men (1:18-3:20). The gospel powerful enough to save all (1:16) is desperately needed by all (3:9). This section (1:18-3:20) can be subdivided into three sections: the sinfulness and condemnation of the Gentile (1:18-32); the sinfulness and condemnation of the Jew (2:1-3:8); and the sinfulness and condemnation of all (3:9-20).

The Sinfulness and Condemnation of the Gentile (1:18-32)
This section can be subdivided into two sections (the “therefore” that begins verse 24 marks the divide): culpability (1:18-23) and consequences (1:24-32).

Culpability (1:18-23)
This section can be subdivided into two sections: repression of the truth (1:18-20) and replacement of the truth (1:21-23).

Repression of the Truth (1:18-20)
The first reason why Gentiles are culpable for their sinfulness and condemnation is because they repress the truth that God, and God alone, is worthy of worship, a truth communicated by His work of Creation.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (1:18)

Paul begins his unpacking of the gospel on a somber note with a sobering truth.53 The reason why (“For”)
men so desperately need the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel (1:17) is because “the wrath of God is revealed” against such men due to their sinfulness (1:18; cf. John 3:36, Romans 2:5, 8, 3:5, 5:9, Ephesians 2:3, 5:6, Colossians 3:6, and 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Interestingly, the Greek verb translated “is revealed” is in the present tense; therefore, we could more accurately translate: “is being revealed” (cf. John 3:36, Romans 3:5, Ephesians 5:6, and Col 3:6, all of which speak of God’s wrath with verbs in the present tense; verses that speak of God’s wrath as future include Romans 2:5, 8, 5:9, and 2 Thessalonians 1:8). In what sense is God’s wrath currently being revealed against unbelievers? According to this context, it is by God giving the unbeliever over (see 1:24, 26, and 28), setting in motion a vicious cycle of sin ⇒ hardening of heart ⇒ severer sin ⇒ severer hardening of heart, etc. Thus, Schreiner (p. 85) rightly states: “The moral desolation of human society from the beginning of the world and continuing up to the present day is a manifestation of God’s wrath.”

The wrong against which God responds in wrath is categorized as “all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Commenting on these two, Cranfield (p. 30) states: “... [U]ngodliness’ [brings] out the fact that all invariably start with this: ‘For the wrath of God has been revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.’”

54a. “Wrath is the holy revulsion of God’s being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness” (Murray, p. 35). “A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, then there are to His love and tenderness” (A. W. Pink, The Attributes of God, p. 75). Romans contains more explicit references to God’s wrath (10, according to Lloyd-Jones, 1:330) than all the rest of Paul’s letters put together (J. I. Packer, Knowing God, p. 154). Since the theme of Romans is the gospel, and Romans mentions the wrath of God so frequently, the implication is that the wrath of God is an essential element of the gospel message. Paul implicitly makes this point at this point.

55a. “If one does not have the righteousness of God, he or she has the wrath of God. Those are the two revelations and the two choices” (Hughes, p. 38).

56a. “We will never come to grips with the importance of the gospel, or be motivated as we should to proclaim it, until this sad truth has been fully integrated into our worldview” (Moo, p. 98). As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:11: “Therefore, knowing the fear [“terror,” KJV] of the Lord, we persuade men.”

57a. “There is undoubtedly a natural law of consequence operative in sin; it intensifies and aggravates itself when there is no restraint placed upon it. This cycle or sequence is part of sin’s retribution” (Murray, p. 44).

58a. “Civilizations do not die because of violence, crime, immorality and anarchy. These things are evidences death is already at work, a death brought on by disobedience to the revelation of God” (S. Lewis Johnson, “‘God Gave Them Up’: A Study in Divine Retribution,” Bibliotheca Sacra, April 1972, p. 130).
sin is an attack on the majesty of God, and ‘unrighteousness’ the fact that it is a violation of God’s just order.” Henry (p. 369) and Lloyd-Jones (1:353-354) see “ungodliness” as corresponding to the first table of the Ten Commandments (Commands 1-4, which focus on man’s vertical relationship with God), with “unrighteousness” corresponding to the second table (Commands 5-10, which focus on man’s horizontal relationship with his fellow man).

The reason why unbelievers are liable to God’s wrath is because they are those “who suppress the truth.” The verb translated “suppress” (katecho) literally means “to hold down” (echo, “to hold” + kata, “down”). Sproul (p. 35) defines it as “to press down with force against something that is exercising a counterforce.” The same verb is translated “restrains” in 2 Thessalonians 2:6 and 7. What “truth” do unbelievers suppress/repress/suffocate/drown? Contextually, it is the truth that God, and God alone, is worthy of worship (see 1:21, 23, and 25).

Unbelievers reject this truth, not because it is unsound (it is not), but because they are unsound. Paul says they suppress the truth “in unrighteousness.” In other words, unbelievers willfully reject what they know to be true (see 1:19 and comments on). “It takes a concerted act of the will to deny that a vastly powerful God made and sustains the Creation” (Hughes, p. 35). “. . . [T]he issue of the existence of God, in the final analysis is not an intellectual question, so much as it is a moral question” (Sproul, p. 38).

because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. (1:19)

That unbelievers willfully repress the truth presupposes that they are cognizant of and, to a certain degree and in a certain sense, convinced of its reality. “You cannot be restraining something you do not know anything about” (Lloyd-Jones, 1:367). Thus, beginning in verse 19, Paul affirms that unbelievers know of God’s existence (that He is) and somewhat of His essence (who He is/what He is like). That unbelievers are cognizant of God’s existence and essence is asserted several times in verses 19-21: “that which is known about God” here in verse 19; cf. “understood” in verse 20 and “knew” in verse 21.

The truths of God’s existence and essence are revealed clearly (“is evident within them”; cf. “clearly seen” in v. 20) and continually (“since the creation of the world” in v. 20). The reason why these truths are known by man is because God has chosen to reveal them (“for God made it evident to them”).

Commenting on verse 19, Calvin (p. 70) states: “By saying, that God has made it manifest, he means, that man was created to be a spectator of this formed world, and that eyes were given him, that he might, by looking on so beautiful a picture, be led up to the Author himself.”
For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (1:20)

One of the means by which God has revealed His existence and His essence is Creation ("For since the creation of the world"), sometimes referred to as “natural revelation,” i.e., God’s revelation in nature).60 Besides this one, another key text in this regard is Psalm 19:1-6.

God’s essence (“His eternal power and divine nature”) is revealed through His attributes (“His invisible attributes”), words that describe what He is like. Though natural revelation may not reveal every attribute of God61, it does reveal that God is great (this text) and that God is good (Acts 14:17; cf. Matthew 5:45), greatness and goodness being the two general divisions into which God’s attributes are commonly categorized.

Because the message communicated by natural revelation is so clear and convincing (it has been said that man is “drowning in a sea of evidence”), the unbeliever’s rejection of it is inexcusable ("so that they are without excuse"). He really does know better (cf. 1:19 and comments on).

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Can Natural Revelation Save?

According to this section of Romans, the message of natural revelation (ultimately, because of its implications) is universally rejected because of universal sinfulness. Furthermore, natural revelation does not communicate the content of the gospel (there is no “gospel in the stars”). Natural revelation is enough to justly condemn a man (“so that they are without excuse,” 1:20), but not enough to save him. In order for a man to be saved, he must hear the gospel message found in the special revelation of Scripture (Romans 10:17). Paul’s words in Romans 10:13-14 are based on these realities. Moo (p. 106) gives this homily: “... [I]t is vital if we are to understand Paul’s gospel and his urgency in preaching it to realize that natural revelation leads not to salvation but to the demonstration that God’s condemnation is just: people are ‘without excuse.’ That verdict stands over the people we meet every day just as much as over the people Paul rubbed shoulders with in the first century, and our urgency in communicating the gospel should be as great as Paul’s.”

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60 “God has stitched into the fabric of the human mind his existence and power, so that they are instinctively recognized when one views the created world” (Schreiner, p. 86).

61 Natural revelation reveals God’s omnipotence (Jeremiah 10:12, 51:15, and Romans 1:20) and His wisdom (Psalm 104:24, Proverbs 3:19, Jeremiah 10:12, and 51:15).
Replacement of the Truth (1:21-23)
The second reason why Gentiles are culpable for their sinfulness and condemnation is because they replace the truth that God, and God alone, is worthy of worship, choosing to worship creatures instead of the Creator (1:25).

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (1:21)

Though unbelievers do not know God in a relational, salvific, John 17:3 way (1 Corinthians 1:21), they do know about Him (“they knew God”; cf. “known about God” in verse 19 and “His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature ... being understood” in verse 20). Thus, there is no such thing as a true atheist or agnostic (to be more precise, there is no such thing as a philosophical atheist or agnostic, though there are many practical atheists and agnostics).

Rather than responding to such knowledge by honoring God for who He is and thanking Him for what He does (for His benevolent acts—Matthew 5:45, Luke 6:35, and Acts 14:17), the unbeliever rejects such knowledge (“they did not honor Him as God or give thanks”; ingratitude is a big deal—see also 2 Timothy 3:2) and, as a result, pays a heavy price. As mentioned earlier (in comments on verse 18), God judges the unbeliever’s sin by hardening/darkening the unbeliever’s heart, causing the unbeliever to become “futile” and “foolish” in his thinking (cf. Ephesians 4:17-18).

The unbeliever’s futile thinking gives way to the futile action of idolatry (see 1:23; cf. 2 Kings 17:15 and Jeremiah 2:5). The noun form of the Greek verb translated “became futile” here in verse 21 is translated “vain things” (“idols,” NASB marginal note) in Acts 14:15. The futility and folly of idolatry is amply illustrated by such passages as Isaiah 44:9-20, 46:6-7, and Jeremiah 10:14-15. “The practice of idolatry is inherently futile. What else can be said of offering worship to what one’s hands [or heart] have made” (Morris, p. 84).

Professing to be wise, they became fools, (1:22)
The unbeliever may think he is “enlightened,” when in reality he is “darkened” (v. 21). He professes one thing (“professing to be wise”), but possesses the exact opposite (“they became fools”). The unbeliever

62An atheist is one who claims to believe that there is no God, while an agnostic is one who claims to believe that God cannot be known (in other words, God may exist, but even if He does, we can’t know so).

63We were created for the purpose of honoring or glorifying God (Isaiah 43:7, Colossians 1:16). Sin has rendered us unable to do so (Romans 3:23). Salvation enables us to do so (Ephesians 1:6, 12, and 14).

64“They wouldn’t know, and now they couldn’t know” (John MacArthur, “When God Abandons a Nation,” Heartcry!, no date, p. 13; emphasis his).
is so blind (John 9:40-41) to reality\textsuperscript{65} that he actually thinks he is wise when he foolishly rejects the ultimate realities of God (Psalm 14:1) and His revelation (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Greek verb translated “became fools” in this verse is \textit{moraino}, from which we get our English word, “moron.” Worldly wisdom is in reality foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:20).

and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (1:23)

The unbeliever’s futile and foolish thinking (verses 21-22) ultimately reveals itself in idolatry. The unbeliever replaces (“\textit{exchanged}”) the truth that God is glorious (“\textit{the glory of the incorruptible God}”) and, thus, worthy to be worshiped by worshiping creatures instead (“\textit{for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures}”). Rather than worshiping the glorious, incorruptible God, unbelievers worship corruptible creatures (cf. Psalm 106:20, Jeremiah 2:11, and Romans 1:25; one modern example of this is the Hindu worship of the cow), and images of them at that! To show how low the unbeliever will go in his idolatry, Paul gives a descending scale, starting with man\textsuperscript{66} and ending with reptiles (“\textit{crawling creatures}”) (cf. Deuteronomy 4:16-18). How foolish to exchange the One who carries (Isaiah 63:9) for that which can be carried (Isaiah 46:6-7)!

\textbf{Consequences (1:24-32)}

In the major section of 1:18-3:20, Paul establishes the bad news of the universal sinfulness and condemnation of man. Neither Jew nor Gentile are exempt (3:9). Paul begins by exposing the sinfulness and condemnation of the Gentile (1:18-32). The Gentile is culpable for his condemnation (1:18-23) because he represses (1:18-20) and replaces (1:21-23) the truth that God, and God alone, is worthy of worship. In 1:24-32, Paul identifies the consequences that come when this truth is rejected. Man rejects God (1:18-23); God, in turn, rejects man (1:24-32). This section (1:24-32) can be subdivided into two sections: sexual consequences (1:24-27) and social consequences (1:28-32).

\textbf{Sexual Consequences (1:24-27)}

A rejection of the truth that God, and God alone, is worthy of worship results in sexual consequences.

\textsuperscript{65}\“The futility to which they [unsaved men] have succumbed is the inevitable consequence of loss of touch with reality. It is to be seen, in particular, in their thinking, which suffers from a fatal flaw, the basic disconnexion from reality involved in their failure to recognize and to glorify the true God” (Cranfield, p. 33).

\textsuperscript{66}\“In modern times the western world has outgrown crass idolatry, but humanism [the belief that man is the measure of all things] has subtly injected the worship of man without the trappings. God is quietly ruled out and man is placed on the throne” (Harrison, pp. 23-24).
Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. (1:24)

The “therefore” that begins this section shows that what follows is consequential to what has gone before. The unbeliever commits idolatry (1:21-23); therefore, God in judgment gives him over to immorality (1:24-32).

Three times in this section, Paul says that “God gave them over” (vs. 24, 26, and 28; cf. Psalm 81:11-12, Acts 7:41-42a, 1 Corinthians 5:5, and 1 Timothy 1:20). The idea is that God removes His restraining influence, (see Genesis 20:6 and 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7), “taking off the bridle of restraining grace” (Henry, p. 371), allowing unbelievers to give full vent to “the lusts of their hearts”/to drown in their depravity. “God simply took his hands off and let willful rejection of himself produce its ugly results in human life” (Harrison, p. 24). In reality, the unbeliever gives himself over (Ephesians 4:19); God’s giving over of the unbeliever is judicial.

The first sin that God judicially gives the unbeliever over to is “impurity,” a term for sexual immorality in general (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:21, Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 5:3, and Colossians 3:5). Sexual immorality dishonors God (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:13b, 18-20, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, and 7). Failure to honor God by committing idolatry (“did not honor Him” in 1:21) leads to dishonoring Him by committing sexual immorality (“so that their bodies would be dishonored among them”).

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (1:25)

Paul reiterates (cf. vs. 21-23) the reason why (“For”) God gives unbelievers over to sexual immorality (v. 24), namely, idolatry (v. 25). Idolatry involves an exchange (“they exchanged”), evicting the truth that God, and God alone, is worthy of worship (“the truth of God”) and embracing “a lie,” the lie that idols are. Idolatry is a lie (see Isaiah 44:18-20 and Jeremiah 16:19-20; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 and 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

Idolatry is worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator (“and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator”; cf. v. 23 and Daniel 5:23). This is theological treason! “Contemplating this abysmal betrayal, the apostle cannot resist an outburst to counteract it” (Harrison, p. 25). Thus, Paul

67 “Degrading passions” in verse 26 is literally “passions of dishonor,” “dishonor” in verse 26 being the noun form of the verb translated “dishonored” in verse 24.

68 “A lie” in verse 25 is literally “the lie.” Contextually (see vs. 23 & 25b), the specific lie in view is idolatry, “that something or someone is to be venerated in place of the true God” (Harrison, p. 25).

69 Murray (p. 46) likewise states: “The doxology with which verse 25 closes is a spontaneous outburst of adoration evoked by the mention of God as ‘the Creator’ and in reaction against the dishonour described in the preceding clauses.”
exclaims that the Creator, God, is “blessed forever.” “Blessed” is the Greek adjective, eulogetos, from which we get our English word, “eulogy.” This blessing was a common Jewish one (cf. Psalm 89:52a) and is used elsewhere by Paul (in Romans 9:5, 2 Corinthians 1:3, 11:31, and Ephesians 1:3) and by Peter (in 1 Peter 1:3).

Though “amen” is usually uttered by an audience, not by a speaker, Paul cannot contain himself, ending his blessing with an emphatic “Amen” (cf. Psalm 89:52b). “Amen” is a transliteration of the Greek word, amen, which itself is a transliteration of the Hebrew verb, aman, which means something like “so let it be” (Witmer, p. 443). It is “a word of solemn affirmation and enthusiastic approval” (Hendriksen, p. 77).

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. (1:26-27)

Once again (cf. v. 24), Paul states that God judicially hands the unbeliever over (“God gave them over”; see comments on v. 24) because of the sin of idolatry (“For this reason,” the idolatry mentioned in v. 25; cf. v. 23), with sexual immorality being the result (“to degrading passions”; cf. v. 24), only this time Paul gets more specific.

Whereas in verse 24, he spoke of sexual immorality in general terms, here in verses 26-27 he speaks of a particularly vile form of it, lesbianism (v. 26b)/homosexuality (v. 27).

Once again (cf. vs. 23 & 25), an “exchange” takes place (“for their women exchanged”). This time, the exchange is heterosexual relationships, “the natural function” (proper only within the bond of marriage–Hebrews 13:4) for homosexual ones (“for that which is unnatural”). Homosexuality is unnatural (cf. “abandoned the natural function of the woman” in v. 27); thus, any appeal to genetic predisposition is bogus, without biblical basis.

Though our society may condone homosexuality, Scripture condemns it in the strongest terms, calling it an “indecent act” in verse 27 (cf. Leviticus 18:22, which calls it an “abomination”; cf. Leviticus 20:13, which calls it a “detestable act”). In the Old Testament theocracy, homosexuality was punishable by death (Leviticus 20:13). A homosexual Christian is an oxymoron (Romans 1:32 and 1 Corinthians 6:9).

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70It is interesting to note that Paul wrote these words from Corinth (see under “Place and Date of Writing” in the Introductory Lesson), a city infamous for its sexual immorality, especially homosexuality. Another interesting fact is that Paul is writing to the local church at Rome, and 14 of the first 15 Roman emperors were homosexuals (Hughes, p. 44; William Barclay, cited in Morris, p. 93).

71Those who reject natural revelation (1:18-20) end up living unnaturally (1:26-27).

72As some have said, God made Adam & Eve (see Matthew 19:4), not “Adam & Steve.”
Paul ends verse 27 by making the point that homosexuals receive “in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” This could mean either 1) homosexuality is the penalty for the error of idolatry (so Schreiner and Morris) or 2) the error is homosexuality and the penalty is the physical (AIDS, etc.) and spiritual devastation this sin produces. Though the latter is certainly a biblically legitimate option (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:6, Hebrews 13:4, and Jude 7), the former seems to be more in keeping with the context.

**Social Consequences (1:28-32)**
A rejection of the truth that God, and God alone, is worthy of worship not only results in sexual consequences (1:24-27), but also social consequences.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, (1:28)

Once again (cf. vs. 24 & 26), we see God judicially giving the unbeliever over (“God gave them over”; cf. comments on v. 24).

Unknown to the English reader is the wordplay Paul makes in this verse. Since the unbeliever “did not see fit [Greek verb, dokimazo] to acknowledge God,” God gave the unbeliever over “to a depraved [Greek adjective, adokimos] mind,” with the result that the unbeliever does “those things which are not proper” (notice how thinking ⇒ doing; compare 1:21-22 with 1:23). Schreiner (p. 92) masterfully brings out the wordplay in his translation of this verse: “And just as they did not think God was fit to be known, God handed them over to an unfit mind, so that they did things that are not fitting.”

being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; (1:29-31)

Paul now specifies what he meant by “those things which are not proper” in verse 28 with a “vice list” in Scripture.

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73 As Witmer (p. 444) states: “Such lustful and indecent acts have within them the seeds of punishment.”

74 More literally: “to have God in [their] knowledge.” In other words, as this entire passage of 1:18-32 stresses (see also vs. 19, 20, 21, and 32), the unbeliever knows about God, but rejects this knowledge. In the original, “God” is in an emphatic position. The Greek literally reads: “they did not see fit God to acknowledge.” In other words, it isn’t just anyone they viewed as unfit—we’re talking God here.

75 For other vice lists in Paul’s writings, see 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 2 Corinthians 12:20, Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Timothy 1:9-10, and 2 Timothy 3:2-5. Paul’s list here in Romans 1:29-31 is the longest such list in Scripture (21 vices long).
verses 29-31, vices that are for the most part social in nature (i.e., sins that are injurious to interpersonal relationships). Early on, the list consists of vices more general in nature ("unrighteousness," "wickedness," "evil") before moving on to vices more specific in nature.⁷⁶

Notice that unbelievers are not half-hearted about their sin (Morris, p. 95), "being filled with" it (v. 29a)/"full of" it (v. 29b).⁷⁷

“Envy” [Gk. phthonou] and “murder” [Gk. phonou] (v. 29) are listed side by side⁷⁸, as are “without understanding” [Gk. asunetous] and “untrustworthy” [Gk. asunthetous] (v. 31), both pairs being examples of the literary phenomenon known as assonance (similar sounding words).

“Greed” (v. 29) is literally “to have more” (the Greek word pleonexia, from the Greek comparative, pleon, “more” + the Greek verb, echo, “to have”).

A surprising entry is verse 29’s “gossips” (literally: “whisperers,” so KJV), which also appears in the Pauline vice list in 2 Corinthians 12:20. “Slanderers” (v. 30) is literally “to speak against” (the Greek word, katalalous, from the Greek preposition, kata, “against” + the Greek verb, laleo, “to speak”). Hendriksen (p. 81) distinguishes “gossips” and “slanderers”: “What the gossips do secretly, the slanderers do openly.” Cranfield (p. 37) makes the following distinction: “Both words denote people who go about to destroy others’ reputations by misrepresentation; but the whisperers are the more dangerous kind, against whom there is virtually no human defence.”

“Insolent” (v. 30) is the Greek noun, hubristes, from which we get our English word, “hubris,” which means “exaggerated pride or self-confidence” (Webster’s).

“Inventors of evil” (v. 30) is “they invent ways of doing evil” (NIV).

“Disobedient to parents” (v. 30) is another surprise entry. It also appears in the Pauline vice list in 2 Timothy 3:2-5. In the Old Testament theocracy, a rebellious child was stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

“Untrustworthy” (v. 31) is literally “covenant-breakers” (so KJV). In light of our society’s rejection of God, is it any wonder that the covenant of marriage (Proverbs 2:17 and Malachi 2:14) is so often broken?

⁷⁶“Unrighteousness is a generic term and suggests that it is the genus of which the other vices are specifications” (Murray, p. 50).

⁷⁷“... [T]he stress falls upon the completeness with which unrighteousness had come to exercise control over its subjects—they were filled to the brim with all forms of unrighteousness” (Murray, p. 50).

⁷⁸Some have suggested that another reason why “envy” and “murder” are listed side by side is because the former often leads to the latter (see the story of Cain & Abel in Genesis 4, as well as Mark 15:10).
and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of
death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (1:32)

Paul concludes this section on the sinfulness and condemnation of the Gentile by reiterating (cf. vs. 19, 20, 21, and 28) the fact that sinners "know better."

Even though ("and although") unbelievers innately know (cf. Romans 2:14-15) that their sin is deserving of
death ("they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death"; cf. Romans 5:12 and 6:23a), they not only continually (the Greek verb translated “do” is in the present
tense) commit it ("they not only do the same"), but also relish (“give hearty approval to”79) the fact that
others do, too.80

Henry (p. 373) makes a perceptive point at this point: “Now lay all this together, and then say whether the
Gentile world, lying under so much guilt and corruption, could be justified before God by any works of their
own.”

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An Oasis

The news for the unbeliever is bad. God in judgment is handing the unbeliever over
to his sin. Yet, there is hope for the unbeliever because God has also delivered over (see Romans 8:32, where “delivered ... over” is the same Greek verb translated “gave over” in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28) His Son, Jesus Christ to redeem the unbeliever
from his slavery to sin (see Romans 6:17-18, where “were committed” in verse 17 is
the same Greek verb translated "gave over" in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28).

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79 The Greek verb translated “give hearty approval” is the same one used to describe

80 Cranfield (p. 27) translates the end of verse 32: “...[B]ut actually applaud others who
practice them.”
The Sinfulness and Condemnation of the Jew (2:1-3:8)

In the major section of 1:18-3:20, Paul announces the bad news of the universal sinfulness and condemnation of man. Neither Jew nor Gentile are exempt (3:9). Paul began by exposing the sinfulness and condemnation of the Gentile (1:18-32). Now, he exposes the sinfulness and condemnation of the Jew (2:1-3:8). Though it is not until 2:17 that Paul specifically mentions the Jew by name, most are of the opinion that Paul primarily has the Jew in mind throughout the entire section of 2:1-3:8. The “irreligious” and immoral Gentiles were certainly sinners and, therefore, justly deserving of God’s condemnation, but the “religious” and “moral” Jews? Yes, the Jew, too, is a sinner and deserving of God’s condemnation, his “religiosity” and “morality” notwithstanding.

God’s Judgment Upon the Jew (2:1-5)

Just as the Gentiles are sinners under condemnation (1:18), a condemnation for which they are culpable (1:18-23, especially v. 20’s “so that they are without excuse”), so also the Jews are sinners (2:1’s “practice the same things” and 2:3’s “do the same”) under condemnation (2:1’s “you condemn yourself” and 2:5’s “wrath for yourself”), a condemnation for which they are culpable (2:1’s “Therefore you have no excuse”).

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (2:1)

Paul wastes no time denouncing the Jew. Throughout this section, he uses a literary device known as “apostrophe,” in which he carries on an imaginary dialogue with an opponent (James does the same in the latter half of James 2—see especially v. 20).

The opponent (the “you” of this verse; cf. the “O man” of v. 3) is a typical Jew (“everyone of you”), one who clearly sees the “speck” in the Gentile eye, but fails to see the “log” in his own eye (Matthew 7:3-5/Luke 6:41-42). The Jew passes judgment on the Gentile (“you who passes judgment … you judge another … you who judge”), and rightly so. The problem, however, is that the Jew doesn’t denounce himself. As Murray (p. 57) states: “It is to be noted, however, that the indictment brought against the Jew is not that he judged others for sins committed; it is rather that he judged others for the very things he practised himself.” He failed to realize that for every finger he pointed at the Gentile, he had three pointing back at himself.

81 Notice the change from the third person (in the previous section, 1:18-32—“them,” “they,” “their”) to the second person (in this section, 2:1f—“you,” “yourself,” “your”).

82 There are some, such as Alva J. McClain (The Epistle to the Romans Outlined and Summarized, p. 9), who categorize 2:1-16 as the condemnation of the moralist, with 2:17-3:8 being the condemnation of the Jew.

83 Contrary to the thinking of our age (and, sadly, to the thinking of many within Christendom), judging is not inherently wrong (see Matthew 7:5/Luke 6:42b, John 7:24, and 1 Corinthians 2:15a).
Paul’s point is that the Jew, like the Gentile, is a sinner under condemnation ("you condemn yourself"). Therefore ("Therefore"), the Jew, like the Gentile (1:20), is without excuse ("you have no excuse"), because ("for ... for") the Jew commits the same sins the Gentile does ("you ... practice the same things"; cf. 2:3 and 21-22), even though he may do so in a different manner (perhaps in a more private, respectable manner).84

And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. (2:2)

Paul safely assumes that both he and his imaginary opponent are in agreement ("we know") that God justly judges sin ("that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things"; cf. 1:32). Thus, if Jews are sinners (v. 1), and if God judges sin (v. 2), then God will judge the Jews (v. 3).85 Unlike the skewed judgment of the Jew (see comments on v. 1), the judgment of God is "according to truth" (literal rendering of the Greek prepositional phrase translated “rightly” by the NASB).

But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? (2:3)

Paul attacks another flaw in the thinking of his opponent (the "O man" of this verse). Whereas in verse 1, the Jew mistakenly thought that he really wasn’t a sinner—Gentiles are, not Jews (cf. Luke 18:9-14), here in verse 3 he mistakenly thinks that he will escape God’s judgment simply because he is a Jew ("do you suppose ... that you will escape the judgment of God?"). This was a common belief among the Jews of that day (cf. Micah 3:11, Matthew 3:9, John 8:33, and 39).

The last "you" ("that you will escape") is emphatic. The Greek literally reads: "that you you will escape the judgment of God," the repetition of the “you” being for emphasis. In other words, "Do you think that you of all people will escape . . . ?" (Morris, p. 111). The Jews actually thought they would. However, they would not (see v. 5; cf. Hosea 12:2 and Amos 3:1-2). In fact, because of his privileged position, particularly in having received more revelatory light (3:2), the Jew was even more liable to God’s judgment than the Gentile (see Luke 12:47-48).

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84 Several statements from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 come to mind: hatred is mental murder/homicide of the heart (Matthew 5:21-22); a lustful look is tantamount to adultery (Matthew 5:27-28); etc.

85 The “linchpin” or “crux” of Paul’s argument is the first premise, Jews are sinners. If Paul can get his opponent to recognize this reality, then the argument is won. The unbeliever has to be absolutely convinced of his sinfulness and its resultant condemnation before he will convert to Christianity. “It is very easy to get a non-Christian to agree that he is a sinner (‘nobody’s perfect’), but it is almost impossible to get him to realize the gravity of his sin” (Hughes, p. 51).
Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? (2:4)

Yet another flaw in the thinking of Paul’s Jewish opponent was the mistaken belief that God’s benevolence to Israel over the years (“His kindness and tolerance and patience”) was an indication that God approved of their conduct. On the contrary, God’s benevolence to Israel over the years was intended to bring them to repentance (“the kindness of God leads you to repentance”).

The Jewish thinking in this regard was actually an insult to God’s goodness. The Greek verb translated “think lightly” by the NASB literally means “to think down upon.” “Despisest” (so KJV) and “show contempt” (so NIV) seem to be better renderings than the NASB’s “think lightly.” Accordingly, Lloyd-Jones (2:59) understands the participial phrase (“not knowing that…”), being subordinate to the main verb (“think lightly”), to have a more actively negative nuance: “choosing not to know, regarding with contempt.”

God’s bountiful benevolence (“the riches of His kindness”; cf. Ephesians 2:7), even towards unbelievers such as the Jews (cf. Luke 6:35), is seen in His “tolerance” (cf. 3:25’s “forbearance”) and “patience.” Though it would be perfectly just for God to unleash His wrath on sinners immediately, He usually does not do so in order to give them time to repent (cf. Romans 9:22, 1 Timothy 1:16, 1 Peter 3:20, and 2 Peter 3:9).

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (2:5)

Paul “takes the gloves off” here in verse 5. The fact of the matter is that the Jew is just as willfully sinful as the Gentile and, therefore, like the Gentile, will not escape the judgment of God (cf. v. 3). The culpability for this does not lie with God, Who is seeking to hold off His judgment as long as possible (see comments on v. 4), but with the sinner (“because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself”).

The Greek noun translated “stubbornness” (KJV “hardness”) is sklerotes, from which we get our English word “sclerosis,” meaning “hardening.” Arteriosclerosis is the medical condition in which one’s arteries harden; here, Paul is speaking of a spiritual hardening of heart (cf. Ephesians 4:18).

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86 Morris (p. 113) describes repentance as “that change which comes over a sinner when he sees his wrongdoing no longer as attractive but as damnable.”

87 The verb is kataphroneo, from the Greek preposition, kata, “down upon” + the Greek verb, phroneo, “to think.”

88 The Greek noun translated “patience” is makrothumia, which literally means “long anger” (makros, “long” + thumos, “anger”). The word (translated “longsuffering” in the KJV) has the idea of people patience (Morris, p. 113), putting up with someone for a long time before unleashing one’s anger. See Exodus 34:6’s “slow to anger.”

89 What Ralph Earle (cited in Morris, p. 115) calls “spiritual sclerosis,” a “hardening of
Due to (“because of”) his spiritual obstinacy (“stubbornness and unrepentant heart”), the Jew is “storing up wrath,” which will be revealed (in a full and final sense⁹⁰) on “the day of wrath,” Judgment Day (cf. Revelation 6:17). Such judgment will be well-deserved (“righteous”; cf. v. 2, Genesis 18:25b, Acts 17:31, and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-6).

The Justice of God’s Judgment (2:6-16)
At the end of his indictment of the Jews, Paul makes the point that God’s judgment upon them is righteous (end of v. 5). In the verses to follow, he develops this point, showing that the justice of His judgment is seen in His impartial response to man’s behavior (vs. 6-11) and in His basing His justice upon the revelatory light one has received (vs. 12-16).

Seen in His Impartial Response to Man’s Behavior (2:6-11)
God’s justice is impartial, being based upon the outward, observable works displayed by each individual. In these verses, Paul gives the principle that God’s judgment is based on works (v. 6), applies this principle to the believer (vs. 7 and 10) and to the unbeliever (vs. 8 and 9), then concludes (v. 11) by explicitly reaffirming the impartiality implied throughout (in vs. 6’s “TO EACH PERSON”; v. 9’s “for every soul … of the Jew first and also of the Greek”; and v. 10’s “to everyone … to the Jew first and also to the Greek”).

who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: (2:6)
In a quote of Psalm 62:12b and/or Proverbs 24:12d (thus, ALL CAPS in the NASB), Paul sets forth the principle found throughout Scripture (cf. Job 34:11, Jeremiah 17:10b, 32:19, Hosea 12:2, Matthew 16:27, 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, 2 Corinthians 5:10, 2 Timothy 4:14, Revelation 2:23, 20:12-13, and 22:12) that “the righteous judgment of God” spoken of in verse 5 will be in accordance with one’s works (“ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS”), the Jew not being exempt (“EACH PERSON”; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10) from such judgment (see comments on v. 3).

to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; (2:7)
In verses 7-10, Paul applies the principle set forth in verse 6, that God’s judgment is according to one’s

the spiritual arteries.”

⁹⁰It’s already being revealed (see comments on 1:18). Calvin (p. 89) states in this regard: “... [T]hough [God] gives daily some indications of [His judgment], he yet suspends and holds back, till that day [Judgment Day], the clear and full manifestation of it.” Murray (p. 61) likewise states: “Since it cannot be supposed that nothing of God’s righteous judgment is manifest in the history of the world and since such a notion cannot be credited to the apostle, the term ‘revelation’ in this instance must be used in the sense of the full exhibition and execution.”
works, applying it in relation to believers in verses 7 and 10 and in relation to unbelievers in verses 8 and 9.

The reason why God’s ultimate judgment can be based on works is because one’s works reveals one’s spiritual condition and, therefore, one’s ultimate spiritual destination. Not only are one’s actions (“doing” here in v. 7, “do not obey” and “obey” in v. 8, and “does” in vs. 9 and 10) part of this equation, but also one’s ambitions/aspirations (“seek” here in v. 7, as well as “selfishly ambitious” in v. 8).

In verses 7-10, Paul develops these truths through the use of a literary device known as “chiasmus” (named after the Greek letter, chi, which looks like an “x”). In a chiasmus, there are 4 elements, with the 1st and 4th elements corresponding to one another, and the 2nd and 3rd elements corresponding to one another. Thus, verse 7 (the 1st element) corresponds to verse 10 (the 4th element) and verse 8 (the 2nd element) corresponds to verse 9 (the 3rd element). As mentioned previously, verses 7 and 10 speak of the believer, verses 8 and 9 of the unbeliever.

According to verse 7, the believer is one who not only perseveres in the faith (John 8:31, Acts 14:22, 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, Colossians 1:23, Hebrews 3:6, 14, the test of correct Christology in 1 John, and 2 John 9), but also in faithfulness/good works (“those who by perseverance in doing good”; cf. John 15:1-11, Hebrews 10:36, and the tests of consistent conduct and concern for Christians in 1 John). Morris (p. 116) describes perseverance as “an active, manly fortitude. It is used of the soldier who, in the thick of a hard battle, gives as much as he gets; he is not dismayed by the blows he receives, but fights on to the end” (cf. 1 Timothy 6:12 and 2 Timothy 4:7).

The believer has heavenly aspirations (“those who … seek for glory and honor and immortality”; cf. Colossians 3:2). The “glory and honor” he seeks is ultimately not his own, but God’s (cf. Romans 5:2 and 1 Timothy 1:17).

A person who perseveres in good works and has heavenly aspirations will be rewarded with “eternal life” (cf. Romans 8:13b). Paul is not teaching salvation by works here, else he would be hopelessly contradicting his teaching that salvation is by faith, not by works. Paul teaches this not only elsewhere (for example, in Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5), but also in the more immediate context of the book of Romans. The thesis upon which the entire book is based, 1:16-17 states that salvation is by faith. Furthermore, the

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91. “A person’s habitual conduct, whether good or evil, reveals the condition of his heart” (Witmer, p. 445).

92. “The faith” is the body of doctrine essential to Christianity (see Acts 6:7 and Jude 3), such as belief in the deity of Christ (John 8:24 and Romans 10:9) and belief in the exclusivity of Christ/solus Christus for salvation (John 14:6 and Acts 4:12).

93. Eternal life is more a quality of life than a quantity of life (everyone will live eternally; the question is: will it be in the place of eternal life/heaven or in the place of eternal death/hell). Eternal life becomes the believer’s possession the moment he or she gets saved (John 3:36a). Thus, the eternal life being spoken of here in Romans 2:7 is eternal life in its full and final sense (Romans 6:22’s “the outcome, eternal life”), when the believer reaches Heaven.
words of 2:7-10 are in the midst of a discussion of the universal sinfulness and condemnation of man (a discussion Paul will end by saying in 3:20 that “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight”), so there are no works man can do to merit salvation. Rather, Paul’s words here should be understood in keeping with the biblical truth that one who is truly saved will give evidence of his salvation by his works (see Matthew 7:15-23, 12:33-37, Romans 6:22, Ephesians 2:10, Titus 2:14, James 2:17, and the tests of consistent conduct and concern for Christians in 1 John). Good works don’t make one a Christian; rather, they show that one is a Christian. They are the fruit that comes from the root. Furthermore, godly actions and aspirations are not ultimately generated by us (and are not, therefore, meritorious), but by God (see Ephesians 2:10 and Philippians 2:13). See footnote 98.

but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. (2:8)

Using the same principle, that one’s actions and ambitions/aspirations reveal one’s spiritual condition, Paul characterizes the unbeliever as one who is “selfishly ambitious.” The essence of sin is selfishness (see 2 Corinthians 5:15), living to please self instead of living to please God (Galatians 1:10). The unbeliever is also one who does not “obey the truth.” What is truth (John 18:38a)? God’s Word is truth (John 17:17b). Truth is whatever God affirms in His Word. God’s Word is not an option to be considered, but an obligation to be obeyed (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:8, and 1 Peter 4:17). In the more immediate context of the book of Romans, the truth that the unbeliever does not obey is the truth that God and God alone is worthy of worship (see 1:18 and 1:25 and comments on)

Rather than obeying the truth, unbelievers “obey unrighteousness” (cf. Romans 6:16-22). The unbeliever may think he is free (Psalm 2:3), when in reality he is a slave to sin (John 8:34) and to Satan (2 Timothy 2:26).

A person who lives for self (“selfishly ambitious”) and continually does (“obey” is a present tense participle in the original) unrighteousness will be a recipient of God’s “wrath” (cf. v. 5) and “indignation” (cf. Romans 8:13a). Such a person’s ambitions (“selfishly ambitious”) and actions (“obey unrighteousness”) show that he is an unbeliever; thus, he will one day suffer the full and final consequence for his unbelief (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:12).

There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, (2:9)

Paul continues to discuss the unbeliever’s fate, giving the consequence of God’s wrath and indignation being poured out upon him (v. 8), namely, “tribulation” and “distress.” Commenting on the Greek noun translated “tribulation,” Morris (p. 119) states: “[Its verb form] in the literal sense means ‘press,’ ‘squash’

94I say “full and final” because the unbeliever is already “perishing” (notice the present tense verbals in 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Corinthians 2:15, 4:3, and 2 Thessalonians 2:10; “perish” in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 in the NASB is more literally “perishing”). See also comments on 1:18.
(as in the treading of grapes) [see Revelation 19:15], so that [the noun form] denotes not minor discomfort, but acute suffering.” Commenting on the English word, tribulation, Lloyd-Jones (2:87) states: “Tribulation means trouble, it means affliction, it means pressure. The derivation of the word is this: in the old days, when they wanted to separate the wheat from the chaff, they would put the garnered wheat on a floor, and then they had great flails, with which they used to beat the wheat. In this way they would separate the chaff from the wheat, and in so doing they were, as it were, bruising it. They used tribulum and hence the term ‘tribulation’—as if you are being struck.” The Greek noun translated “distress” (KJV: “anguish”) literally means “narrow place” (stenochoria, from the Greek adjective, stenos, “narrow” + the Greek noun, chorion, “place”). Its verbal form is translated “crushed” in 2 Corinthians 4:8. See Luke 16:23-28 for a firsthand account of such tribulation and distress.

Every unbeliever, whether Jew or Gentile (“every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew … and also of the Greek”), will suffer tribulation and distress (once again, the Jew is not exempt—cf. vs. 3, 5, and 6 and comments on). Just as the Jew was the first to get the gospel (see 1:16 and comments on), so the Jew would be the first to be held responsible for rejecting it (“of the Jew first”).

but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (2:10)

Paul completes the chiasmus he began in verse 7 by once again (as in v. 7) reiterating the “bliss and blessing” (Morris, p. 120) awaiting the believer (“glory and honor and peace”), the one whose life is characterized by doing good (“to everyone who does good”; cf. comments on v. 7; contrast with those who do evil, unbelievers in v. 9).

Just as verse 9 gave the consequences of God’s wrath and indignation upon the unbeliever (v. 8), so this verse gives the consequences of God’s gift of eternal life upon the believer (v. 7). Both Jew and Gentile (“to the Jew first and also to the Greek”) can enjoy the blessings enumerated here in verse 10 by simply believing the gospel (1:16).95

For there is no partiality with God. (2:11)

Here in verse 11, Paul sets forth the principle found throughout Scripture (cf. Deuteronomy 10:17, Job 34:19, Galatians 2:6, Ephesians 6:9, and 1 Peter 1:17) that God is impartial in judgment.96

95In regards to verses 7-10, Calvin (pp. 92-93) states: “We may add, that though he might have briefly described, even in two words, the blessedness of the godly and also the misery of the reprobate, he yet enlarges on both subjects, and for this end—that he might more effectually strike men with the fear of God’s wrath, and sharpen their desire for obtaining grace through Christ: for we never fear God’s judgment as we ought, except it be set as it were by a lively description before our eyes; nor do we really burn with desire for future life, except when roused by strong incentives.”

96While it is true that in the New Testament dispensation of grace (better known as the
The Greek noun translated “partiality” literally means “to receive the face” (prosopolempsia, from the Greek noun, prosopon, “face” + the Greek verb, lambano, “to receive”). God “does not show favoritism” (NIV). He is not more or less lenient in judging based upon who a person is. Both Jew and Gentile are on equal footing when it comes to God’s judgment, both being judged in accordance with their works (1 Peter 1:17), regardless of their ethnicity. Though the Jew may enjoy an advantage in other respects (see 3:1-2), in this respect he does not.

**Seen in His Basing His Justice Upon the Revelatory Light One has Received (2:12-16)**

The justice of God’s judgment (2:6-16) is seen not only in His impartial response to man’s behavior (2:6-11), but also in the fact that He bases it upon the revelatory light one has received.

*For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; (2:12)*

The righteousness of God’s judgment (2:2 and 5) is seen by the fact that God judges according to the amount of revelatory light one has been given (cf. Matthew 11:20-24 and Luke 12:47-48).

“All who have sinned without the Law” (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:21) are the Gentiles, while “all who have sinned under the Law” (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:20) are the Jews.

Gentiles, who did not possess the Law (“sinned without the Law”), will not be judged by the Law (“perish without the Law”), though they will be judged (“perish”; cf. 2:14-15 and comments on). Jews, who did possess the Law (“under the Law”; cf. 3:2 and 9:4), will be “judged by the Law” (cf. John 5:45).

*for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. (2:13)*

Here in verse 13, Paul alludes to yet another (cf. vs. 1, 3, and 4 and comments on) mistaken notion of the Jew, the notion that merely hearing the Law (the Jew heard the Law as it was read during every synagogue service—see, for example, Luke 4:16-21) was enough to make one right with God. Justification comes by doing, not by hearing (cf. Matthew 7:24-27 and James 1:22-25). As Wiersbe (p. 520) states: “…[I]t was not the possession of the Law that counted, but the practice of the Law.”

...church age) God is no longer partial to the Jew (as He was in the Old Testament dispensation of law, under which Israel had “most favored nation” status), as both Acts 10:34-35 and Ephesians 2:11-22 testify, this is not the point of Paul’s statement in verse 11. Based on the context of the passage as a whole, Paul’s focus is on God’s judgment. Thus, his point is that the unbelieving Jew will suffer the same fate as the unbelieving Gentile, the Jew’s alleged advantages notwithstanding (see v. 9; cf. vs. 3, 5, and 6).
Paul’s statement that “the doers of the Law will be justified” seems hopelessly contrary to what he so plainly teaches elsewhere, namely, that justification is by faith, not by works (see Romans 3:20, 28, 5:1, and Galatians 2:16). How can we resolve this seeming dilemma? Some (such as Moo) see this as hypothetical. In other words, if one were able to perfectly keep the Law, he would be justified thereby (however, no one can). Others (such as Schreiner) take Paul at face value. This latter option seems preferable. Based on the preceding context of verses 7 and 10, the point seems to be that those who do the Law (not a perfect keeping of the Law, but a lifestyle that can be characterized as “Law-abiding”\(^\text{97}\)) will be justified (i.e., vindicated) in the End. On Judgment Day, “their” (1 Corinthians 15:10, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 2:13, and Colossians 1:29) works will be proof positive that they truly are believers (like Abraham’s in James 2:21 and 24 and Rahab’s in James 2:25). When Paul says that justification is not by works (in the references cited above), he means that pre-conversion works (human works) do not cause God to justify someone (a declaration of righteousness). Here in Romans 2:13, when Paul says that justification is by works (note that he does not actually use this exact terminology, though James does), he means that post-conversion works (God’s work, ultimately\(^\text{98}\)) prove that one already has a righteous standing before God (a demonstration of righteousness).

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, (2:14-15)

Though the Gentile will be not judged by the Mosaic Law (v. 12), this does not mean that there is no law upon which God’s judgment of the Gentile is based. If God’s judgment of the Gentile is going to be just, there has to be some basis upon which it can be made. Paul gives that basis here in verses 14 & 15 (he also gives it in 1:18-23).

Though the Gentiles did not have the Mosaic Law (v. 14’s “who do not have the Law” and “not having the Law”), they did have “natural law” (v. 14’s a law to themselves”). This “law” was “written in their hearts” (v. 15). In other words, part of the image of God in which every human being is created (Genesis 1:26-27) is an innate sense of right and wrong (cf. 1:32).\(^\text{99}\) Thus, Gentiles are able to “do instinctively the

\(^{97}\) As, for example, Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-6).

\(^{98}\) Schreiner (p. 145), taking another commentator to task, states in this regard: “F. Watson (1986: 112, 120) fails to see that the good works done are the result of the Spirit’s power and therefore concludes that Paul teaches salvation by works. This statement is false if the idea is that one will be saved by autonomous works. Paul certainly teaches that one must do good works to be saved, but these works are produced by the Holy Spirit.”

\(^{99}\) Once again (as with natural revelation—see 1:20 and comments on), God has not left Himself without witness (Acts 14:17). Unbelievers reject this avenue of general revelation, too, thus once again leaving them without excuse.
things of the Law” (v. 14). This means that, at times, unbelievers can do “good” (Luke 6:32-34).

The unbeliever’s conscience (if not “seared”–1 Timothy 4:2) interacts with this natural law (v. 15’s “their conscience bearing witness”), at times causing condemnation (v. 15’s “accusing”), at other times commendation (v. 15’s “defending”; KJV: “excusing”). Like creation (Romans 1:20), this medium of general revelation cannot save. The special revelation of the gospel message is still needed.

on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus. (2:16)

The judgment of one’s conscience (“accusing” in v. 15) is a reflection of the judgment God will render (“God will judge the secrets of men”) on Judgment Day (“the day”; cf. v. 5).103

This eschatological (end times) judgment is in accordance with the gospel (“according to my gospel”) in that the good news of the gospel presupposes the bad news of judgment.104

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100 Note that Paul does not say that they are “doing the Law,” but “the things of the Law.”

101 The reason why I put the word, “good” in quotes is that such works of an unbeliever are good only in a cultural or civic sense, not in a meritorious sense, i.e., they do not in any way earn God’s favor (see Proverbs 15:8a//21:27, Isaiah 64:6, Mark 10:18, and Romans 3:12), the reason being that unsaved men never do good for the right reason, to glorify God.

102 The Greek verb translated “bearing witness” is more accurately “bearing witness with.” In other words, the conscience works in conjunction with natural law. Along these lines, it is often said, “Let your conscience be your guide.” Should you? It depends. The conscience operates in accordance with a standard. Only to the degree that you have properly programmed your mind with Scripture can your conscience be a reliable indicator as to the appropriateness or inappropriateness of a contemplated or completed activity. Hendriksen (p. 114) states in this regard: “If conscience forbids you to do something, you should not do it. But be sure to send conscience to school, the school of the Bible.”

103 “The accusing and defending work of the conscience in the present will reach its consummation, full validity, and clarification on the day of judgment” (Schreiner, p. 125). “The excusing and accusing testimony of the thoughts within each person’s conscience portends the verdict of the one who will bring every thought to light” (Moo, p. 153).

104 “Unless judgment is a stern reality, there is nothing from which sinners need to be saved and accordingly no ‘good news,’ no gospel” (Morris, p. 129). Lloyd-Jones (2:113) adds: “… [U]nless we preach this wrath of God and the day of judgment, we are not preaching a full gospel, we are holding back something, in order, perhaps, to ingratiate ourselves with men.”
This eschatological judgment will be (in the words of Hebrews 4:12) piercing, judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart ("the secrets of men"); cf. Ecclesiastes 12:14 and 1 Corinthians 4:5.

This eschatological judgment will be rendered by Jesus Christ ("through Jesus Christ"); cf. Matthew 16:27, 25:31-46, John 5:22, 27, Acts 10:42, 17:31, 1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Timothy 4:1, and Revelation 22:12. Hughes (p. 58), commenting on this verse, states: "The day of judgment is coming, and men and women need to 'settle out of court' while they can."

The Delusion of Jewish Advantage (2:17-29)
In 2:17-29, Paul continues the argument he began in 2:1 that the Jew, like the Gentile in 1:18-32, is a sinner under God's condemnation. While the Jew is Paul's focus in the entirety of chapter 2, this becomes more evident in the latter half of the chapter ("Jew" in v. 17; prominence of the Law in vs. 17-24 and of circumcision in vs. 25-29).

As mentioned previously (see comments on 2:3 and 13), the Jews thought that, when it came to God's judgment, they had a "leg up" on the Gentiles simply because they were Jews (2:3) and had the Law (2:13). Paul deals directly with this delusion in the remainder of chapter 2, showing that neither the Law (2:17-24) nor circumcision (2:25-29) gave the Jew any such advantage. Though these things were inherently advantageous (see 3:1-2 and comments on), the Jews did not take advantage of them due to their depravity.

There is No Advantage in Having the Law (2:17-24)
The Jews were given a great advantage, being recipients of the Mosaic Law (vs. 17-18; cf. 3:2), an advantage that was to aid the Gentiles (vs. 19-20). However, the Jews did not take advantage of it (vs. 21-22), to the dishonor of God and the detriment of the Gentiles (vs. 23-24).

But if you bear the name “Jew” and rely upon the Law and boast in God, (2:17)
In verses 17-20, Paul identifies several realities that the Jews gloried in, and rightly so. Paul

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I say "realities" because the "if" clause that governs the entirety of verses 17-20 is what is called a "first class condition" in the original. A first class condition is one in which what is mentioned in the "if" clause is assumed to be true for the sake of argument; thus, the "if" could be more accurately translated "since."

According to Moo (p. 159), mention of every item enumerated in verses 17-20 could be found in the Jewish literature of that day.

In 2:1, Paul’s point of contention was not that the Jews were passing judgment on others (they should—see footnote 83), but that they were not passing judgment on themselves. In a similar vein, Paul’s point of contention in 2:17-24 is not that the Jews were glorying in their privileges (they should), but that they weren’t taking advantage of them. The problem was not that the Jew gloried in his divinely-bestowed privileges, but that he viewed them merely as
mentions three of these realities in verse 17. First and foremost, they were called “Jews” (“you bear the name ‘Jew’”), identifying them as God’s special people.

Second, they relied upon the Law (“and rely upon the Law”; cf. John 5:45). Relying upon the Law was not wrong in and of itself. The problem was that the Jews believed that mere possession of the Law, rather than a work-producing faith, was sufficient for salvation\(^\text{108}\) (see 2:13 and comments on).

A third reality that the Jews gloried in was their God and their relationship to Him (“and boast in God”; NIV: "brag about your relationship to God"). Glorifying in God and in one’s relationship with Him is a good thing (see Jeremiah 9:23-24, Romans 5:11, 1 Corinthians 1:31, and 2 Corinthians 10:17), provided such a relationship does, in fact, exist. Paul’s Jewish opponent in this passage did not have such a salvific relationship with God. Of course, the spirit in which one can rightfully glory in his or her relationship with God must be one of humility, understanding that such a relationship is a divine, graciously-bestowed gift (from the top down), not a human, mentoriously-earned entitlement (from the bottom up).

and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, (2:18)

Another reality that the Jew gloried in was the fact that he knew God’s will (“and know His will”). The reason why the Jew knew God’s will is because he had been “instructed\(^\text{109}\) out of the Law.” Knowing God’s Word is the only way to know God’s (revealed) will about anything.

The Jews also gloried in the fact that they “approve[d] the things that are essential” (cf. Philippians 1:10). The Greek verb translated “approve” means to prove/put to the test for the purpose of approval. The Greek participle translated “things that are essential” literally means things that differ. In a word, this is speaking of what is called discernment, the ability to distinguish or differentiate, on one level, the good from the bad (see 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 and Hebrews 5:14; cf. Romans 12:9b) and, on another level, the good from the best (see Philippians 1:10). The latter is in view here. The Jews were able to discern what was “essential” (Romans 2:18)/what was “excellent” (Philippians 1:10)/what really mattered (Hendriksen, Moo). As with their ability to know God’s will, their ability to be discerning was the direct result of their “being instructed out of the Law.” The more one knows Scripture, the more discerning he will become (see Psalm 119:66 and Hebrews 5:12-14).

privileges, and not also as responsibilities. Rather than using these privileges for the salvific advantage of himself and others, he misused them, to the eternal detriment of himself and others.

\(^{108}\) The Jews considered the Law to be their “national guardian angel” (Moo, p. 388).

\(^{109}\) “Instructed” is the Greek verb, katecheo, from which we get our English words, “catechize” and “catechism.” The Jews made heavy use of the catechistic method of instruction.
and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, (2:19-20)

Not only did the Jews’ exposure to the Law give them the ability to know God’s will and to be discerning (v. 18), but also the opportunity to positively influence others (i.e., Gentiles) with such knowledge and ability (vs. 19 & 20).

As possessors of the Truth (cf. 2:27 and 3:2), the Jews were to have been guides to the blind Gentiles, those who did not possess the Truth (cf. 2:14), and thought that they were (v. 19’s “and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind”). However, because they rejected the Truth, the Jews were blind guides (Matthew 15:14, 23:16, 24, and John 9:40-41), in need of guidance themselves.

The Jews were to have been “a light to those who are in darkness” (v. 19; cf. Isaiah 42:6-7, 49:6, and 60:3)\textsuperscript{110}, those in darkness being the Gentiles (Matthew 4:12-16). However, because they rejected the Truth, the Jews themselves were in darkness and, therefore, could not shine (cf. Matthew 5:14-16).

The Jews were to have been “a corrector of the foolish” (v. 20), “the foolish” being another reference to the Gentiles. “Foolish” does not denote mental deficiency, but moral deficiency. It denotes “persons without moral intelligence” (James Denney, quoted in Morris, p. 133). Though the Jews were to have corrected the moral folly of the Gentiles, their own moral folly (cf. 2:1, 3, and 21-23) rendered them in need of correction themselves (cf. John 9:34).

The Jews were to have been “a teacher of the immature” (v. 20), “the immature” (the same Greek noun is more literally translated “infants” in Matthew 21:16) being yet another reference to the Gentiles, but their rejection of the Truth rendered them infants in need of instruction themselves (cf. Hebrews 5:12-13).

The reason why the Jews had the opportunity to positively influence the Gentiles was because they had the Law\textsuperscript{111} (cf. 2:27 and 3:2), “the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth”\textsuperscript{112} (v. 20). God’s Word is Truth (cf. Psalm 119:142b, John 17:17b, and comments on 2:8).

\textsuperscript{110}These words should not necessarily be understood as a Jewish “missionary mandate.” The Jews were not commissioned to go to the Gentiles. Rather, the Gentiles were expected to go to the Jews/become Jewish “proselytes.” Gentiles were saved by faith-driven adherence to the covenant (see Ruth 1:16 and John 4:22).

\textsuperscript{111}I love what Morris (p. 134) says in regards to the Jewish possession of the Law: “It is a priceless privilege to be the recipient of God’s revelation.”

\textsuperscript{112}The original is very definitive. It literally reads: “having the embodiment of the knowledge and of the truth in the Law.”
you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? (2:21)

Though the Jews enjoyed all the privileges mentioned in verses 17-20, most of which came as a result of their possession of the Law (vs. 18-20), they did not take advantage of the potential such Law-possessing privileges offered by their rejection of the Law. Their rejection of the Law is spelled out in verses 21-23.

The ones who were supposed to be the teachers ("you, therefore, who teach another"; cf. v. 20) needed to be taught themselves ("do you not teach yourself?"; cf. comments on v. 20). That they needed to be taught was seen by the fact that they weren’t practicing what they were preaching (vs. 21b-22; cf. Matthew 23:1-3).

For example, the Jews preached, “Thou shalt not steal” (Exodus 20:15, KJV) (“You who preach that one shall not steal”), yet they were stealing (“do you steal?”; cf. 2:22b). Though Paul may have the words of Malachi 3:8-9 in mind (cf. footnote 84), it seems more likely that he is speaking of theft in the sense we normally think of it.

You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? (2:22)

The Jews preached, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14, KJV) (“You who say that one should not commit adultery”), yet they were committing adultery (“do you commit adultery?”). It may be that Paul has “spiritual adultery” in mind (as in Jeremiah 3:20 and James 4:4; cf. the book of Hosea), or perhaps “mental adultery” (cf. footnote 84). Most likely, physical adultery is in view.

The Jews abhorred idolatry (“You who abhor idols”), yet they were robbing temples (“do you rob temples?”). Temple robbery is mentioned one other time in Scripture, in Acts 19:37. The Greek verb translated “rob temples” literally means just that (hierosuleo, the Greek noun, hieron, “temple” + the Greek verb, sulao, “to rob”). There is some question among interpreters as to whether this should be understood literally (actual temples being robbed) or metaphorically for a sacrilegious act of some kind. Most opt for

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113 Henry (p. 379) speaks of those “who in the pulpit preach so well that it is a pity they should ever come out, and out of the pulpit live so ill that it is a pity they should ever come in.”

114 The Greek verb translated “abhor” is bdelussomai. Morris (p. 136) describes it as “connected with [the Greek verb] bdeo, ‘break wind,’ and words denoting a smell. It means to turn away from something on account of the stench, and thus to abhor, detest.”

115 The KJV wrongly translates “robbers of churches” instead of “robbers of temples” in Acts 19:37. There were no church buildings in Ephesus to rob at the time these words were spoken by the town clerk of Ephesus.

116 This uncertainty is reflected by Morris (p. 137), who states: “Since both ways of understanding the verse have supporters, I see no way of deciding the point. We must keep both
the former. If so, the idea might be that though the Jews preached against idolatry, they didn’t think twice about profiting from it by stealing valuables from pagan temples.

Paul’s point in verses 21 and 22 is not that every Jew was guilty of stealing and adultery, but that the Jew was no different than the Gentile (cf. 2:1 and 3), even though the Jew had all the privileges mentioned in verses 17-20. The Jew, like the Gentile, was a sinner.

**You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?** (2:23)

Grammatically, this verse can be either an interrogative (a question) or a declarative (a statement). The NASB opts for the former (as does the KJV and the NIV). Either way, Paul’s point is the same. Though the Jews gloried in their possession of the Law (“You who boast in the Law”), they were guilty of breaking It (“through your breaking the Law”) and, thereby, dishonoring God (“do you dishonor God?”). To disobey the Word of God is to dishonor the God of the Word. As Paul will go on to point out in 3:23, sin is a failure to glorify God (cf. Daniel 5:23 and footnote 63).

**For “THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,” just as it is written.** (2:24)

With a quotation of (“just as it is written”119) Isaiah 52:5 (cf. Ezekiel 36:20-23), Paul explains why it is that the Jewish failure to obey the Law was dishonoring to God (v. 23). It is because (“For”) it gave the enemies of God an opportunity to blaspheme the name120 of God (v. 24). The Jews’ dishonoring of God possibilities in mind.”

117““It is not, then, that all Jews commit these sins, but that these sins are representative of the contradiction between claim and conduct that does pervade Judaism” (Moo, p. 165).

118“Transgression of the law is a dishonouring of God; it deprives him of the honour due to his name and offers insult to the majesty of which the law is the expression” (Murray, pp. 84-85). “... [F]or as they avowed God as their Lawgiver, and yet had no care to form their life according to his rule, they clearly proved that the majesty of their God was not so regarded by them, but that they easily despised him” (Calvin, pp. 106-107).

119The Greek verb translated “it is written” is in the perfect tense, indicating a completed action with ongoing effects. Thus, we could more literally translate: “it has been written and stands written.” This is implicit testimony to the ongoing authority of Scripture.

120It is significant that Paul makes reference to the “name of God,” as the Jews had an extreme reverence for God’s personal name, Yahweh (Jehovah). In fact, the Jews wouldn’t even pronounce it (thus, it came to be called the “ineffable,” i.e., “not to be uttered” name).
through disobedience (v. 23) caused the Gentiles to dishonor God through blasphemy\(^\text{121}\) (v. 24; cf. 2 Samuel 12:14). James Denney (quoted in Morris, p. 138) captures the idea well: It is “as if the heathen were saying: ‘Like God, like people; what a Divinity the patron of this odious race must be.’” If God is not significant to us, what makes us think He will be significant to those around us (cf. Matthew 5:14-16, 1 Corinthians 15:34, Philippians 2:14-15, and 2 Peter 2:2)?

**There is No Advantage in Circumcision (2:25-29)**

Paul switches gears\(^\text{122}\) slightly beginning in verse 25. Whereas in verses 17-24, his main point was that mere possession of the Mosaic Law, and the privileges (and responsibilities) that accompanied It, did not in and of itself give the Jew any advantage over the Gentile when it came to God’s judgment (due to Jewish depravity), so in verses 25-29 his main point is that mere practice of the rite of circumcision didn’t either. Circumcision (like baptism today) was meaningful only if it was done as a post-conversion act of obedience. If it was done as a pre-conversion work intended to earn God’s favor, it was meaningless (a mere act of mutilation, Philippians 3:2, NIV).

For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. (2:25)

A believer is one who is practicing the Law (“practice” in “if you practice the Law” is in the present tense).\(^\text{123}\) For such an one, circumcision was meaningful (“circumcision is of value”) because it was done as a post-conversion act of obedience.

An unbeliever, by contrast (“but”), was one who was being a transgressor of the Law (the “are” in “are a transgressor of the Law” is in the present tense). For such an one, circumcision was meaningless\(^\text{124}\)

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\(^\text{121}\) According to Leviticus 24:16, “the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death.” Paul says in verse 24 that “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” [the Jews]. Thus, the Jews’ failure to obey the Law was causing others to commit an awful offense.

\(^\text{122}\) What causes Paul to “switch gears”? Perhaps his imaginary opponent (see comments on 2:1) raised the issue of circumcision at this point.

\(^\text{123}\) Paul is not speaking of a perfect practicing (v. 25)/perfect keeping (vs. 26 & 27) of the Law, but of a lifestyle that could be characterized as Law-abiding (cf. comments on 2:13). As Schreiner (p. 145) puts it: “Paul is not speaking of perfect obedience, but of obedience that clarifies that one has been transformed.” Rather than “sinless” practicing/keeping of the Law, Schreiner (p. 145) speaks of “significant” and “substantial” practicing/keeping of It. John Piper (in a February 21, 1999 sermon on Romans 2:25-29 entitled, “Who is a True Jew?”) speaks of “sincere” practicing/keeping of the Law as opposed to “sinless” practicing/keeping of It.

\(^\text{124}\) Circumcision for an unbeliever was “as a wedding ring on an adulterer’s finger” (Hughes, p. 67).
(`your circumcision has become uncircumcision`) because it was done as a pre-conversion work intended to earn God’s favor.

So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? (2:26)

The physically-uncircumcised Gentile ("the uncircumcised man") who was keeping ("keeps" is in the present tense) the requirements of the Law gave evidence that he was a believer and would, thus, be regarded by God as a believer (spiritually circumcised) on Judgment Day ("will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?"; cf. comments on 2:13).

And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? (2:27)

As if the point of verse 26 (that physically-uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved) wasn’t appalling enough, Paul informs his Jewish opponent that such a saved Gentile ("he who is physically uncircumcised," yet "keeps the Law") would actually sit in judgment over him ("will he not judge you"), the Jew’s possession of the Law and practice of circumcision notwithstanding ("though having the letter of the Law and circumcision").

That the saved Gentile would “judge” the unsaved Jew does not mean “that the Gentile will pronounce sentence on the Jew but probably that he will be a witness for the prosecution in the sense that his relative obedience will be evidence of what the Jew ought to have been and could have been” (Cranfield, p. 58). See also Matthew 12:41-42//Luke 11:31-32 in this regard.

Once again, Paul makes the point that the believer was keeping ("keeps" is a present tense participle) the Law (cf. vs. 25 & 26), while the unbeliever was transgressing the Law (cf. v. 25). Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7:19 provide a succinct summation of his words in these verses (Romans 2:25-27): “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God” (cf. Galatians 5:6 and 6:15).

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125 The Jews actually believed that merely being circumcised was enough to save. For example, one Jewish rabbi of that day (quoted in Morris, pp. 139-140) said: “In the Hereafter Abraham will sit at the entrance to Gehenna [≈ Hell], and permit no circumcised Israelite to descend therein.”

126 Commenting on the words translated “keeps the requirements of the Law” by the NASB in verse 26, Cranfield (p. 58) states: “... [W]e must understand ‘observes the righteous requirements of the law’ [Cranfield’s translation] to mean, not a perfect fulfillment of the law’s demands ... , but a grateful and humble faith in God and the life turned in the direction of obedience which is its fruit.” See also footnote 123.
For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (2:28-29)

Paul concludes his discussion on the relative significance of circumcision by contrasting physical/outward circumcision with spiritual/inward circumcision. Someone may be physically circumcised, yet not be spiritually circumcised (cf. Jeremiah 9:25-26), while another may not be physically circumcised, yet be spiritually circumcised.

The important thing is not physical circumcision ("nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh," v. 28; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:19), but spiritual circumcision/circumcision of the heart ("circumcision is that which is of the heart," v. 29; cf. Leviticus 26:41, Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4, 9:25-26, Ezekiel 44:7, Acts 7:51, and Colossians 2:11). One may have the symbol, but not the substance (Harrison, p. 34)/the rite, but not the reality. The “true Jew”127 is anyone who has been circumcised spiritually/in heart (v. 28’s he is not a Jew who is one outwardly … v. 29’s But he is a Jew who is one inwardly”), i.e., a believer (cf. Romans 9:6b-8 and Galatians 3:7).

Such circumcision must be performed by God (“by the Spirit,” v. 29; cf. Colossians 2:11); it cannot be performed by human effort (“not by the letter,” v. 29).128

Paul concludes this section with a wordplay when he says that the true Jew’s “praise is not from men, but from God” (v. 29; cf. Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18, John 5:44, and 12:43). The name, “Jew” is derived from the name, “Judah,” and the name, “Judah” is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning “to praise” (see Genesis 29:35).129

Answering Objections (3:1-8)
Paul concludes his section on the sinfulness and condemnation of the Jew (2:1-3:8) by answering the objections of his imaginary Jewish opponent (see comments on 2:1) to what he has said in chapter 2. His opponent puts forth four basic objections in the form of questions (vs. 1, 3, 5, and 7), each of which Paul answers in turn (vs. 2, 4, 6, and 8). Several commentators (such as Schreiner and Lloyd-Jones) consider 3:1-8 to be one of the most challenging sections to interpret in the entire epistle.

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. (3:1-2)

In the previous section (2:17-29), Paul made the case that Jewish privileges (such as possession of the

127Whom Cranfield (p. 60) calls “the Israel within Israel.”

128For the Spirit-letter contrast elsewhere in Paul, see Romans 7:6 and 2 Corinthians 3:6.

129For a similar wordplay, see Genesis 49:8.
Law and the practice of circumcision) did not in and of themselves give the Jews any advantage when it came to God’s judgment, prompting his imaginary opponent to question if there was any advantage, then, in being a Jew (v. 1).

Previously (in 2:25), Paul had answered the second question in verse 1 by stating that “circumcision is of value if you practice the Law.” Viewed as ends in themselves, Jewish privileges were of no advantage. However, viewed as means to an end, Jewish privileges were highly advantageous/beneficial (“Great in every respect,” v. 2).

The first and foremost (“First of all,” v. 2) of these privileges was the possession of the Law (end of v. 2; cf. Deuteronomy 4:8, Psalm 147:19-20, Romans 9:4, and footnote 111). Though possession of the Law was in and of itself no value when it came to God’s judgment, this does not mean that possession of It was of no value. Because the Jews had been “entrusted with the oracles of God” (cf. Hebrews 5:12 and 1 Peter 4:11; NIV: “entrusted with the very words of God”), they held a distinct advantage over the Gentiles, being able to know God’s will (see 2:18).134

What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, “THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED.” (3:3-4)

Though the Jews had the distinct advantage of possessing the Law (v. 2), for the most part they did not take advantage of this advantage (start of v. 3). The fact of the matter is that the overwhelming majority of Jews did not believe (“…some did not believe, their unbelief …,” v. 3).135

130 The Greek verb translated “value” in 2:25 is the verb form of the Greek noun translated “benefit” in 3:1.

131 “Practice the Law” refers to post-conversion, faith-driven, significant/substantial/sincere (as opposed to sinless) practicing of the Law. See comments on 2:13 and footnote 123.

132 It is interesting that Paul gives only a first and not also a second, third, etc., though he does so later in the epistle (see 9:4-5). See 1:8 for the same phenomenon.

133 The Jews, like us today, have been given a sacred trust, the stewardship of the Truth (cf. Galatians 2:7, 1 Thessalonians 2:4, 1 Timothy 1:11, 2 Timothy 2:2, and Titus 1:3).

134 “By their possession of the Law the Jews have an advantage over the heathen, much as the educated man has a better chance in life than the one who has never been at school” (E. F. Scott, quoted in Morris, p. 153).

135 Paul goes easy on the Jews by saying “some.”
Though the Jews were unfaithful to God and His Word (start of v. 3), God will remain faithful to the Jews and to His promises to them (end of v. 3 and “let God be found true,” v. 4; cf. 2 Timothy 2:13). Though it is true that during the current dispensation, the church age, God’s program for the Jews is on hold, God will continue it in the end times (see Romans 11).

Grammatically, the question Paul asks in verse 3 is constructed in such a way in the original that a negative answer is expected. In verse 4, Paul emphatically answers it: “May it never be!” (cf. 3:6, 31, 6:2, 15, 7:7, 13, 9:14, 11:1, and 11). God will remain faithful (v. 3) and “true” (v. 4) to His promises to the Jews, not only if some did not believe (v. 3), but even if all of them did not (“though every man be found a liar,” v. 4).

In support of his assertion that God is faithful and true to His promises, Paul cites Psalm 51:4 (“as it is written, 'THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED,’” v. 4). It is difficult to see exactly how this citation supports the point that has been made. Up to this point, Paul has been speaking of God’s faithfulness to His promises to bless Israel, but the verse cited, in its Old Testament context, deals with God’s judgment. Perhaps the point is this: Because God is true, He is true to His promises to bless (vs. 3-4a), as well as to His promises to judge (see 2:1-16), and Psalm 51:4 is cited in confirmation of this latter point.

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? (3:5-6)

In response to Paul's citation of Psalm 51:4, the point of which is that “God's name and honor are cleared in his judgment of Jewish sinners” (Schreiner, p. 157), Paul's imaginary Jewish opponent (representative of the typical Jew of the day) displays the depth of his depravity by daring to question the rightness of God’s judgment simply because His judgment magnifies Himself (v. 5).137 As Calvin (pp. 118-119) puts it: “If God seeks nothing else, but to be glorified by men, why does he punish them, when they offend, since by offending they glorify him? Without cause then surely is he offended, if he derives the reason of his displeasure from that by which he is glorified.”

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136The KJV rendering, “God forbid” is a dynamic equivalent, unusual for the KJV. This is a case where the modern versions (such as the NASB and the NIV) translate more literally than the KJV does.

137The primary reason why God does anything is to bring honor and glory to Himself (see Ecclesiastes 3:14, NIV). Being God, He has no other choice but to be God-centered. He would be unjust were He not to give Himself the honor and glory which He so richly deserves. “God must choose his own glory ahead of all else. As the only infinite being, this is what he must do. To put something else in the primary place would in effect be a case of idolatry” (Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, p. 288). In response to an unbeliever who inferred that God was being out of line for doing so, a pastor friend of mine replied, “He’s not called the I AM for nothing.”
Such an objection was so outlandish that Paul, in effect, apologizes for even having to mention it (v. 5’s “I am speaking in human terms”; cf. Romans 6:19).\textsuperscript{138}

Paul once again (cf. v. 4) emphatically denies the validity of such an objection (“May it never be!,” v. 6; cf. Romans 9:14) because it leads to the conclusion that God could not, then, judge anyone (“For otherwise, how will God judge the world?,” v. 6), Gentiles included, a conclusion that no Jew would agree to.

But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just. (3:7-8)

The opponent’s objection (“why am I also still being judged as a sinner?,” v. 7) ultimately led to the ludicrous, end-justifies-the-means conclusion that sinning (“But if through my lie\textsuperscript{139},” v. 7; “Let us do evil,” v. 8) is actually a good thing because it benefits God (“the truth of God abounded to His glory,” v. 7; “that good may come,” v. 8). See 6:1 for a similar argument. As Calvin (p. 122) puts it: “If God is by our iniquity glorified, and if nothing can be done by man in this life more befitting than to promote the glory of God, then let us sin to advance his glory!”

Paul response in verse 8 is pointed: “Their condemnation is just.”\textsuperscript{140} Anyone who thinks this way is clearly a sinner deserving of God’s condemnation.

\textsuperscript{138}“That God might be unrighteous is so wide of anything that is possible that Paul asks pardon for even mentioning it” (Morris, p. 159).

\textsuperscript{139}Sin is a lie.

\textsuperscript{140}“The viewpoint taken by the Jewish objector, that it would not be right for God to punish his people for their sins, is implied to be fallacious, and, indeed, blasphemous, by the absurd conclusion to which his objection leads” (Moo, p. 195).
Sinfulness and Condemnation of All (3:9-20)

Paul now concludes the first major section of the epistle (1:18-3:20) with a sweeping indictment of all men, whether Jew or Gentile. All men are sinners under God’s condemnation.

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; (3:9)

Even though the Jews (the “we”) enjoyed many advantages over the Gentiles (the “they”), they did not take advantage of these advantages, thus showing themselves to be, like the Gentiles, “under sin” (cf. Galatians 3:22), that is, under the dominion/power/ sway of sin (cf. 7:14, where the NASB translates the same Greek phrase, “under sin” as “into bondage to sin”).

Paul has already made his case (“for we have already charged”) that “both Jews (in 2:1-3:8) and Greeks (in 1:18-32)” are under sin’s dominion.\(^{141}\)

as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEeks FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” (3:10-12)

To support his point that all men are under sin’s sway (v. 9), Paul, as he so often does in the book of Romans (see under “Two Outstanding Features of Romans” in “The Introduction to the Book of Romans”), quotes from the Old Testament (“as it is written”)\(^{142}\), stringing together\(^{143}\) six Old Testament passages in

\(^{141}\)Lloyd-Jones (2:195), commenting on this verse, states: “So when the apostle evangelizes, you see, he does it in this way. He does not come to people and say in his first approach, ‘How would you like to be a bit happier, or would you like to have a Friend, or are you seeking guidance?’ He does not say something like that. He does not start with that; he cannot possibly start with it. What is the use of asking questions like that if a man is in the wrong realm, if a man is under sin? The primary thing is not whether I am happy or miserable, or anything else; the question is, what is my relationship to God in the Judgment, what is my realm? If I am under sin, the first thing I want to know is how I can get out of that and be under grace. So we must not hesitate to say that an evangelism which does not start by a call to repentance and conviction of sin is unscriptural.”

\(^{142}\)“Paul’s argument has been that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, are sinners, and he now shows that this is no private opinion but one well grounded in Holy Writ” (Morris, p. 163). It is instructive that Paul does not appeal to human experience to validate his point (I’m sure he could have shared many specific examples of depravity in his day), but to Scripture.

\(^{143}\)This was a common practice among Jewish rabbis. This phenomenon was called a “charaz,” which literally meant “stringing pearls” (Hughes, p. 76).
The first Old Testament passage he cites is Psalm 14:1-3 (cf. Psalm 53:1-3). All men, without exception, are sinners (cf. 1 Kings 8:46 and Romans 3:23). "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS" (v. 10; cf. Psalm 143:2 and Ecclesiastes 7:20); therefore, all are desperately in need of the righteousness God provides (see 3:21f).

"THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS" (v. 11). The unbeliever's mind is blind to the truth and significance of God and the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:14 and 2 Corinthians 4:4).

Contrary to the "seeker" lingo of today's church growth gurus, the Scriptures teach that no unbeliever seeks for [literally "seeks out"; NIV: "searches for"] God ("THERE IS NONE WHO SEeks FOR God," v. 11). Some unbelievers may be "seekers," but what they are seeking is not the one and only (Isaiah 46:9) true and living God (Jeremiah 10:10) of the Bible, but a god of their own imagination. Only a believer, his mind having been enlightened by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, seeks for God and the things of God (cf. 2:7 and comments on).

Every unbeliever has turned aside ("ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE," v. 12; cf. Isaiah 53:6) from the "strait and narrow way" (Matthew 7:14, KJV).

All unbelievers are useless ("TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS," v. 12); they are not

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144 It is interesting to note that most of the Old Testament passages Paul cites in this section are from the book of Psalms, the “hymnal” of Israel. By contrast, hymns that speak of man’s depravity are often edited or removed from modern hymnals. Examples include “for such a worm as I” in At the Cross (see Job 25:6) and “a wretch like me” in Amazing Grace.

145 Notice how unequivocal Paul is on this point: “NONE” (v. 10); “NOT EVEN ONE” (v. 10); “NONE” (v. 11a); “NONE” (v. 11b); “ALL” (v. 12); “NONE” (v. 12); “NOT EVEN ONE” (v. 12).

146 There is nothing so unscriptural as to say that the natural man is seeking for God, and that his trouble is that nobody has ever given him the gospel that he has been waiting for and expecting to hear. This is a blank contradiction of the scriptural declaration that there is “none that seeketh after God”’ (Lloyd-Jones, 2:205-206). According to Scripture, God seeks us (Luke chapter 15 and 19:10), not vice versa. God is not lost! We are! David Platt (in his Radical Together) makes some perceptive points in response to the “seeker sensitive” evangelical church of our day: “But let me remind you of a startling reality that the Bible makes clear: ‘There is … no one who seeks God.’ So if the church is sensitive to seekers, and if no one is seeking God, then that means the church is sensitive to no one” (p. 108) and “So let’s be radically seeker sensitive in our churches. But let’s make sure we are being sensitive to the right Seeker” (p. 109).

147 The Greek word translated “useless” in verse 12 was used to describe soured milk (Morris, p. 167 and Lloyd-Jones, 2:207) and contaminated food.
fulfilling the purpose for which they were created, to glorify God (Isaiah 43:7; cf. footnote 63).

Unbelievers do not do good ("THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE," v. 12; cf. Matthew 19:17), not in a meritorious sense (see footnote 101).

"THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; (3:13-14)

In verses 13-18, Paul gets more specific about man’s sinfulness. Man’s depravity is total in that it affects every part of his being (cf. Isaiah 1:6), head (vs. 13-14 and 18) to toe (vs. 15-17), including throat, tongue, and lips (v. 13); mouth (v. 14); feet (v. 15); and eyes (v. 18).

In verses 13-14, Paul’s focus is on man’s sinful speech. In verse 13, he cites Psalm 5:9 and 140:3. The unbeliever’s throat is vividly described as an “OPEN GRAVE” (v. 13). The point of comparison is that the unbeliever’s communication is corrupt. "What proceeds out of their mouth is infected and putrid, and as the exhalation from a sepulchre proves the corruption within, so it is with the corrupt conversation of sinners" (Robert Haldane, quoted in Morris, p. 167).

The unbeliever’s speech is deceptive (“WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” v. 13; cf. Psalm 36:3), flattery being a prime example (the Old Testament text behind this, Psalm 5:9 speaks of flattery).

The unbeliever’s speech is venomous (“THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS," v. 13; cf. James 3:8).

In verse 14, Paul cites Psalm 10:7. The unbeliever’s mouth is “FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS” (v. 14; cf. James 3:9-10).

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148 If there is any significance to “throat,” it may be to signify the biblical truth that sins of speech are rooted deep within a man (see, for example, Matthew 12:34).

149 Cf. Ephesians 4:29, where Paul admonishes the Ephesians to shun “unwholesome” speech. The Greek adjective translated “unwholesome” in this verse is one which was used to describe rotten fish.

150 “The verb translated are full [in the NIV] points to a generous supply” (Morris, p. 168; cf. comments on 1:29).
“THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.” (3:15-17)

In verses 15-17, Paul cites Isaiah 59:7-8. While the focus in verses 13-14 was on verbal devastation, the focus in these verses is on physical devastation.

Unbelievers are “SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD” (v. 15; cf. Proverbs 1:11-16).


The unbeliever’s path is not only known for the presence of destruction and misery (v. 16), but also for the absence of peace (“AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN,” v. 17; cf. Isaiah 57:21).

“THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.” (3:18)

Paul culminates his string of Old Testament citations on the universal sinfulness of man with a citation of Psalm 36:1. Many are of the opinion that Paul purposefully saves this citation for last because it gives the underlying cause for the corruptions mentioned in the previous verses. For example, Schreiner (p. 167) states: “The root and basis of all sin is the failure to fear and reverence God.” Sadly, we live in a “no fear” culture that desperately needs to come to grips with the words of Matthew 10:28b: “. . . [F]ear Him [God] who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Henry (p. 384) states: “The fear of God … consists in an awful and serious regard to the word and will of God as our rule, to the honour and glory of God as our end.”

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; (3:19)

Having made his “closing argument” (vs. 10-18), Paul now gives the verdict (arising out of the charge of universal sinfulness he has pressed from 1:18 up to this point; cf. 3:9). Since every man is a sinner, every man is guilty before God (‘every mouth”; “all the world”).

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151 “Swift” is first in the Greek sentence, likely for emphasis. A literal rendering: “swift the feet of them to shed blood.”

152 So also Cranfield (p. 66): “The statement ‘destruction and misery mark their ways’ indicates the dire results of their activities with poetic evocativeness: wherever they go, they leave behind them a trail of destruction and misery.”
Though “those who are under the Law” are specifically Jews (see comments on 2:12b), Gentiles are not excluded (the Gentiles had “natural law”; see comments on 2:14-15). If Jews are guilty, Gentiles certainly are (an argument of the greater-to-the-lesser).  

The unbeliever will have nothing to say on Judgment Day (“every mouth may be closed”).  

because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. (3:20)  

The reason why every unbelieving Jew will hear a guilty verdict on Judgment Day (v. 19) is because (“because”) his works flow from a flesh-driven, unconverted heart, instead of from a faith-driven/Spirit-driven, converted one (cf. Romans 8:3-4).  

Any attempt by an unbeliever to be justified by doing the works of the Law in the power of the flesh will fail because such works cannot justify (“by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight”; cf. Acts 13:39, Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16, 3:11, and 21), the reason being that such works are tainted by human sinfulness (see Romans 8:3’s “weak as it was through the flesh”).  

The purpose of the Law was not to justify, but to make one conscious of sin (“for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin”, cf. Romans 7:7), to be a “tutor” to lead one to Christ (Galatians 3:24).  

This is the bad news (1:18-3:8). The good news is coming (3:21f).  

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153... [I]f the Jews, the people who might seem to have reason to regard themselves as an exception, are in fact no exception, then without doubt the entire human race lies under God’s judgment” (Cranfield, p. 67).  

154“The reference to the stopped mouth evokes the image of the defendant in court, who, when given the opportunity to speak in his own defence, remains silent, overwhelmed by the weight of the evidence against him” (Cranfield, p. 67).  

155“Paul [taught] that law keeping was necessary to be saved, but he emphasized that obedience to the law was the result of the Holy Spirit’s powerful work in believers” (Schreiner, p. 154; cf. footnote 98).  

156“The Law presents people with the demand of God. In our constant failure to attain the goal of that demand, we recognize ourselves to be sinners and justly condemned for our failure” (Moo, p. 210). “It is the straight edge of the Law that shows us how crooked we are” (J. B. Phillips, quoted in Morris, p. 172).
Romans 3:21-5:21

In 1:16-17, Paul stated his “thesis” for the book of Romans, declaring that in the gospel (the gospel being the theme for the book of Romans) “the righteousness of God is revealed” (1:17). In 1:18-3:20, Paul gave the bad news that all men (3:9-20), whether Gentile (1:18-32) or Jew (2:1-3:8), are unrighteous (3:10) and in desperate need of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel.

Beginning in 3:21 (“but now”), Paul gives the gospel, the good news (“gospel” literally means “good news”—see comments on 1:1) that the unrighteous can become righteous positionally (justification/imputed righteousness) (3:21-5:21); practically (sanctification/imparted righteousness) (6:1-8:16); and perfectly (glorification/impeccable righteousness) (8:17-30).

In the major section of 3:21-5:21, Paul teaches that positional righteousness/justification comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (3:21-31); supports justification by grace alone through faith alone (as opposed to works) from the Old Testament, using Abraham as an example (4:1-25); and suggests some of the benefits of justification (5:1-11) and the basis of justification (5:12-21).

Positional Righteousness Comes by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone in Christ Alone (3:21-31)

One of the most important words in all of theology is sola, Latin for “alone.” The Protestant Reformation (16th century A.D.) was based on the conviction that the Scriptures alone (sola scriptura) are authoritative, and that the Scriptures teach that salvation is by grace alone (sola gratia; its basis) though faith alone (sola fide; its means) in Christ alone (sola Christus; its object). Foundationally, sola is what distinguishes Protestants from Roman Catholics. The Reformers derived their “sola theology” primarily from Paul’s writings, especially from the book of Romans and such passages in Romans as 3:21-31.158

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157 Position is one’s legal or judicial status/standing. It is what someone is in God’s sight/how God views him. At the moment of conversion, one goes from being “in Adam”/positionally unrighteous (and, hence, condemned) to being “in Christ”/positionally righteous (and, hence, justified). Though positional truth is not experiential, it is just as true and real.

158 Lloyd-Jones (3:31) calls 3:21-31 “one of the greatest and most important sections in the whole of Scripture.” The first half of this section, 3:21-26, is particularly significant. Cranfield (p. 68) calls it “the centre and heart of the whole of Rom 1.16b-15.13.” Martin Luther (quoted in Moo, p. 218) called it “the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible.” Morris (p. 173) calls it “possibly the most important single paragraph ever written.”
But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, (3:21)

That 3:21 marks a transition in the epistle is clearly seen by the words, “but now.”159

Just prior to his lengthy discussion of man’s sinfulness in 1:18-3:20, Paul spoke in 1:17 of the righteousness of God being revealed in the gospel, a point that he resumes once again in 3:21 with the words, “the righteousness of God has been manifested.”

“Righteousness of God” means the righteousness from God, the righteousness that God provides (cf. comments on 1:17).

This righteousness was manifested “now” through the righteousness (sinless life) of Christ (cf. 2 Timothy 1:10).

It had to be “apart from the Law” because the Law could not provide it (cf. Romans 3:20, 28, 4:6, Galatians 2:16, and 3:21); therefore, Christ had to (see especially Romans 8:3-4).

Though the righteousness of God was apart from the Mosaic Law, it was “witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,” i.e., the Old Testament160 (cf. Romans 1:2 and 16:25-26). In chapter 4, using Abraham as an example, Paul will go on to show how the Old Testament did, in fact, teach that the righteousness God provides was apart from the Mosaic Law (cf. Galatians 3:8 and Paul’s citation of Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17).

even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; (3:22)

If anyone is to have a right standing before God (be positionally righteous; “the righteousness of God”),

159 “There are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than just these two words ‘But now’” (Lloyd-Jones, 3:25). I am reminded of another glorious transition in Scripture, “But God” in Ephesians 2:4.

he must have faith in/believe\textsuperscript{161} in Jesus Christ ("through faith in Jesus Christ").

The "faith" of which Paul speaks here is saving faith. Saving faith is the divinely-energized act of the sinner whereby he wholeheartedly turns to the Savior to save him from his sin. It has also been defined as "the knowledge of [intellectual element], assent to [emotional element], and unreserved trust in [volitional element] the accomplished redemption of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures" (Dr. Rolland McCune, Systematic Theology 3 class notes, p. 29; cf. footnote 49).\textsuperscript{162}

The object of one’s faith must be Christ ("in Jesus Christ"); cf. John 3:16, 36, Acts 16:31, Romans 3:26, and Galatians 2:16), both His person/who He is (John 8:24 and 20:31) and His work/what He did\textsuperscript{163}, the former (who He is, God in the flesh) giving the latter (what He did, lived an infinitely valuable/meritorious life and died an infinitely valuable/meritorious death, both in the sinner’s behalf) its value/merit. Notice Romans 10:9 in this regard: “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord [His person], and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead [His work, capped by His resurrection], you will be saved.” The object of one’s faith must be Christ alone (John 14:6 and Acts 4:12).

God’s righteousness is available to all without distinction ("for all those who believe; for there is no distinction"). Both Jews and Gentiles can receive it through faith in Christ (cf. Romans 10:12-13).

\textbf{for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (3:23)}

The reason why ("for") all without distinction can receive the righteousness that God provides (v. 22) is

\textsuperscript{161}The Greek verb translated “believe” is in the present tense. Thus, we could translate more literally: “are believing.” A true believer will persevere in the faith.

\textsuperscript{162}Other definitions of saving faith: “Saving faith may be defined as a response to God’s call by the acceptance of Christ with the total person—that is, with assured conviction of the truth of the gospel, and with trustful reliance on God in Christ for salvation, together with genuine commitment to Christ and to his service” (Anthony Hoekema, Saved by Grace, p. 140); saving faith is “a firm, trustful reliance; a vigorous act of commitment; an entire self-commitment of the soul to Jesus as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world” (B. B. Warfield, quoted in Vernon Grounds, “The Nature of Faith,” Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society, Fall 1963, p. 124); saving faith is “a whole-souled movement of self-commitment to Christ for salvation from sin and its consequences” (John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied, p. 107).

\textsuperscript{163}“The Reformers recognized that the essence of saving faith is to bring the sinner lost and dead in trespasses and sins into direct personal contact with the Saviour himself, contact which is nothing less than that of self-commitment to him in all the glory of his person and perfection of his work [emphasis mine] as he is freely and fully offered in the gospel” (John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied, p. 112).
because all without distinction\(^\text{164}\) (and all without exception) need it, being sinners ("all have sinned"; cf. 1 Kings 8:46, Psalm 143:2, Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:10-12, 5:12, and Galatians 3:22).


The phrase, "glory of God" is somewhat mysterious.\(^\text{166}\) Paul's point seems to be that sin prevents men from reflecting God’s glory. Sin removes the moral likeness to God in which mankind was originally created (part of the image of God in man).\(^\text{167}\) Salvation gradually restores this likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18) until, at the point of glorification, it is completely restored (1 John 3:2).\(^\text{168}\)

**being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; (3:24)**

All without distinction are sinners (v. 23). All without distinction can be saved (v. 22). Paul returns to this latter point here in verse 24. Salvation comes through justification ("being justified").\(^\text{169}\) Justification is the

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\(^{164}\) "In the matter of being sinners there is no distinguishing between one person and another” (Morris, p. 176).

\(^{165}\) In my opinion, “fall short” is not the best translation of the underlying Greek verb, primarily because it potentially gives the impression that unbelievers make some progress toward God, but just not enough. Representative of this kind of thinking is that of H.C.G. Moule (quoted in Morris, p. 177): “The harlot, the liar, the murderer, are short of it; but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of an Alp; but you are as little able to touch the stars as they.” A better translation, in my opinion, would be “lack” (so Murray, p. 112; so Cranfield, p. 69). The verb is translated this way in 1 Corinthians 1:7 (“lacking”) and in 1 Corinthians 12:24 (“lacked”). Every unbeliever absolutely lacks the glory of God. No one unbeliever is any closer to it than another. “[Paul] means that we all lack, we all have a need of the glory of God” (Lloyd-Jones, 3:50). The verb describes a condition, not an action (Murray, p. 112).

\(^{166}\) Morris (p. 177) mentions at least 6 different interpretations among commentators. Murray (pp. 112-113) gives four possible options.

\(^{167}\) “All people fail to exhibit that ‘being-like-God’ for which they were created” (Moo, p. 226).

\(^{168}\) “The glory of God’ is that state of ‘God-likeness’ which has been lost because of sin and which will be restored in the last day to every Christian” (Moo, p. 302).

\(^{169}\) Harrison (p. 42) calls justification “the leading doctrinal contribution of Romans.”
act of God whereby He declares a sinner to be legally righteous\textsuperscript{170} due to the righteousness of Christ (His sinless life) being imputed to (placed on the account of) him at the moment of conversion (cf. comments on 1:17).

In justification, the believer becomes positionally righteous due to the perfect righteousness of Christ being graciously ("by His grace"; cf. Titus 3:7; grace is unmerited favor, getting something good that one does not deserve) given to him "as a gift" (cf. Romans 5:15-17, 6:23, and Ephesians 2:8; cf. also John 15:25, where the same Greek word translated "as a gift" here in Romans 3:24 is translated "without a cause").\textsuperscript{171}

Though salvation is free, it is not cheap; though it is a gift, we must never forget that it is a gift Someone had to pay for. That Someone was Jesus Christ ("through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus"),\textsuperscript{172} Redemption is the act of God whereby He buys the believer out of the slave market of sin/releases the sinner from sin's bondage (John 8:34, Romans 6:16-22, and Titus 3:3) by paying a ransom\textsuperscript{173}, the ransom being the death of Christ (Matthew 20:28//Mark 10:45, Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, Galatians 3:13, Ephesians 1:7, 1 Timothy 2:6, Hebrews 9:12, 1 Peter 1:18-19, and Revelation 5:9).

\textsuperscript{170}Justification does not mean to make righteous (an impartation of righteousness), but to declare righteous (an imputation of righteousness) (see Deuteronomy 25:1 and Luke 7:29). The believer is “made righteous” at justification only in a positional sense. He is made practically righteous through sanctification and perfectly righteous through glorification.

\textsuperscript{171}“No element in Paul’s doctrine of justification is more central than this—God’s justifying act is not constrained to any extent or degree by anything that we are or do which could be esteemed as predisposing God to this act. And not only is it the case that nothing in us or done by us constrains to this act but all that is ours compels the opposite judgment—the whole world is brought in guilty before God (cf. vss. 9, 19). This action on God’s part derives its whole motivation, explanation, and determination from what God himself is and does in the exercise of free and sovereign grace. Merit of any kind on the part of man, when brought into relation to justification, contradicts the first article of the Pauline doctrine and therefore of his gospel. It is the glory of the gospel of Christ that it is one of free grace” (Murray, p. 115).

\textsuperscript{172}Wiersbe (p. 523; emphasis his) shares the following: “Dr. G. Campbell Morgan was trying to explain ‘free salvation’ to a coal miner, but the man was unable to understand it. ‘I have to pay for it,’ he kept arguing. With a flash of divine insight, Dr. Morgan asked, ‘How did you get down into the mine this morning?’ ‘Why, it was easy,’ the man replied. ‘I just got on the elevator and went down.’ Then Morgan asked, ‘Wasn’t that too easy? Didn’t it cost you something?’ The man laughed. ‘No, it didn’t cost me anything; but it must have cost the company plenty to install that elevator.’ Then the man saw the truth: ‘It doesn’t cost me anything to be saved, but it cost God the life of His Son.’”

\textsuperscript{173}The idea of ransom is inherent in the Greek word for redemption. The Greek word for redemption is \textit{apolutrosis}. The Greek word for ransom is \textit{lutron}. The ransom is paid to God the Father.
whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (3:25-26)\textsuperscript{174}

Paul introduces another significant soteriological (soteriology is the doctrine of salvation) concept, “propitiation” (v. 25). The death of Christ (“His blood”\textsuperscript{175}, v. 25) propitiated (appeased, pacified, satisfied) God the Father’s wrath toward sinners (Romans 1:18, 2:5, 8, 3:5, and 5:9). See also 1 John 2:2 and 4:10.

Notice that God the Father didn’t need to be coaxed into this, for it is He who took the initiative (v. 25’s “whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation”).

Unfortunately, because of aversion to the concept of a wrathful God\textsuperscript{176}, “nearly every modern translation waters down” (Morris, p. 180) this concept in the way they translate this word, “propitiation.” Fortunately, the NASB is not among them.\textsuperscript{177}

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\textsuperscript{174}Lloyd-Jones (3:95-96) relates how the legendary poet and hymn writer, William Cowper was saved as a result of reading Romans 3:25: “…[H]e was in his room in an agony of soul, under deep and terrible conviction. He could not find peace, and he was walking back and fore, almost at the very point of despair, feeling utterly hopeless, not knowing what to do with himself. Suddenly in sheer desperation he sat down on a chair by the window in the room. There was a Bible there, so he picked it up and opened it, and he happened to come to this passage. This is what he tells us: ‘The passage which met my eye was the twenty-fifth verse of the third chapter of Romans. On reading it I received immediate power to believe. The rays of the Sun of Righteousness fell on me in all their fullness. I saw the complete sufficiency of the expiation which Christ had wrought for my pardon and entire justification. In an instant I believed and received the peace of the Gospel. If the arm of the Almighty God had not supported me I believe I should have been overwhelmed with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears; transports choked my utterance. I could only look to heaven in silent fear, overflowing with love and wonder.’”

\textsuperscript{175}“Blood” here is metaphorical, primarily and ultimately referring to the violent, bloody death of Christ on the Cross (compare Romans 5:9 with Romans 5:10), not to His literal, physical blood.

\textsuperscript{176}Perhaps one reason why the idea of a God who inflicts wrath is unsettling to some is because they think of wrath solely in its human, tainted expression. However, as Cranfield (p. 77) reminds us: “God’s wrath, unlike all human wrath, is perfectly righteous, and therefore free from every trace of irrationality, caprice, and vindictiveness ....”

\textsuperscript{177}The NIV seems to do so with its rendering, “sacrifice of atonement.” However, it does give as an alternate rendering (in a marginal note) “the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin.” Hendriksen (p. 128) translates the word as “wrath-removing sacrifice”; Cranfield (p. 69) as “propitiatory sacrifice”; Murray (p. 117) as “propitiatory offering.”
Since man’s sin is a crime committed against an infinite God (see comments on 3:23), and since the penalty has to fit the crime, the penalty for sin is eternal death (Romans 6:23), permanent separation from God in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). The only way this penalty can be avoided is if Someone whose death would be of infinite value could die in the sinner’s place. That Someone was Jesus Christ. Christ’s humanity made His death possible (God cannot die: 1 Timothy 1:17 and 6:16; cf. comments on 1:3), while His deity made it effectual.

Christ’s death propitiated God the Father’s wrath by satisfying God the Father’s justice (“This was to demonstrate His righteousness,” v. 25; “for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time,” v. 26).

It is only “through faith” (v. 25) that Christ’s death becomes effectual for the sinner.

Significantly, the Greek word translated “propitiation” in verse 25 is used in Hebrews 9:5 in reference to the “mercy seat.” The mercy seat was the cover of the ark of the covenant, located in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, upon which the high priest sprinkled the blood on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:14-15). Whereas the mercy seat was hidden from public view (being behind the veil), our Lord’s death on the Cross was not (“displayed publicly” in v. 25; cf. “manifested” in 3:21; cf. Galatians 3:1).

Old Testament saints were saved “on credit”178; thus, Christ’s death justified the fact that God “passed over”179 (v. 25) their sins (“the sins previously committed,” v. 25).180 See also Hebrews 9:15.

Were it not for Christ, God’s justification of the wicked would be abominable (Proverbs 17:15), but because of Christ, it is just.181 Thus, through the death of Christ, God can be both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (v. 26). As John Stott put it: “God’s righteous way of righteousing the unrighteous.”

178... [T]he Old Testament saints believed in the future Redeemer who was to come, whose work was typified by the sacrificial system in Old Testament worship. The people in the Old Testament looked forward to the future, trusting in that which was to come. We, in the New Testament age, look backward to that which has already been accomplished” (Sproul, p. 85).

179“[G]od could tolerate the sin of human beings only because he looked forward to the death of his Son as an atonement for sin” (Schreiner, p. 198). “God has in fact been able to hold His hand and pass over sins, without compromising His goodness and mercy, because His intention has all along been to deal with them once and for all, decisively and finally and altogether adequately, through the Cross” (Cranfield, p. 74).

180Forgiveness of sin is not baseless, as if God decides to give some (that is, believers) a free pass. In order for God to remain just, every sin must be punished. The unbeliever pays the penalty for his sin in Hell, while Jesus paid the penalty for the believer’s sin on the Cross.

181Schreiner (p. 198) perceptively points out that while the contention of the unbelieving Jewish objector in chapter 3 was the propriety of God’s condemnation of sin (see comments on 3:5-8), the real question is: How can God justly forgive sin? Paul’s answer? Christ.
Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. (3:27)

In light of the fact that justification is by grace alone through faith alone (preceding context of vs. 22-26), it naturally follows that boasting (in human works) is illegitimate (“Where then is boasting?”; cf. Romans 4:2 and Ephesians 2:8-9).¹⁸² Such boasting is “excluded,” literally “shut out” (the Greek verb is ekkleio, from the Greek preposition ek, meaning “out” + the Greek verb kleio, meaning “to shut”; cf. Galatians 4:17 in the NASB). Boasting is excluded because of the “law” (NIV: “principle”—so also Lloyd-Jones, 3:117; cf. Romans 7:21 for a similar usage of the word, “law”) of faith.”¹⁸³ The believer’s only boast is in God (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:29-31 and Galatians 6:14).

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (3:28)

Because (“For”) justification is by faith (“we maintain that a man is justified by faith”; cf. vs. 22, 26, and 30, as well as Galatians 2:16), not by works (“apart from the works of the Law”; cf. vs. 20-21, as well as Romans 4:6 and Galatians 2:16), boasting in works is illegitimate (v. 27).

Note that a man is justified “by,” or through, faith, not because of faith. Faith is the means of justification, not the basis of it. The basis is the grace of God. If faith was the basis, one might be tempted to boast, surmising (wrongly) that faith is ultimately his doing. However, faith is a gracious gift of God (see v. 24 and comments on, as well as John 6:65, Acts 14:27, Ephesians 2:8, and Philippians 1:29).

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, (3:29)

Paul asks two rhetorical questions here in verse 29, the first (“Or is God the God of Jews only?”) demanding a “no” answer and the second (“Is He not the God of Gentiles also?”) a “yes” answer, which Paul supplies (“Yes, of Gentiles also”). Unknown to the English reader is the fact that in the original, “Jews” is the second word in the first question, for emphasis. The question literally reads: Or of Jews [is God] the God only? The Jews really, but wrongly (cf. Romans 9:24), thought so.

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¹⁸² I like what Homer Kent (on p. 39 of his commentary on Ephesians) has to say about this: “Because fallen human nature is so prone to boast of its accomplishments and to take credit where there is even the slightest occasion, God devised a plan to save men in their hopelessness which allows no grounds whatever for human pride to operate.”

¹⁸³ Commenting on this point, Wiersbe (p. 524) states: “The swimmer, when he is saved from drowning, does not brag because he trusted the lifeguard.”
since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. (3:30)

To support his point made in verse 29 (notice the “since” that begins v. 30), Paul alludes to what is called the Jewish “Shema”\(^\text{184}\): “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Jews wrongly interpreted this verse to mean that Yahweh was their God only (notice that the verse simply says that Yahweh was Israel’s God, not that He was Israel’s God only, though it is true that He was Israel’s God especially).

Paul focuses on the last statement in the Shema: God is one. Since God is one, He is the God of everyone who places his or her faith in Him (cf. Isaiah 45:22, Romans 3:22, and 10:12-13), whether Jew (“God … will justify the circumcised by faith”) or Gentile (“and the uncircumcised through faith”; cf. Galatians 3:8). The means is the same for all: “by faith”/“through faith” (cf. Romans 1:16-17).

Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law. (3:31)

If justification is through faith and not through the works of the Law (v. 28), does this mean that faith nullifies the Law (“Do we then nullify the Law through faith?”)? Paul answers this question with an emphatic “May it never be!” (cf. 3:4, 6, 6:2, 15, 7:7, 13, 9:14, 11:1, and 11). Rather than nullifying the Law (“On the contrary”), faith establishes It (“we establish the Law”), both in that such faith is in One, Christ, who fulfilled the Law and in that faith enables one to do the Law (2:13)/practice the Law (2:25)/keep the Law (2:26-27). See Romans 8:3-4.

\(^{184}\)“Shema” is basically a transliteration of the Hebrew verb meaning “to hear,” the verb that begins Deuteronomy 6:4.
Justification by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone: Abraham as a Prime Example (4:1-25)

In 3:21, Paul began giving the gospel, the good news that the unrighteous can become righteous through the righteousness God provides, the righteousness (sinless life) of Jesus Christ.

In the major section of 3:21-5:21, Paul teaches that the unrighteous can become positionally righteous/justified.

In 3:21-31, he taught that justification comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

In order to support the truth that justification comes by grace alone through faith alone, Paul (as he so often does in the book of Romans—see under “Two Outstanding Features of Romans” in “The Introduction to the Book of Romans”) appeals to the Old Testament (cf. 3:21 and comments on), showing that Abraham was a prime example of one who was justified by grace alone through faith alone.\(^{185}\)

Abraham was not justified by works (vs. 1-8), including circumcision (vs. 9-12) or the keeping of the Mosaic Law (vs. 13-15). He was justified by faith (vs. 16-25).

Abraham Was Not Justified by Works (4:1-8)\(^{186}\)

Paul begins making his case that Abraham was justified by grace alone through faith alone by showing that Abraham was not justified by faith’s antithesis, works.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? (4:1)

In 3:27-28, Paul made the point that men are justified by faith, not by works (3:28); therefore, boasting is excluded (3:27). The Jews, however, believed that Abraham was justified by works\(^{187}\) (4:2a) and, therefore, had reason to boast (4:2b). Paul corrects this misconception by showing that even Abraham was justified by faith, not by works.

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\(^{185}\)“Paul’s emphasis on faith is not some new-fangled innovation. God has always saved people by the way of grace, as the case of Abraham shows” (Morris, p. 202).


\(^{187}\)The Jews believed that Abraham perfectly kept the Law. For example, the 2\(^{nd}\) century B.C. Jewish Old Testament Pseudepigraphical Book of Jubilees states in 23:10: “Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life” (cited in Hendriksen, p. 145). That Abraham was not perfect is seen by the fact that twice (in Genesis 12:10-20 and in Genesis chapter 20) he told the “half-truth” (see Genesis 20:12) that his wife, Sarah was his sister.
Abraham was the physical father of the Jews ("our forefather according to the flesh"); cf. Matthew 3:9 and John 8:39. Paul will go on to show (in 4:11-12) that Abraham is also the spiritual father of every believer, whether Jew or Gentile.

What did Abraham find ("What then shall we say that Abraham ... has found?")?, i.e., find to be the case/discover by experience (Moo, p. 259)? He found/discovered that justification is by faith. The Greek verb translated "has found" is in the perfect tense, indicating a past event with continuing relevance, the implication being that justification continues to be by faith, not by works (Harrison, p. 47).

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. (4:2)

The fact of the matter is that Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith (cf. 3:28) and, therefore, could not boast before God (cf. 3:27 and 1 Corinthians 1:29).

Was Abraham Justified by Works or Wasn’t He?

Here in Romans, Paul makes it quite clear that Abraham was not justified by works. However, James (in James 2:21-24) teaches that Abraham was justified by works. Which is it? Both. Paul is speaking of pre-conversion works, James of post-conversion works. Paul is speaking of saving faith, James of sanctifying faith. Paul is speaking of a declaration of righteousness, James of a demonstration of righteousness. Paul is focusing on Genesis 15, James on Genesis 22. James is likely correcting an abuse of Paul’s teaching. Paul taught, and rightly so, that justification is by faith, not by works. Some erroneously inferred from this a license to sin (see Romans 3:8 and 6:1). James corrected this error by stressing that though it is true that it is faith alone that saves (sola fide), the faith that saves is never alone, but will be authenticated by works.

For what does the Scripture say? “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (4:3)

In support of his point that Abraham is no exception to the rule that men are justified by faith, not by works,

188"Found" is the Greek verb, eurisko, from which we get our English word, “eureka.”

189Victor Hamilton, in his commentary on Genesis (vol. 1, p. 441), speaks of the works of Abraham “not as a merit for salvation but as a mark of salvation.”

190For further study, see John Piper’s August 8, 1999 sermon (on Romans 3:27-4:5 and James 2:14-26) entitled, “Does James Contradict Paul?” This sermon can be accessed at www.desiringGOD.org. See also comments on 2:13.
Paul appeals to the ultimate authority, God’s Word (“For what does the Scripture say?”--this is the key question!)

Paul cites Genesis 15:6 (also cited by Paul in Galatians 3:6 and by James in James 2:23), which speaks of the conversion of Abraham (which most likely took place in Genesis 12:1-5). In Genesis 15:1-5, God promised Abraham that he would have an heir from his own body (v. 4). Abraham by faith took God at His word (“ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD”).

Due to Abraham’s faith (first exhibited in 12:1-5 and again in 15:1-5), God credited righteousness to Abraham’s account (“AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS”; cf. Romans 10:10). The Greek verb translated “CREDITED” is a key word in Romans 4, found 11 times in the chapter. It is an accounting term that means to credit to one’s account. It is “used to indicate what a person, considered by himself, is not, or does not have, but is reckoned, held, or regarded to be, or to have” (Hendriksen, p. 147); “something is reckoned to a person that is not inherent to him or her” (Schreiner, p. 215).

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, (4:4-5)

Works and grace are antithetical (see especially Romans 11:6). If justification was by works, then it would not be by grace (“as a favor” in v. 4 is literally “according to grace”). Rather, it would be by obligation (“as what is due” in v. 4 is literally “according to debt”).

However, it cannot be by works, for God “justifies the ungodly” (v. 5). Though justifying the ungodly is normally unjust (Proverbs 17:15 and 24:24), God can justly do so (Romans 3:26) because Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6), taking away their condemnation, and lived for the ungodly, giving them a righteous standing before God (cf. Romans 5:18b, 5:19b, and 2 Corinthians 5:21b).

All of this happens only to the one who does not depend on his own work (“the one who does not work,” v. 5; cf. Romans 3:20 and comments on), but on the work of Christ (“believes in Him,” v. 5; cf. Romans 3:22 and 26).194

191 The Greek verb translated “does say” is in the present tense. Commenting on this, Morris (p. 196) states: “It may be too much to press the use of the present tense here, but it fits in with the vital role Paul assigns to Scripture. It still speaks.”

192 Saving faith involves both believing God and believing what God says, i.e., it is both personal and propositional (Derek Kidner, cited in Morris, p. 197).

193 The NASB translates it “credited” nine times (vs. 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, and 24), “credits” once (v. 6), and “take into account” once (v. 8).

194 Morris (p. 198) perceptively points out Paul’s implicit affirmation of the deity of Christ at this point in the epistle: “[Paul] has spoken of faith in Christ (3:22, 26); now he speaks of faith
just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. “BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.” (4:6-8)

As further (“just as ... also,” v. 6) Old Testament support for his case that justification is by faith, not by works, Paul summons David as a witness (“David ... speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works,” v. 6), citing Psalm 32:1-2.

In the 32nd Psalm, David basks in the blessing of God's forgiveness (“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN,” v. 7), a forgiveness that covered (“WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED,” v. 7; cf. Psalm 85:2) such serious sins as adultery and murder.

Because David was a believer, God viewed him as positionally righteous, as one having had righteousness credited to his account and not having had sin credited to his account (“BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT,” v. 8; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:19).

David's beatitude in Psalm 32 is an intense one, the Hebrew adjective translated “blessed” in Psalm 32:1 and in Psalm 32:2 being a plural of intensity (thus, one could translate: “O, how blessed . . .!”). Justification is, indeed, a great blessing.

Unknown to the English reader is the fact that Paul uses an emphatic double negative in verse 8. The Greek literally reads: “. . . not not [i.e., certainly not] take into account.” When Adam sinned, his sin (called “original sin” by theologians) was placed on the account of every one of his descendants. Thus, every human being is conceived in a state of sin (Psalm 51:5). When a person exercises saving faith, an extraordinary exchange takes place. The believer’s sin is taken away, being laid on Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21a), while Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer’s account (2 Corinthians 5:21b).

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195 As with “does say” in verse 3, “speaks” in verse 6 is in the present tense. See footnote 191 for the possible significance.

196 “Blessed” describes a condition in which, foundationally, all is well between a man and God.

197 The same literary device is used by John in John 6:35, 37, 10:28, and 13:8.
Abraham Was Not Justified by Circumcision (4:9-12)

Having made the point that Abraham was not justified by works (vs. 1-8), Paul further develops this point by pointing out that Abraham was not justified by circumcision.

Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, “FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; (4:9-10)

The blessing (“this blessing,” v. 9) of the non-imputation of sin (vs. 7-8)/the imputation of righteousness (“For we say, “FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” v. 9; cf. vs. 3-6), two sides of the same coin, is a blessing given to all without distinction; both Jew (“the circumcised,” v. 9) and Gentile (“the uncircumcised,” v. 9) can experience it.

As proof of this point, Paul points out in verse 10 that Abraham was justified (Genesis 12) before he was circumcised (Genesis 17), while he was still a “Gentile” (“Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised,” v. 10), thus showing that Gentiles can also be justified. Abraham was justified no later than Genesis 15 and circumcised approximately 14 years (so Harrison, Hughes, Hendriksen, Lloyd-Jones, Murray, and Wiersbe; Witmer says 13 years; Combs says 15 years) later in Genesis 17.

and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. (4:11-12)

Abraham was justified by faith, apart from circumcision (vs. 9-10). His circumcision, however, was not inconsequential. Though it did not save him, it did signify (“the sign of circumcision,” v. 11) and authenticate that he was truly saved (“a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised,” v. 11).200 It was a seal that his faith was real (faith was the cause/root, while circumcision was the effect/fruit).

198 “It could even be said that the Gentile has first claim on the patriarch, who was just like himself when justified” (Harrison, p. 50).

199 The Greek verb translated “follow in the steps of” was a military one, meaning to “march in file” (Morris, p. 204).

200 This is not to say that everyone who got circumcised was saved, only that everyone who was truly saved got circumcised (in the case of proselytes).
Abraham’s paternity was not only physical, but more so spiritual. Abraham is the spiritual father of every believer, whether Gentile ("the father of all who believe without being circumcised," v. 11) or Jew ("and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham," v. 12).201 See also Luke 19:9, Romans 2:28-29, 4:16-17, Galatians 3:6-9, and 29.

Abraham Was Not Justified by the Mosaic Law (4:13-15)
Having made the point that Abraham was not justified by works (vs. 1-8), including circumcision (vs. 9-12), Paul continues to further develop this point by pointing out that Abraham was not justified by observing the Mosaic Law.

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. (4:13)

God had promised Abraham “that he would be heir of the world”202 (cf. Galatians 3:29). Abraham’s faith in God and in what God said (first seen in Genesis 12:1-5), exemplified by his faith in this promise, was the means of his justification (Genesis 15:6).203

Because Abraham was a sinner (4:5), he could not have possibly been justified in conjunction with Law-keeping (“not through the Law”)204, but had to be justified “through the righteousness of faith,” i.e., the righteousness given to those who believe (cf. Romans 3:22).

201 The words of a popular children’s song come to mind: “Father Abraham had many sons. Many sons had father Abraham. I am one of them, and so are you . . . .”

202 This statement is somewhat problematic in that the Old Testament nowhere explicitly records such a promise made to Abraham. However, it does do so implicitly. God promised Abraham (in what is usually referred to as the “Abrahamic covenant”) that 1) he would have many descendants, that 2) his descendants would possess the land of Canaan, and that 3) his descendants would be a means of blessing to the peoples of the world. See Genesis 12:1-3, 7, 13:14-17, chapter 15, 17:1-8, and 22:15-18. That Abraham and his descendants would inherit the world “succinctly summarizes the three key provisions of the promise as it unfolds in Genesis” (Moo, p. 274).

203 “Paul’s statement [in v. 13] is in striking contrast to the Rabbis’ assumption that all the promises were made to Abraham on the basis of his fulfillment of the law (which, according to them, was already known to him and performed in its completeness, although it had not yet been promulgated) and to their understanding of his faith as itself a meritorious work” (Cranfield, p. 90).

204 Furthermore, according to Galatians 3:17, the Mosaic Law was not even given until 430 years after the promise was made to Abraham.
For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; (4:14)

Law-keeping and faith are antithetical when it comes to justification. If justification was achieved through Law-keeping (“if those who are of the Law are heirs”), then it would not be graciously given by God through faith (“faith is made void”) and the unconditional promise (it could not have been conditioned upon Law-keeping, because the Law had not yet been given and because the Law could not be perfectly kept anyway) made to Abraham and to his descendants could not be realized (“the promise is nullified”). See also Galatians 3:18.

for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. (4:15)

Justification cannot be achieved through Law-keeping, because no one can perfectly keep the Law, being a sinner.\textsuperscript{205} The Law reveals man’s sinfulness (Romans 3:20b, 5:20a, and 7:7-13), showing man to be justly under God’s wrath (“the Law brings about wrath”).

The Law renders man’s sinfulness unquestionable, because the standard broken is one that is clearly delineated. This is the idea behind the Greek word translated “violation” (KJV: “transgression”). As Schreiner (p. 230) states: “Transgression [violation] of the law involves greater responsibility since the infraction is conscious and therefore involves rebellion against a known standard.”\textsuperscript{206} Paul’s point at the end of this verse (“where there is no law, there also is no violation”) is not that there was no such thing as sin prior to the giving of the Mosaic Law (Romans 5:13a), but that there was no such thing as “violation” prior to the giving of It.

Abraham Was Justified by Faith (4:16-25)

Having pointed out that Abraham was not justified by works (vs. 1-8), including circumcision (vs. 9-12) or the observing of the Mosaic Law (vs. 13-15), Paul now points to what Abraham was justified by, faith.

\textsuperscript{205}“If it is the case that the inheritance is to be based on adherence to the law, then there will be no heirs, because no fallen human being can adequately adhere to the law—and that means that faith is exercised in vain and the promise will never be fulfilled” (John Calvin, quoted in Moo, p. 275).

\textsuperscript{206}Later (p. 362), Schreiner speaks of transgression as a deliberate and rebellious violation of God’s will. So also Cranfield (p. 91): “The law, by showing men with inescapable clarity that what they are doing is contrary to God’s declared will, gives to their continuing to do it the character of conscious and wilful disobedience, of deliberate rebellion against God: ‘transgression’ in the Bible denotes the disobeying of definite commandments.” So also Calvin (p. 172): “But the Apostle speaks not of the mere transgression of what is right, from which no man is exempt; but he calls that a transgression, when man, having been taught what pleases and displeases God, knowingly and willfully passes over the boundaries fixed by God’s word; or, in other words, transgression here is not a mere act of sin, but a wilful determination to violate what is right.”
For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (4:16)

Because of (“For”) human sinfulness (“this reason”; see comments on verse 15), justification cannot be by merit through works, but must be by grace (“in accordance with grace”; cf. 3:24) through faith (“by faith”).

Where human sinfulness produced a falling short, i.e., a lack (Romans 3:23; see footnote 165), God graciously intervened in a unilateral, unconditional fashion, guaranteeing that the promise made to Abraham and to his descendants (the “it”) would be fulfilled (“so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants”).

The Abrahamic covenant not only promised physical blessings, but also spiritual ones. The latter is Paul’s focus here. The spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic covenant are given not only to believing Jews (“those who are of the Law”), but also to believing Gentiles (“those who are of the faith of Abraham”), thus making Abraham the spiritual father of all believers (“the father of us all”; cf. Matthew 8:11, Romans 4:11-12, Galatians 3:7, and 29). Galatians 3:22 serves as a summation of this verse.

(as it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. (4:17)

In support of his last proposition in verse 16, that Abraham is the father of all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, Paul cites Genesis 17:5 (“as it is written, ‘A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU’”). Though it is true that Abraham was the father of many nations in a physical sense (such as the Israelites and the Ishmaelites), he is also so in a spiritual sense. Paul cites Genesis 17:5 with this latter thought in mind.

In the midst of verse 17, Paul switches gears somewhat, turning his focus to the quality of Abraham’s faith. Abraham’s faith was a quality faith because it was placed in the right object, God (“in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God”). Faith is only as strong as its object (one may have faith in thin ice, but once he puts his full weight on it, he will discover that his faith is misplaced).

Abraham’s faith was in One so strong that He “gives life to the dead” [cf. John 5:21 and 2 Corinthians 1:9] and calls into being that which does not exist” (cf. Genesis 1, where God creates ex nihilo, “out of

207 “The outstanding feature of Abraham’s faith was that it was God-centered” (Schreiner, p. 235).

208 “It is only as Abraham had respect to such an attribute of God as is exemplified in raising the dead that he could have believed the promise that he would be the father of many nations. And the reason for this (as shown later in the subsequent verses) is that the fulfillment was as naturally and humanly impossible as raising the dead” (Murray, p. 146).
nothing”). This is true both physically and spiritually. In regards to the latter, see both 2 Corinthians 4:6 and Ephesians 2:1-10. Based on the succeeding context (especially v. 19), Paul most likely has Abraham’s impotence and Sarah’s barrenness specifically in mind.

In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. (4:18-21)

Abraham’s faith was placed in the right object, God. Therefore, he believed “in hope” (v. 18; not wishful thinking, but a confident expectation; not a “hope so,” but more of a “know so”), in spite of the fact that from a purely human standpoint, the situation was hopeless (“against hope” in v. 18). God promised Abraham in Genesis 15:1-5 that he would have descendants from his own loins (thus Paul’s citing in v. 18 of Genesis 15:5’s “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE”).

In spite of the fact that, reproductively-speaking, his body was “as good as dead” (v. 19; cf. Hebrews 11:12), as was the body of his wife, Sarah (“the deadness of Sarah’s womb”; cf. Genesis 18:11), Abraham being “about a hundred years old” (v. 19; cf. Genesis 17:17 and 21:5) and Sarah being about ninety (Genesis 17:17), Abraham by faith (“he believed,” v. 18; “Without becoming weak in faith,” v. 19; “he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith,” v. 20) took God at His Word (“according to that which had been spoken,” v. 18; “with respect to the promise of God,” v. 20), “being fully assured [cf. Romans 14:5, where the same Greek verb is translated “fully convinced”; cf. Hebrews 11:1 and 13] that what God had promised, He was able also to perform” (v. 21; cf. 2 Timothy 1:12).

Abraham’s faith flew fully (“contemplated” in v. 19) in the face of all appearances to the contrary.  

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209Ernst Käsemann (quoted in Morris, p. 220) calls hope “not the prospect of what might happen but the prospect of what is already guaranteed.”

210Hughes (p. 102) calls verse 21 “one of the best definitions of faith in the Bible.” I agree.

211“[Abraham] weighed the human impossibility of becoming a father against the divine impossibility of God being able to break his word and decided that if God was God, nothing is impossible” (Hughes, p. 101). See Genesis 18:14’s “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” (see Jeremiah 32:17 for the answer), uttered in response to Sarah’s doubt over the promise of Isaac’s conception and birth.

212“Genuine faith adheres to God’s promise despite the whirlwind of external circumstances that imperil it” (Schreiner, p. 239). “It is mere weakness of faith that makes a man lie poring upon the difficulties and seeming impossibilities that lie in the way of a promise” (Henry, p. 393).
Abraham believed that the God who “gives life to the dead” (v. 17) could “resurrect” the reproductive systems of both his wife and him (cf. his belief that God could resurrect Isaac, as seen by Genesis 22:5’s “we will worship and return to you,” as well as by Hebrews 11:17-19) in order to fulfill His promise.

Abraham’s faith did not weaken (v. 19), though his body was becoming reproductively weaker with each passing day, nor did it waver (v. 20), but became stronger (“grew strong” in v. 20).

Abraham’s faith in God gave glory to God (“giving glory to God” in v. 20), showing that God is a God worth being trusted and One who is able to do what He has promised to do.

213 The Greek verb translated “as good as dead” is in the perfect tense (thus, it could be more literally translated “having become as good as dead”), seemingly indicating that Abraham had already become impotent. Furthermore, some Greek manuscripts have the Greek particle for “already” along with the verb, a further indicator that Abraham had already become impotent (if the particle is original; Morris seems to think so). Abraham was stile virile at age 86 (Genesis 16:16). Interestingly, his reconstituted virility continued after the birth of Isaac, as his second wife, Keturah bore him six children (Genesis 25:1-2).

214 “We must not overlook the fact that many years passed between the giving of the promise (Gen 15:5) and its fulfillment (Gen 21:2). Abraham must have been sorely tried by the delay, as he saw Sarah and himself growing old and beyond the human capacity of producing a child” (Morris, p. 213).

215 The Greek verb translated “waver” in verse 20 is translated “doubt” in Matthew 21:21, Romans 14:23, and James 1:6 (where James compares such “wavering” to the waves of the sea). In light of Genesis 17:17-18, when Paul says that Abraham “did not waver” in verse 20, he means “not that Abraham never had momentary hesitations, but that he avoided a deep-seated and permanent attitude of distrust and inconsistency in relationship to God and his promises” (Moo, p. 285).

216 Moo (p. 285) uses the analogy of muscles that grow stronger in the face of a counterforce, such as weights. Abraham’s faith grew stronger in the face of a counterforce, his impotency and Sarah’s barrenness.

217 “It is, of course, impossible to increase God’s glory; ‘giving glory to God’ means recognizing the glory he has . . . .” (Morris, pp. 212-213).

218 “He was able” in verse 21 literally reads “able is He,” the Greek adjective for “able” given first, for emphasis.

219 “Faith is to believe God simply and solely because He is God. Nothing glorifies God more than this; nothing is so insulting to God as not to believe His word” (Lloyd-Jones, 3:225).
Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. (4:22)

Abraham’s faith (“IT”), demonstrated by his belief in God’s promise that he would have an heir from his own body, was the means of his justification. Once again (as in 4:3), Paul cites Genesis 15:6, the verse wherein we are told that Abraham had saving faith. Because Abraham exercised saving faith, God imputed Christ’s righteousness to his account (“IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS”), making him positionally righteous, resulting in his justification (his being declared righteous).

Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, (4:23-24)

Abraham’s justification (“it was credited to him,” v. 23) has continuing relevance (“not for his sake only,” v. 23 … “but for our sake also,” v. 24), for men and women today are justified (“to whom it will be credited,” v. 24) through faith (“those who believe,” v. 24) in the same object, the God who raises the dead (“in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,” v. 24; cf. 4:17 and comments on). If one does not believe that God “raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (v. 24), he cannot be saved (see Romans 10:9 and 1 Corinthians 15:12-18). If God can raise the physically dead, He can certainly raise the spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1-10).

He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. (4:25)

Having ended the previous verse (v. 24) by mentioning “Jesus our Lord,” Paul concludes chapter 4 by declaring two truths regarding Him. First, Jesus was “delivered over [by God the Father, Acts 2:23 and Romans 8:32] because of our transgressions” (cf. Isaiah 53:5-6 and Galatians 1:4).

Second, Jesus “was raised because of our justification,” most likely meaning that Jesus’ resurrection secured our justification (Moo, p. 289). It showed that the debt for sin had indeed been paid, as the prisoner was released from it (Henry, p. 394). If Jesus had not risen, we could not be justified (1 Corinthians 15:17). Paul reiterates the truth of this verse in 2 Corinthians 5:15, stating that Jesus died (“delivered over because of our transgressions” here in Romans 4:25) and rose again (“raised because of our justification” here in Romans 4:25) on the believer’s behalf.

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220The Greek participle translated “those who believe” is in the present tense and could, thus, be more literally translated “those who are believing.” See footnote 161 for the possible significance.

221“[Jesus’s] resurrection authenticates and confirms that our justification has been secured” (Schreiner, p. 244). According to Romans 5:9, it was His death that secured it.
The Benefits of Justification (5:1-11)
In the major section of 3:21-5:21, Paul's focus is on justification/positional righteousness. In 3:21-31, he stressed that justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In chapter 4, he used Abraham as a prime example of one who was justified by grace alone through faith alone.

Now, in the first half of chapter 5, he discusses some of the benefits enjoyed by those who are justified, which include peace with God/reconciliation (vs. 1, 10, and 11), access to God (v. 2a), the hope of the glory of God (vs. 2b-5a), the assurance of God's love (vs. 5b-8), and exemption from God's wrath (v. 9).

Peace with God (5:1)
The first benefit of being justified is being at peace with God.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (5:1)

Once again (cf. 3:26, 28, and 30), we are reminded that justification is by faith (“having been justified by faith”).

As a result of being justified, “we have peace with God.” Before being justified, we were God’s enemy (“haters of God” in Romans 1:30; “enemies” in Romans 5:10, “hostile toward God” in Romans 8:7, “hostile in mind” in Colossians 1:21). At justification, we go from being God’s foe to being His friend. This transition is theologically known as “reconciliation,” which Paul will mention in verses 10 and 11.

“Peace with God” differs from the “peace of God” (Philippians 4:7) in that the first is objective/positional, while the second is subjective/experiential. The two are inseparable, however, with the first being the root/cause and the second being the fruit/effect.222

Peace with God/reconciliation is possible only because of Christ (“through our Lord Jesus Christ”223; cf. Romans 5:10-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:18, as well as 1 Timothy 2:5), since it was the death of Christ that propitiated God’s wrath (see 3:25-26 and comments on).

Access to God (5:2a)
Another benefit of being justified is having access to God.

222 "Peace of heart and mind proceeds from ‘peace with God’ and is the reflection in our consciousness of the relation established by justification” (Murray, p. 159).

223 Note how often the book of Romans uses such phrases as through, in, or by Christ (3:24, 25, 5:1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19, 21, 6:11, 23, 7:4, 25, 8:1, 2, 37, 39, et. al.)
through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand ... (5:2a)

Christ is not only the means by which believers are reconciled to God (see v. 1 and comments on), but also the means by which (“through whom also”) believers gain access to God (John 14:6, Ephesians 2:18, and 3:12, as well as John 10:7 and 9, where Jesus calls Himself “the door”) and the grace of justification (“this grace in which we stand”; cf. 1 Peter 5:12). The secondary means by which this access takes place is faith (“by faith”; cf. Ephesians 3:12).

The Greek noun translated “introduction” (“access” in the KJV) has the idea of being escorted into the presence of royalty (Morris, p. 219; Schreiner, p. 254). Because of Christ, the believer has direct access to God. This doctrine is commonly called the “priesthood of the believer.” When Christ died, the veil separating the “holy place” from the “holy of holies” in the temple was “torn in two” (Matthew 27:51//Mark 15:38//Luke 23:45), symbolizing direct access to God (Hebrews 4:16 and 10:19-22).

This access is continuous/ongoing (“have obtained”), as Paul uses the perfect tense of the verb (in Greek, the perfect tense indicates a past action with continuing/ongoing results).

Because we are now at peace with God (v. 1), we can have access to God (v. 2a).

The Hope of the Glory of God (5:2b-5a)

Another benefit believers enjoy as a result of justification is the hope of the glory of God (cf. Colossians 1:27).

... and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (5:2b)

So glorious is this benefit that believers are to “exult” in it (cf. Hebrews 3:6 and 1 Peter 4:13).

Because of the Fall, everyone falls short of/lacks “the glory of God,” that is, the ability to reflect God’s glory in a moral sense (see 3:23 and comments on). Salvation gives one the ability to gradually reflect more and more of God’s glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). The moment one is glorified, he will perfectly reflect the glory of God (Romans 8:17-18 and 1 John 3:2). He will also be privileged to behold the Lord in all His glory (John 17:24 and 1 John 3:2).

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224“Introduction” is the Greek noun, prosagoge, the verbal form of which is prosago, which literally means “to lead to” (the Greek preposition pros, “to” + the Greek verb ago, “to lead”). The verbal form is used in 1 Peter 3:18, where Peter says that Christ died so that He might “bring us to God.”

225Commenting on the words, “we exult in hope of the glory of God” in verse 2, Cranfield (p. 103) states: “... [I]t denotes a glorying or boasting, an exultant jubilation, resulting from confident expectation of the glory of God ...”
This future glorification is the believer’s “hope” (cf. Ephesians 1:18, Colossians 1:5, and 27), meaning his confident expectation (see comments on 4:18).

Schreiner (p. 254) aptly points out: “Those who scorned God’s glory (Rom 1:21-23) and have fallen short of it (3:23) are now promised a future share in it.”

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (5:3-4)

Peace with God (v. 1) does not necessarily mean peace in life (v. 3). Trials and tribulations are an integral part of the committed Christian life (see John 16:33, 2 Timothy 3:12, James 1:2, and 1 Peter 4:12).

It is easy to see how one can “exult in hope of the glory of God” (v. 2), but in tribulations also (“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations,” v. 3; note that Paul says, “exult in our tribulations,” not “exult in spite of our tribulations”)? Yes, in tribulations also (“knowing,” v. 3). In other words, the pressures we face in life are not pointless, but purposeful and profitable. Many Scriptures call upon believers to have a positive outlook/attitude toward difficulties in life (see Matthew 5:10-12, Acts 5:41, 2 Corinthians 11:23-30, 12:7-10, Philippians 2:17-18, James 1:2-4, 12, and 1 Peter 4:12-16).

According to this passage, the reason why the believer ought to rejoice in his tribulations is because he knows that such pressures produce perseverance (“knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance,” v. 3; cf. James 1:3). “Perseverance” literally means “to abide or remain under” (the Greek noun is hupomone, the verbal form of which is hupomeno, the Greek preposition, hupo, “under” + the Greek verb, meno, “to abide or remain”).

When tribulations come, God wants us to endure them, to abide or remain under them until they run their course (2 Corinthians 1:6, 2 Thessalonians 1:4, James 1:4, 12), so that we may know and show that our faith is genuine (the “proven character” of v. 4). The Greek noun translated “proven character” has the idea of something (like tempered steel or glass or like sterling silver) that has been put to the test/tested/tried (2 Corinthians 2:9) and has passed the test (Philippians 2:22). When our faith is put to the test by trials (James 1:3, 12, 1 Peter 1:7, 4:12), and such trials by God’s grace (2 Corinthians 12:7-10 and 1 Peter 1:3-9) are successfully endured, our faith is strengthened/we become sterling in character (cf. Job 23:10b).227 Remember that the one writing these words, Paul knew what it was like to be tried (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 4:11-13, 2 Corinthians 11:23-29, 12:7-10, and 2 Timothy 3:11).

226“Tribulations” are any “pressures” (the literal meaning of the Greek term—see comments on 2:9) we face in life. Commenting on this, Wiersbe (p. 527) writes: “Our English word “tribulation” comes from a Latin word tribulum. In Paul’s day, a tribulum was a heavy piece of timber with spikes in it, used for threshing the grain. The tribulum was drawn over the grain and it separated the wheat from the chaff. As we go through tribulations, and depend on God’s grace, the trials only purify us and help to get rid of the chaff.”

227“After one endures many difficulties, a strength of character develops that was not present previously” (Schreiner, p. 256).
The end result of all of this is “hope” (v. 4). Successful enduring of trials bolsters the believer’s confidence that he is truly a child of God and will, therefore, one day receive what he presently hopes for, the glory of God (v. 2; cf. Romans 15:4). Trials are one of the means God uses to help us persevere in our faith and in faithfulness, with the end result being the receiving of the crown of life, eternal life in its full and final sense (James 1:12), or, as this passage puts it (vs. 2 and 4), the hope of the glory of God. This is why we can, indeed, exult in our tribulations. Meditate long and hard on these verses, as well as on Romans 8:17-18 and 2 Corinthians 4:16-17, and exult!

The Assurance of God’s Love (5:5b-8)
Another benefit believers enjoy as a result of justification is the assurance of God’s love for them.

and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (5:5)

When trials and tribulations come, the believer may be tempted to question God’s love for him. However, the indwelling (1 Corinthians 6:19) Holy Spirit (“through the Holy Spirit who was given to us”) works within him (“within our hearts”) to convince him that God loves him (“the love of God has been poured out”), even in the midst of hardship (cf. Romans 8:35-39). In fact, such pressures are proof positive that God loves the believer (see Hebrews 12:6 in the context of Hebrews 12:1-11). Like the successful

228 “...[T]he hard realities of everyday life conspire to make believers more godly and Christlike. This builds hope in them that they have really been justified, and that they are truly heading for future glory” (Schreiner, p. 250). “To have one’s faith proved by God in the fires of tribulation and sustained by Him so as to stand the test is to have one’s hope in Him and in the fulfillment of His promises, one’s hope of His glory (v. 2), strengthened and confirmed” (Cranfield, p. 105).

229 This is Paul’s first mention of the word “love” in Romans. Regarding Paul’s use of this term in his writings, Morris (p. 221) makes this perceptive point: “Paul’s emphasis on love is strangely overlooked; the apostle is often seen as somewhat pugnacious and argumentative, while John, by contrast, is ‘the apostle of love.’ But the word love occurs 75 times in Paul out of a New Testament total of 116.”

230 According to Lloyd-Jones (4:78), this pouring out is a “gushing forth.” Lloyd-Jones (4:81-86) goes on to give several examples from English church history of men who experienced this Spirit-given assurance of God’s love for them in the midst of trial.

231 Boice (2:534) shares the following: “[The story is] told of an American student who came to Hong Kong to study the Chinese church. Before he had left the States a friend had asked him, ‘If God loves the Chinese church so much, why did he allow so much suffering to come upon it?’ The student confessed that he had no answer at the time. But after he had traveled to China and had made extensive and meaningful contacts with a number of Chinese Christians, he discovered an answer that he put like this: ‘I am going back to America and ask...’
enduring of trials (vs. 3-4), this special ministry of the Holy Spirit increases the believer’s confidence that he is truly a child of God and will not be disappointed in the end (“hope does not disappoint”; cf. Romans 9:33 and 10:11, where Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:16).

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (5:6-8)

Paul continues (notice the “for” that begins v. 6) his focus on God’s love that he began in verse 5. God’s love is not only experienced in the heart (v. 5), but it was also exhibited in history (vs. 6-8).

God’s love is distinct from human love. Whereas human love may on rare occasion (“hardly” in v. 7a; “perhaps” in v. 7b232) move one to give his life for a fellow human being deemed worthy of dying for (someone “righteous” or “good,” v. 7233), God, by contrast (notice the “But God” that begins v. 8), demonstrated His love by dying for those absolutely unworthy of dying for, “the ungodly” (v. 6; cf. 4:5) “sinners” (v. 8).234 Along these lines, Lloyd-Jones (4:123) rightly writes: “The people who have appreciated the love of God most have always been those who have realized their sinfulness most.”

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232 “Paul is not rating highly the possibility of someone dying for the good man” (Morris, p. 224).

233 While some see a distinction between the “righteous” man and the “good” man, viewing the second as superior to the first, texts such as Matthew 5:45, Luke 23:50, and Romans 7:12 seem to view them as synonymous.

234 Hughes (p. 110) shares an excellent illustration from the Revolutionary War that aptly illustrates this contrast: “During the Revolutionary War there was a faithful preacher of the gospel by the name of Peter Miller. He lived near a fellow who hated him intensely for his Christian life and testimony. In fact, this man violently opposed him and ridiculed his followers. One day the unbeliever was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. Hearing about this, Peter Miller set out on foot to intercede for the man’s life before George Washington. The General listened to the minister’s earnest plea, but told him he didn’t feel he should pardon his friend. ‘My friend! He is not my friend,’ answered Miller. ‘In fact, he’s my worst living enemy.’ ‘What!’ said Washington. ‘You have walked 60 miles to save the life of your enemy? That, in my judgment, puts the matter in a different light. I will grant your request.’ With pardon in hand, Miller hastened to the place where his neighbor was to be executed, and arrived just as the prisoner was walking to the scaffold. When the traitor saw Miller, he exclaimed, ‘Old Peter Miller has come to have his revenge by watching me hang!’ But he was astonished as he watched the minister step out of the crowd and produce the pardon which spared his life.”
Christ’s death for sinners was substitutionary (“for the ungodly” in v. 6; “for us” in v. 8; cf. Isaiah 53:5a, 53:6b, 1 Corinthians 15:3b, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Galatians 3:13, Ephesians 5:2, 25, 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 2:24a, 3:18a).

Christ died for us when “we were still helpless” (v. 6; NIV: “powerless”) spiritually\(^{235}\) (cf. John 5:5, where the noun form of the Greek adjective translated “helpless” in Romans 5:6 is used to describe the physical infirmity of the man at the pool of Bethesda). Because we were helpless, God had to intervene (cf. Romans 8:3). Along these lines, rightly does Lloyd-Jones (4:114) write: “It is to the extent to which we realize our inability and incapacity that we realize the love of God.”

Christ died “at the right time” (v. 6), meaning at the right moment in history (cf. Mark 1:15, Galatians 4:4, 1 Timothy 2:6, and Titus 1:3) or “just at that very time when we were weak” (Moo, p. 307; cf. Murray, p. 167 and Calvin, p. 195). The first option is the one put forth by most commentators, though the second one seems more in keeping with the context.

Time and time again, the Scriptures point to the death of Christ as the supreme (Romans 8:32) demonstration of God’s love for man (cf. John 3:16, 15:13, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 5:2, 25, 1 John 3:16, 4:9-10).\(^{236}\)

The fact that God died for us while we were ungodly sinners is evidence of the fact that salvation is not based on merit, but on grace.

**Exemption from God’s Wrath (5:9)**

Another benefit believers enjoy as a result of justification is exemption from God’s wrath.

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. (5:9)

Paul has already made the point in Romans (in 1:18, 2:5, and 3:5) that unbelievers are liable to God’s wrath. It is justification that reconciles God and the unbeliever (v. 1), sparing the unbeliever from the wrath of God (“having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God”; cf. 1

\(^{235}\) According to Ephesians 2:1, our helpless spiritual condition is described in terms of death. We were so spiritually helpless that our only hope was a unilateral work of God to raise us from the dead spiritually. Praise God, though our condition was helpless (Romans 5:6) and hopeless (Ephesians 2:12), He intervened (“but God” in Romans 5:8 and Ephesians 2:4)! A truth such as this undoubtedly is what causes Lloyd-Jones (4:103) to call Romans 5:6 “one of the greatest verses in the whole Bible.”

\(^{236}\) “Calvary is the supreme demonstration of Divine love. Whenever you are tempted to doubt the love of God, Christian reader, go back to Calvary” (Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 81).
Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9, as well as Romans 8:33b-34a’s “God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?”). We often talk about being “saved” (this is the first mention of this word in the book of Romans) without specifying from Whom or what we are being saved. According to Romans 5:9, when we are saved, we are saved from God’s wrath (“we shall be saved from the wrath of God”).

Once again (cf. v. 1 and comments on, as well as v. 10’s “through the death of His Son”), Christ’s death (“by His blood” and “through Him”) is what makes all of this possible. It is Christ’s “blood” (a metaphor for His bloody, violent, sacrificial death; compare v. 9, which says we are justified by Christ’s “blood,” with v. 10, which says we are reconciled to God through the “death” of His Son; one translation translates “by His blood” as “by Christ’s sacrificial death”) that makes justification possible (“justified by His blood”) and saves us from God’s wrath (“saved from the wrath of God through Him”), Christ having took God’s wrath upon Himself on the Cross in the believer’s stead.

Reconciliation to God (5:10-11)
Yet another benefit believers enjoy as a result of justification is reconciliation to God, essentially the same as the peace with God spoken of in verse 1. As a result of reconciliation, believers have a right relationship with God/peace with God.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.  (5:10)

In verse 10, Paul once again (as in v. 1) speaks of the benefit of peace with God/reconciliation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 and Colossians 1:20-22). Praise God, that though we were once His “enemies” (see comments on v. 1), we are now His “beloved” (1:7) by being “reconciled to God through the death of His Son”! Once God was against us, but now He is “for us” (Romans 8:31; cf. Psalm 118:6). Nothing is worse than being God’s foe; nothing is better than being His friend.

It is through Christ that one is reconciled (“reconciled to God through the death of His Son”; cf. v. 1’s “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” and v. 11’s “through whom we have now received the reconciliation,” as well as 2 Corinthians 5:18 and Colossians 1:20-22).

Paul once again (cf. v. 9’s “much more”) argues from the greater to the lesser237 (“much more”). If God did us good while we were His foes (“if while we were enemies we were reconciled...”), the greater, then certainly He will do us good while we are His friends (“we shall be saved by His life,” i.e., saved fully and finally), the lesser.238 See also Romans 8:32 for a similar line of reasoning.

237 Lloyd-Jones (4:147) writes: “The argument is from the greater to the lesser, indeed I should have said, from the greatest to the lesser.”

238 “If Christ has done the great work of justifying sinners, dying for God’s enemies, he will certainly perform the comparatively simple task of keeping those who are now God’s friends” (Moo, p. 225); “If God justifies and reconciles to himself enemies, he will certainly save friends” (Hendriksen, p. 175). “… [S]ince God has already done the really difficult thing, that is,
The believer need not fear that the God who justified him will fail to complete what He started (Philippians 1:6). Because He lives, we will live also ("saved [in the full and final sense] by His life"; cf. John 14:19, Romans 8:34, and Hebrews 7:25).

And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (5:11)

Verse 11 is a fitting conclusion to the entire section of 5:1-11. It is Paul’s “exclamation point” to the section. In light of the glorious benefits we enjoy as justified believers, including reconciliation, how can we not but “exult in God”? (compare “we exult in hope of the glory of God” in v. 2 with “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations” in v. 3 and with “And not only this, but we also exult in God” in v. 11). When we realize how precious a gift (“received”) reconciliation is, how can we not but give glory to God, the Giver of the gift? Exulting in anyone or anything else (Romans 4:2, 1 Corinthians 1:29, 3:21, and 4:7) other than God and what He has done (Luke 1:47, 1 Corinthians 1:31, 2 Corinthians 10:17, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 3:3 and 4:4) is ludicrous. “Glorying knows no restraint and cannot be too exaggerated when it is in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Murray, p. 176).

Reconciliation is “received,” indicative of the fact that God takes the initiative in it.

justified ungodly sinners, we may be absolutely confident that He will do what is by comparison very easy, namely, save from His wrath at the last those who are already righteous in His sight” (Cranfield, p. 108); “... [I]f, when we were in a state of alienation from God, God showed his love to such an extent that he reconciled us to himself and instated us in his favour through the death of his own Son, how much more, when this alienation is removed and we are instated in his favour, shall the exaltation life of Christ insure our being saved to the uttermost” (Murray, p. 175).

Paul’s main aim in this section is to increase the assurance of Christians that God is for us and will be for us through all our tribulations and through the last great outpouring of wrath on the world” (John Piper, 12-12-99 sermon on Romans 5:9-11, entitled “Much More Shall We Be Saved By His Life”).

The initiative in reconciliation is God’s, and His too is the determinative action: Paul in fact uses the active voice of the verb only of God, the passive only of men. Yet the fact that he can in 2 Cor 5.20 represent God as calling upon men to be reconciled is a clear indication that he does not think of men’s part as merely passive ...” (Cranfield, p. 108).
The Basis of Justification (5:12-21)

In Romans 5, Paul concludes the focus on positional righteousness/justification he began in 3:21 by pointing out some of the benefits of justification. According to 5:1-11, these benefits include peace with God/reconciliation to God (vs. 1, 10, and 11); access to God (v. 2a); the hope of the glory of God (vs. 2b-5a); the assurance of God’s love (vs. 5b-8); and exemption from God’s wrath (v. 9).

In 5:12-21, Paul gives the basis of justification, telling us what Christ did in order to undo the damage done by Adam and make such benefits possible. In many ways, 5:12-21 is a synopsis of 1:18-5:21, where the bad news of sin and condemnation (the focus of 1:18-3:20) is offset by the good news of righteousness and justification (the focus of 3:21-5:21).

Romans 5:12-21 has been called “one of the greatest theological sections in the entire Bible” (Hughes, p. 113); “one of the most difficult and controversial passages to interpret in all of Pauline literature” (Schreiner, p. 267); “among the most difficult passages in Romans if not in the entire New Testament” (Hughes, p. 113); “possibly the most difficult in all the Bible” (Boice, 2:553); and “one of the deepest, most profound theological passages in all of Scripture” (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, p. 366). The passage presents a series of contrasts, based upon to whom one is positionally related, as the following chart illustrates:

| in Adam (vs. 12, 15, 16, 17, 19; cf. 1 Cor 15:22a) | vs. | in Christ (vs. 15, 17, 19, 21; cf. 1 Cor 15:22b) |
| in Adam (vs. 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21) | vs. | righteousness (vs. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21) |
| condemnation (vs. 16, 18) | vs. | justification (vs. 16, 18) |
| death (vs. 12, 15, 17, 21) | vs. | life (vs. 17, 18, 21) |

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-- (5:12)

In verse 12, Paul begins to make a comparison (“just as”), but fails to finish it (there is no “so also”); thus, the dash at the end of the verse in the NASB (and in the NIV). The specific comparison started in verse 12 isn’t resumed until verse 18; thus, the parentheses around verses 13-17 in the KJV.

Paul begins verse 12 with a “therefore,” linking 5:12-21 with the previous section (5:1-11). It is not easy to know exactly what the link is. See the opening paragraph above for my suggestion as to what it is.

Sin entered into (Lloyd-Jones, 4:194 uses the word, “invaded”) the world\textsuperscript{242} through one man (\textit{through one man sin entered into the world}), the one man being Adam (v. 14) and the sin being the partaking of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3).

\textsuperscript{241}Perhaps this is one of the passages Peter had in mind when he wrote in 2 Peter 3:16 that in Paul’s letters “are some things hard to understand.”

\textsuperscript{242}By “world,” Paul means the world of humanity. Sin entered the created order through the fall of Satan. It entered the world of humanity through the fall of Adam & Eve.
Sin results in death ("death through sin"), both spiritual (Genesis 2:17 and 3:8) and physical (Genesis 5:5). See also Romans 6:23 and James 1:15 in this regard.

Not only did Adam's sin result in his own spiritual and physical death, but also in the spiritual and physical death of all his descendants ("death spread to all men"; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:21a and 22a). While it is true that each and every human being is born with a sin nature (passed on from Adam & Eve to their children and to every succeeding generation through the natural procreative process; see Psalm 51:5) and commits sin for which he or she is personally responsible (Paul's focus in 1:18-3:20; cf. 3:23), neither of these is Paul's focus in this verse (5:12), nor in this section (5:12-21). Paul's focus at this point is more foundational and fundamental. His focus is on Adam's sin (called "original sin" by theologians) and the judicial effect that particular sin has had upon his posterity. Because we are born "in Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:22)positionally united to him, we are born with sin on our ledger. This is why Paul says at the end of verse 12 that "death spread to all men, because all sinned." "Sinned" is in the aorist tense in Greek, indicating a specific, one-time act of sinning, an allusion to Adam's sin in the Garden. What Paul is saying is that when Adam sinned, we sinned too. We sinned in him. Since Adam was the divinely-chosen representative of the human race, when he sinned, his sin was imputed to the account of each and every

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243 The basic idea of death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the immaterial part of man (the soul/spirit) from the material part (the body). Spiritual death is the separation of the individual from God.

244 The Greek verb translated “spread” is literally “went through” (the Greek verb is dierchomai, the Greek preposition, dia, “through” + the Greek verb, erchomai, “to go”). As a result of Adam’s sin, death permeated/went through/spread to the entire human race.

245 This concept is taught in the saying, “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.”

246 This is known as “federal headship.” The classic work on this view is John Murray’s 1959 book entitled, The Imputation of Adam’s Sin. A competing view is known as “seminal headship” (also known as “realism”), which teaches that because all of Adam’s descendants were in the loins of Adam/there was a biotic relationship between Adam and all his descendants, when he sinned, all his descendants sinned in him. While the seminal view has some biblical merit (see Hebrews 7:9-10) and is held by such notable theologians of the past as A. H. Strong, the federal view is preferable, primarily because it is consistent with the parallel between Adam and Christ Paul makes in Romans 5:12-21 (see point 3 below). Another point in favor of the federal view is that, though Eve was the first to sin, it was Adam’s sin that was significant and consequential (notice in Genesis 3:9 that God seeks out Adam in particular). One of the objections raised against the federal view is that it appears to be unfair. In response, several points can be made: 1) The seminal view is ultimately open to the same charge; 2) God, not finite and fallen human rationality, determines what is fair. Because God is God, He is just (one of His attributes). Therefore, whatever God does is fair (things are fair because God does them, not vice versa). As John Piper (in an August 27, 2000 sermon on Romans 5:12-21 entitled, “Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part 5”) states: “This doctrine of original sin pushes the ability of my reason to the limit of its powers and leaves me behind. Most [all?] of us will have to settle for a large dose of mystery here. How are we connected to Adam such that it is just for his sin to
one of his descendants, resulting in the “grave” consequences of spiritual and physical death. “Adam as the head of the human race sinned as our representative, and we are sinners by virtue of being in corporate solidarity with Adam” (Schreiner, p. 289); “When Adam sinned, the race sinned because the race was in him” (Harrison, p. 62). “Paul can therefore say both ‘all die because all sin’ [in v. 12] and ‘all die because Adam sinned’ [in v. 15] with no hint of conflict because the sin of Adam is the sin of all” (Moo, p. 326).

for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (5:13-14)

Verses 13 and 14 are digressionary. Those who lived before the giving of the Mosaic Law (“until the Law,” v. 13) still died (“death reigned from Adam until Moses,” v. 14). Why? Because of the imputation of Adam’s sin to those individuals. Though such individuals were still sinners (“for until the Law sin was in the world,” v. 13), their sin wasn’t a “violation” (see comments on 4:15); they “had not sinned in the

be counted as our sin, and just for us to be condemned? Paul does not make that explicit. We do not doubt the justice of God; we doubt our own ability to explain it”; and 3) If it is unfair for God to make Adam our representative, then it would be equally unfair for God to make Christ our representative, and we would have no hope of salvation. As Sproul (p. 106) states: “If you are objecting on the grounds that the principles of representation and imputation are wrong in and of themselves, then you must realise that you have just taken away the ground basis for your salvation. It is only by representation that you are saved, and only by imputation that you are redeemed. If it is right for God to save a man on the basis of another man’s work [Christ’s], it is also all right for God to punish us on the basis of another man’s work [Adam’s].” Another reason why the federal view is questioned (at least in this country) is because it seems so “un-American.” As Morris (p. 230) states: “Such a view is not wildly popular in our highly individualistic culture.”

When one realizes, however, that the Bible was written in an eastern, rather than a western, setting, the concept of federalism is not as “foreign” as we might think (we westerners are the foreigners as far as the Bible is concerned). Consider, for example, the sin of one man, Achan, which God viewed as the sin of the entire nation (see Joshua 7:1 and 11).

247 A pastor friend of mine once said tongue-in-cheek that he wanted to have a word with Adam in the parking lot of heaven 😄.

248 Hughes (p. 116) shares the following illustration of this: “Chuck Swindoll tells us a story about his boyhood which makes the point. Like many boys he had a paper route, and like many he didn’t particularly enjoy it. When delivering papers he would ride his bicycle across the lawns of homes that had the misfortune of being on a corner. At one particular place he had actually worn a narrow trail across the lawn. It wasn’t right, but no one seemed to notice. But one day as he rode up he saw a sign which read, ‘KEEP OFF THE GRASS. NO BIKES.’ And—you guessed it—he rode right past it anyway on his well-worn trail—right up to the feet of the waiting author. As Swindoll put it, ‘The man shared with me a few things from his heart.’ Whereas before, Swindoll’s transgression was not fully seen (and in a sense not reckoned), now
likeness of the offense of Adam” (v. 14). Thus, their sin wasn’t charged to their account (“not imputed,” v. 13). However, Adam’s sin was charged to their account, and since Adam’s sin was a violation/transgression (Adam disobeyed a clear command, Genesis 2:17 and 3:6; cf. Hosea 6:7), death passed upon all men (v. 12), “even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam” (v. 14).

An alternative way of understanding verses 13 and 14 is that those who lived before the giving of the Mosaic Law sinned by rejecting the “law” of natural revelation (see Romans 2:12, 14, and 15 and comments on), had this sin imputed to them, and died as a consequence.

Paul concludes verse 14 with a significant statement, stating that Adam is a type of Christ (“Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come”). In what way is Adam a type of Christ? He is a type of Christ in that, like Christ, Adam was a corporate head (meaning the head of a body of individuals) whose actions were directly applied to each and every individual within his corporation. Those united to Adam (“in Adam,” 1 Corinthians 15:22a) share in the work of Adam, while those united to Christ (“in Christ,” 1 Corinthians 15:22b) share in the work of Christ.

But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (5:15-17)

Though Adam is a type of Christ (v. 14) in that he, like Christ, is a corporate head, the headship of Adam differs significantly from (notice the “but” that begins v. 15) that of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:45-49), as Paul points out here in verses 15-17 (“not like” in vs. 15 and 16), the difference being not only in kind, but it was sharply defined and accounted. This is what the Law does.”

These verses give the theological reason why infants and the mentally incompetent die, even though they, like those who lived from Adam to Moses, do not sin in the likeness of the offense of Adam.

“As it is true that Adam imparted to those who were his that which belonged to him, so also Christ bestows on his beloved ones that which is his” (Hendriksen, p. 180).

This is one of several places where the New Testament gives explicit testimony to the humanity of Christ (cf. Matthew 13:54-56, John 8:40, Acts 2:22, 1 Corinthians 15:21b, 47b, and 1 Timothy 2:5).
also in degree252 (“much more” in vs. 15 and 17; cf. 5:20).

Adam’s sin brought condemnation253 and death to all those united to him (every human being; “many died” in v. 15 ≈ “death spread to all men” in v. 12), while Christ’s righteousness (His perfect, sinless life) brought justification and life to all those united to Him (Christians254).255

Five times in these verses, Paul calls righteousness a “gift”256 (the gift remains unspecified until v. 17’s “gift of righteousness,” meaning the gift which is righteousness). This shows that salvation is a gift (cf.

252“The work of Christ is much more significant, for the good that he has effected also involves the undoing of the evil wrought by Adam” (Schreiner, p. 284); “Adam’s sin has wrought great devastation in the world, and we all know that cleaning up a mess is harder than making one” (Schreiner, p. 285). “…[I]n Jesus Christ we have gained much more than we ever lost in Adam” (Wiersbe, p. 528).

253“Condemnation” is a strong word. The Greek word is katakrima, an intensified form of krima, the Greek word for “judgment.” Katakrima is literally “judgment down upon” (the Greek preposition, kata, “down upon” + the Greek noun, krima, “judgment”).

254Some see support for the teaching called “universalism,” the belief that all will be saved, in verse 15 (as well as in verses 18 and 19). However, notice that in verse 17 Paul limits those united to Christ to “those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness” (notice a similar limitation in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, “they who live”). Salvation is a gift offered to all, but it is given only to those who by faith receive it (one must believe in order to receive; see John 1:12). Witmer (p. 459) says that it is available to all, but not appropriated by all. “Paul makes grace common to all men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is offered to all. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive Him” (John Calvin, quoted in Schreiner, p. 292). “The deliberately worded v. 17, along with the persistent stress on faith as the means of achieving righteousness in 1:16-4:25, makes it equally clear that only certain people derive the benefits from Christ’s act of righteousness” (Moo, p. 344).

255“The [many in vs. 15b & 19b] and [all in v. 18b] who have been affected by Christ are not coterminous with the [many in vs. 15a & 19a] and [all in v. 18a] affected by Adam’s sin. The latter group is universal, but the former group is restricted to all those who belong to Christ” (Schreiner, p. 292). The “many” in verses 15a & 19a are likely the same “many” spoken of in Matthew 20:28//Mark 10:45, while the “many” in verses 15b & 19b are likely the same “many” spoken of in Isaiah 53:11-12.

256Paul twice (in vs. 15 and 16) calls it a “free gift.” While this rendering is seemingly tautologous (a gift is by nature free), this particular Greek word for gift is one that places emphasis on the freeness of the gift (Morris, p. 235). The other three times (in vs. 15, 16, and 17), Paul uses two other Greek words for gift that are virtually synonymous, but which do not have this nuance, and are, thus, translated simply as “gift.”
Romans 6:23b and Ephesians 2:8) that must be graciously (notice the emphasis on grace in these verses; cf. 3:24, 4:16, 5:2, 20-21) received (“receive” in v. 17) by faith.

God’s grace is abundant (“abundance” in v. 17), more than able to overcome the calamitous consequences of original sin (cf. 5:20 and comments on, as well as 2 Corinthians 9:8, Ephesians 1:7, 2:7, and 1 Peter 4:10). Paul, the human writer of these words, knew this by experience (see 1 Timothy 1:14). God’s grace takes one from being under the tyranny/domination/reign of sin and death (“death reigned” in v. 17; cf. 5:21, 6:17, and Hebrews 2:15) to reigning (“reign in life” in v. 17; cf. 2 Timothy 2:12a, Revelation 3:21, 5:10, and 22:5). To sinners deserving death (cf. Romans 6:23a) God graciously gives the gift of eternal life (cf. Romans 6:23b) “through the One, Jesus Christ” (v. 17; cf. 5:21).

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (5:18-19)

In verse 18, Paul restates (notice the “So then” that begins the verse) the specific comparison he began, but did not finish, back in verse 12, only this time he completes the comparison (“as … even so …, v. 18).

Adam’s “one transgression” (v. 18) brought “condemnation to all men” (v. 18) in Adam (every human being).

By comparison and by contrast, Christ’s “one act of righteousness” (v. 18) brought “justification of life” (i.e., justification which leads to life; cf. Romans 1:17) to all men” (v. 18) in Christ (Christians). To what is “one act of righteousness” (v. 18) a reference? Most interpreters believe that it has specific reference to the death of Christ on the Cross (what theologians call His “passive obedience”; see Philippians 2:8), due primarily to contextual considerations (notice the prominence of Christ’s death in 5:6-10; notice also that “through one act of righteousness” in v. 18 is parallel to “through the obedience of the One” in v. 19, and that Philippians 2:8 speaks of Christ as being “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”; though not a Romans 5 contextual consideration, notice finally the context of Isaiah 53:11, which, like

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257 Notice that Paul not only identifies God the Father as the source of saving grace, but also God the Son (v. 15’s “the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ”; cf. Acts 15:11).

258 Wiersbe (p. 529) describes a “transgression” as a crossing over the line.

259 “Life,” to be precise, is eternal life (see 5:21). Eternal life is more a quality of life than a quantity of life. Everyone is going to live forever somewhere, either in Heaven or in Hell. The operative word in “eternal life” is not “eternal,” but “life.” What gives eternal life its ultimate quality/what makes eternal life ultimately worth living/what ultimately makes Heaven heavenly is being with Christ forever (see John 14:3, Philippians 1:23, and 1 Thessalonians 4:17). Conversely, what gives eternal death (permanent separation from God) its ultimate “quality” is being separated from Christ for all eternity (see 2 Thessalonians 1:9).
Romans 5:19, speaks of Christ doing what He did for “the many,” a statement found at the end of a chapter, Isaiah 53 that prophesies the crucifixion of Christ. Others interpret “one act of righteousness” in a more general way as referring to the life of Christ viewed as a whole, a life of obedience (what theologians call His “active obedience”; cf. Matthew 3:15’s “to fulfill all righteousness” and Galatians 4:4-5’s “born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law”) that culminated with the ultimate act of obedience, His death on the Cross.260

The Greek verb translated “made” (Murray, p. 203: “constituted”; Lloyd-Jones, 4:209: “constituted,” “put down as,” “regarded as”) in verse 19 is significant. It connotes legal appointment.261 In other words, Adam’s sin resulted in “the many” (v. 19), meaning all humanity, becoming sinners judicially/positionally, while Christ’s righteousness resulted in “the many” (v. 19), meaning all Christians, becoming judicially/positionally righteous.262

The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, (5:20)

Back in verse 13, as he so often does in Romans (see, for example, 2:12-15, 17-18, 20, 23, 25-27, 3:19-21, 28, 31, and 4:13-16), Paul made mention of the Mosaic Law. In what Lloyd-Jones (4:281) has described as tying up a loose end and as a postscript (4:283), Paul now gives one of the purposes of the Law: It “came in so that the transgression would increase” (cf. Galatians 3:19’s “[the Law] was added for the sake of defining transgressions,” NASB marginal note). What exactly does Paul mean by this? Certainly he does not mean that God gave the Law so that there would be more sin, for God is not the source of sin (James 1:13-14). Most likely, he means that the Law had the effect of magnifying sin, clearly showing what was

260“It undoubtedly it was in the cross of Christ and the shedding of his blood that this obedience came to its climactic expression, but obedience comprehends the totality of the Father’s will as fulfilled by Christ” (Murray, p. 205).

261“It means ‘to set down in the rank of,’ or ‘to place in the category of,’ or ‘to appoint to a particular class’” (Lloyd-Jones, 4:271). “It denotes the making … by a judicial act” (Henry, p. 400).

262“The same principle of solidarity that appears in our relation to Adam, and by reason of which we are involved in his sin, obtains in our relation to Christ. And just as the relation to Adam means the imputation to us of his disobedience, so the relation to Christ means the imputation to us of his obedience. Justification means our involvement in the obedience of Christ in terms of the same principle by which we are involved in Adam’s sin. Nothing less is demanded by the analogy instituted in this verse [v. 19]. Again, the involvement in the obedience of Christ is not that of our personal voluntary obedience nor that of our subjective holiness. This would violate the forensic character of the justification with which the apostle is dealing. But we must not tone down the formula ‘constituted righteousness’ to any lower terms than the gracious judgment on God’s part whereby the obedience of Christ is reckoned to our account ...” (Murray, pp. 205-206).
already there (cf. vs. 13-14 and comments on, as well as Romans 3:20, 7:7, and 13). Hendriksen (p. 184)
uses the analogy of a magnifying glass, which does not increase the dirty spots on a garment, but simply
reveals the spots that are already there.

This “increase” in sin, however, is no match for God’s grace. God’s grace “abounded all the more” in
order to overcome it (cf. vs. 15 and 17, as well as 2 Corinthians 9:8, Ephesians 1:7, 2:7, 1 Timothy 1:14,
and 1 Peter 4:10). God’s grace does not merely counteract or cancel sin, but conquers it! The Greek verb
translated “abounded all the more” literally means “superabounded” (the Greek verb is huperperisseuo,
the Greek preposition, huper, “super, above, beyond” + the Greek verb, perisseuo, “to abound”). As the
songwriter has written: “Grace that is greater than all our sin.”

so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord. (5:21)

In what Lloyd-Jones (4:315) calls “one of the most glorious statements in the whole of Scripture,” Paul
gives the bottom line (“so that”).

While it is true that sin has held and continues to hold sway over those in Adam (“as sin reigned in death”;
ciaf. John 8:34 and 2 Peter 2:19), its bondage has been broken for those in Christ (a point Paul will make in
the next chapter, chapter 6), for the grace of God has overruled (“so grace would reign through
righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”). “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory …
the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:54 and 57).

In “light” of the darkness of sin, God’s grace is magnified all the more. As Murray (p. 208) states: “The
apostle construes the multiplying of trespass which the giving of the law promoted as magnifying and
demonstrating the superabounding riches of divine grace. The more transgression is multiplied and
aggravated the greater is the grace that abounds unto justification and the more the lustre of that grace is
made manifest.” Henry (p. 401) says it this way: “The greater the strength of the enemy, the greater the
honour of the conqueror.”

God’s grace is truly magnificent! Where sin, condemnation, and death once reigned (cf. v. 17), grace (and
the righteousness, justification, and life that comes with it) reigns instead. As Charles Wesley has written in
the hymn, “O for a Thousand Tongues”: “The triumphs of His grace.”

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263 From the hymn, “Grace Greater Than Our Sin” by Julia Johnston.

264 See Ephesians 2:1-10, where Paul makes the same contrast between the gloom and
doom of sin (Ephesians 2:1-3) and the glory of God’s grace (Ephesians 2:4-10).
Romans 6:1-8:16

In 1:16-17, Paul stated his “thesis” for the book of Romans, declaring that in the gospel (the gospel being the theme of the book of Romans) “the righteousness of God is revealed” (1:17). In 1:18-3:20, he gave the bad news that all men (3:9-20), whether Gentile (1:18-32) or Jew (2:1-3:8), are unrighteous (3:10) and in desperate need of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. In 3:21 (“but now”), Paul began giving the gospel, the good news (“gospel” literally means “good news”—see comments on 1:1) that the unrighteous can become righteous positionally (justification/imputed righteousness) (3:21-5:21), practically (sanctification/imparted righteousness) (6:1-8:16), and perfectly (glorification/impeccable righteousness) (8:17-30). Justification, sanctification, and glorification, though distinct, are inseparably-linked chains in the salvation process. See especially Romans 8:30 and Philippians 1:6 in this regard. See also the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;He who began a good work in you&quot; Philippians 1:6</td>
<td>&quot;will perfect it until&quot; Philippians 1:6</td>
<td>&quot;the day of Christ Jesus&quot; Philippians 1:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have been saved</td>
<td>are being saved</td>
<td>will be saved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saved from sin’s penalty</td>
<td>being saved from sin’s power</td>
<td>saved from sin’s presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>Sanctification</td>
<td>Glorification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initial or positional sanctification</td>
<td>Progressive sanctification</td>
<td>final, complete, or perfect sanctification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commencement</td>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>culmination completion consummation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>becoming a Christian</td>
<td>becoming more and more like Christ</td>
<td>being with Christ</td>
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Answering Objections (6:1-23)
The sixth chapter of Romans may be divided into two sections, each of which asks and answers a question. In 6:1-14, Paul asks and answers the question, “Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” (6:1). In 6:15-23, Paul asks and answers the question, “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (6:15). The question of 6:1 is an objection that arose from what Paul had said in 5:20. The question of 6:15 is an objection that arises from what Paul says in 6:14.
Answering the First Objection (6:1-14)
Beginning in Romans 6:1, Paul’s focus turns from justification (3:21-5:21) to sanctification (6:1-8:16). In 6:1-14\textsuperscript{265}, he shows how sanctification is inseparable from justification\textsuperscript{266} by basing sanctification on justification. In verses 1-11, he makes the case that we are positionally dead to sin and alive to righteousness based on our union with Christ, while beginning in verse 12, he makes the case that we should be practically dead to sin and alive to righteousness based on our position (notice the “therefore” that begins v. 12). The indicatives of the Christian life (what God has done for us in Christ) are the basis of the imperatives of Christian living (what we must do). We must become (in practice) what we already are (in position). Justification (the imputation of righteousness/declared righteous) must (and infallibly will) result in sanctification (the impartation of righteousness/made righteous).

It is interesting to note that throughout this section Paul roots practical exhortation in theological truth (notice the “know” in v. 3 and the “knowing” in vs. 6 and 9; cf. 7:1 and 11:2). What you believe affects how you behave (learning ⇔ living; creed ⇔ deed). “Christian living depends on Christian learning” (Wiersbe, p. 530). Christianity is founded upon faith (in God and His Word), not upon feelings.

Positionally Dead to Sin and Alive to Righteousness (6:1-11)
Based on his connection to Christ (see 5:12-21), the believer is united to Christ’s death and resurrection and is, therefore, positionally dead to sin and alive to righteousness.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? (6:1-2)

Paul begins this section by asking (v. 1) and emphatically answering (v. 2) a question that naturally arises from what he had just said in 5:20b (notice the “then” in 6:1).

\textsuperscript{265}Schreiner (p. 302) calls 6:1-14 “one of the most complicated and controversial portions of the letter.”

\textsuperscript{266}“The whole sixth chapter of Romans, for example, was written for no other purpose than to assert and demonstrate that justification and sanctification are indissolubly bound together; that we cannot have the one without having the other; that, to use its own figurative language, dying with Christ and living with Christ are integral elements in one indisintegrable salvation” (B. B. Warfield, Perfectionism, p. 356). Cranfield (p. 126) likewise states: “…[J]ustification has inescapable moral implications and to think to accept it without at the same time striving to lay hold on sanctification would be a profane absurdity.” Unfortunately, in our day theologians such as Zane Hodges (to borrow the terminology of Matthew 19:6 in the KJV) have “put asunder” what God “hath joined together” by teaching that one can be justified without being sanctified.
As in our day, there were those in Paul's day who distorted doctrine (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). One such distortion was turning the doctrine of justification by grace into a license to sin (cf. Jude 4). Some surmised: 

If an increase in sin led to an increase in grace (5:20b), then continuing in sin after salvation (“Are we to continue in sin,” v. 1) leads to an increase in grace (“so that grace may increase,” v. 1) and is, therefore, desirable (cf. 3:8 and comments on).

In a verse that Boice (2:650) calls “the most important verse in the Bible for believers in evangelical churches to understand today,” Paul’s response to such convoluted thinking is (as in 3:8) curt: “May it never be” (v. 2; cf. 3:4 and comments on). Grace doesn’t lead to sin; rather, it limits it (see Romans 6:14 and Titus 2:11-14).

Paul answers the question of verse 1 with another question in verse 2, making the point that Christians cannot “continue in sin” (v. 1)/”live in it” (v. 2) because they have died to it267 (“we who died to sin,” v. 2; cf. Galatians 5:24). By dead to sin, Paul does not mean that Christians no longer sin (see Romans 7:14-25, 1 John 1:8, and 10), but that they are no longer enslaved to sin’s power/under sin’s sway (see Romans 6:6, 17, and 20); they no longer habitually practice sin (see 1 John 3:6, 8, and 9). A true believer cannot and, therefore, will not continuously live under the sway of sin’s power because he has died to its power. At conversion, one goes from being unable not to sin to being able not to sin. One day (at glorification), the believer will be unable to sin.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. (6:3-7)

At the end of verse 2, Paul made the point that believers have died to sin. In verses 3-10, he explains how this is so, before reiterating in verse 11 the point of verse 2. By virtue of being united to One (vs. 3-7) who Himself died to sin (vs. 8-10), believers have, therefore, also died to sin (vs. 2 and 11). By virtue of being “in Christ/united to Christ” (“into Christ Jesus” in v. 3; “with Him” in vs. 4, 6, and 8; “united with Him” in v. 5; “with Christ” in v. 8; “in Christ Jesus” in v. 11), the believer partakes of all that Christ did. Therefore, when Christ died, the believer died (6:3, 5a, 6a, and 8a; cf. Galatians 2:20 and 2 Timothy 2:11). When Christ was buried, the believer was buried (6:4a; cf. Colossians 2:12a). When Christ arose, the believer arose (6:4b, 5b, 8b; cf. Colossians 2:12b and 13b).268

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267 At conversion, one goes from being dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1) to being dead to sin (Morris, p. 245).

268 The previous section of the epistle, 5:12-21, with its stress on incorporation (into Adam or Christ), prepares us nicely for the truths of identification stressed in this section of the epistle.
Appropriately, Paul uses the imagery of baptism in verses 3 and 4, baptism signifying identification. When one is baptized, he is publicly identifying himself with Christ and His cause. Though many believe Paul has water baptism in mind in verses 3 and 4, this writer thinks otherwise. While it is true that baptism (immersion being the only “mode” that can legitimately be called “baptism,” since the Greek verb for baptize, baptizo means to dip, plunge, or immerse) physically portrays the spiritual reality that the believer has been united to/is identifying with the death (immersion), burial (submersion)\(^{269}\), and resurrection (emersion) of Christ, this writer is of the opinion that Paul is using baptism not so much in a literal sense, but more so in a metaphorical sense to signify that at conversion one is baptized into/immersed into/united with/identified with Christ (”baptized into Christ Jesus,” v. 3; “baptized into His death,” v. 3; “buried with Him through baptism into death,” v. 4; cf. Galatians 3:27).

The historical, physical realities of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ correspond to (“likeness” in v. 5) a spiritual dynamic that takes place at conversion: the believer dies to sin (a spiritual reality corresponding to the physical reality of Christ’s death; “united with Him in the likeness of His death,” v. 5a) and is made alive to righteousness (a spiritual reality corresponding to the physical reality of Christ’s resurrection; “united with Him ... in the likeness of His resurrection,” v. 5b).\(^{270}\) See especially 1 Peter 2:24 in this regard.

\(^{269}\)One must remember at this point, however, that Christ’s body was placed in a tomb, not buried under the ground.

\(^{270}\)Neither Paul here, nor Scripture elsewhere, gives a spiritual reality in the life of the believer that corresponds to the physical reality of Christ’s burial. In both cases (the believer’s burial and Christ’s burial), the significance of burial is that it testifies to the reality of death and resurrection, proving that one is really dead and that one has been resurrected, not merely resuscitated. “By referring to burial here Paul has expressed in the most decisive and emphatic way the truth of our having died with Christ; for burial is the seal set to the fact of death—it is when a man’s relatives and friends leave his body in a grave and return home without him that the fact that he no longer shares their life is exposed with inescapable conclusiveness. So the death which we died in baptism was a death ratified and sealed by burial, an altogether unambiguous death” (Cranfield, p. 132). “The inseparable conjunction of death and burial in the case of Jesus himself carries of necessity a similar conjunction in the case of those who are united with him in his death. The purpose of bringing this aspect of union with Christ into focus is apparently twofold. It stresses the completeness of identification with Christ in his death—the burial of Jesus was the proof of the reality of his death—and it prepares for that which is to follow in the latter part of this verse, namely, union with Christ in his resurrection—it is burial that gives meaning to resurrection” (Murray, p. 215). In Ephesians 2:5-6, Paul continues the chain of death, burial, and resurrection by teaching that the believer is not only resurrected with Christ (v. 5b), but also ascended with Christ (v. 6a; cf. Colossians 3:1) and enthroned with Christ (v. 6b), the physical, historical realities of Christ’s ascension and enthronement (or session) also corresponding to spiritual realities in the life of the believer.
Just “as Christ was raised [physically] from the dead through the glory [glory ≈ power\textsuperscript{271}; cf. 2 Corinthians 13:4, Ephesians 3:16, and Colossians 1:11] of the Father” (v. 4; cf. John 11:40), so the believer is raised spiritually to new life in Christ through God’s power (“so we too might walk in newness of life,” v. 4; cf. Ephesians 2:5).\textsuperscript{272}

When a person gets saved, his “old self” (Ephesians 4:22 and Colossians 3:9), the sin-bound person he was before he got saved, is crucified (“our old self was crucified with Him,” v. 6a). As a result (“in order that,” v. 6b), sin’s power over him becomes inoperative (“our body of sin\textsuperscript{273} might be done away with,” v. 6b; Wiersbe, p. 532: “rendered inactive, made of no effect”; Boice, 2:670: “no longer to exert a controlling force or power”; Lloyd-Jones, 5:61: “disannulled (be rendered void, or ineffective)”; cf. Romans 3:3, 31, and 4:14, where the same Greek verb is translated, “nullify”/”nullified”). As a further result (“so that,” v. 6c), he is emancipated from his slavery to sin\textsuperscript{274}/his bondage to sin is broken (“we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin,” vs. 6c-7; cf. John 8:34, 1 Peter 4:1-2, and 2 Peter 2:19).\textsuperscript{275} The believer is free from sin, not free to sin (Wiersbe, p. 532).

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. (6:8-10)

In verse 8, Paul reiterates (“Now”) what he said in verse 5, that “if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death” (v. 5a)/“if we have died with Christ”\textsuperscript{276} (v. 8a), then “we shall also be [united with

\textsuperscript{271}“By ‘glory’ here is meant no doubt the power of God gloriously exercised. God’s use of His power is always glorious, and His use of it to raise His Son from the dead is a specially clear manifestation of His glory” (Cranfield, p. 132). Accordingly, Lloyd-Jones (5:48) suggests translating: “Christ was raised up from the dead by the glorious power of the Father.”

\textsuperscript{272}This truth is communicated elsewhere by Paul in Ephesians 1:19-20 (cf. Ephesians 3:20, Philippians 3:10, and 2 Peter 1:3). Christian, you have the power to live victoriously, so “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10)!

\textsuperscript{273}“The expression ‘the body of sin’ would mean the body as conditioned and controlled by sin, the sinful body” (Murray, p. 220).

\textsuperscript{274}“This bondservice, it should be noted, is conceived of as one that we voluntarily render—we serve sin. It is not a service to which we are involuntarily and compulsorily consigned” (Murray, p. 222).

\textsuperscript{275}Charles Wesley, in stanza 4 of his classic hymn, “And Can It Be,” captures this truth so well: “Long my imprisoned spirit lay fastbound in sin and nature’s night; Thine eye diffused a quickening ray. I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free: I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”

\textsuperscript{276}The “if” clauses that begin verses 5 and 8 are “first class conditions” in the Greek,
Because the believer is united to Christ (vs. 3-7), the believer’s death to sin (vs. 2 and 11) is rooted in Christ’s death to sin (“For the death that He died, He died to sin,” v. 10). Christ died to sin, not in the same sense that the believer does, but in the sense that He died in relation to sin277. Christ entered the realm in which sin held sway (our sin-dominated world) and willingly submitted Himself to the penalty of sin (even though He had no sin of His own—2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22, and 1 John 3:5), death, in order to break the bondage of both sin and death through resurrection (“death no longer is master over Him,” v. 9)278. Christ broke the bondage of sin’s consequence, death (v. 9; cf. Acts 2:24, as well as the words to the Easter hymn, “Christ Arose”: “Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus my Savior! He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!”), enabling those who are united to Him, believers to be freed from the bondage of sin (vs. 6-7) and death (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Christ’s resurrection was once for all279 (“Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again,” v. 9a; cf. Revelation 1:18) because (“For,” v. 10a) His death was (“the death that He died, He died to sin once for all,” v. 10a280; cf. Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, 10:10, 12, 14, and 1 Peter 3:18). Consequently, the believer need not fear that either his death to sin or his resurrection to life will fail, because he is united to One whose death to sin and resurrection to life were both “once for all.”

After having died in relation to sin, Christ lives in the realm of God (Lloyd-Jones, 5:107) (“but the life that He lives, He lives to God,” v. 10).

meaning that they are assumed to be true and, thus, could be translated “since” instead of “if.”

277While Christ died in relation to sin during His First Advent, His Second Advent will not be in relation to sin (Hebrews 9:28).

278“Because he [Christ] was vicariously identified with sin, he was likewise identified with the wages of sin which is death. And so he was subject to the power of death. The resurrection from the dead is the guarantee that he vanquished the power of death and this victory over death is an irrevocable finality” (Murray, p. 223).

279Christ’s resurrection differed from all others that preceded it (such as Lazarus’ in John 11) in that Christ, unlike Lazarus, et. al. did not die again. Accordingly, Moo (p. 378) calls all other so-called “resurrections” “revivifications.”

280The Greek adverb translated “once for all” in verse 10 is ephapax, an intensified form of the Greek adverb, hapax, meaning “once.”

281The Roman Catholic Mass flies directly in the face of the biblical truth that Christ died “once for all.”
Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (6:11)

Paul concludes ("Even so") his emphasis on the believer’s position in relation to sin (dead to it) and righteousness (alive to it) by virtue of his position in Christ. Because the believer is “in Christ Jesus” and Christ died to sin (v. 10a) and lives to God (v. 10b), the believer is to consider himself to be positionally dead to sin (cf. vs. 2, 6, and 7) and alive to God (cf. vs. 5b and 8b), as well.

The Greek verb translated “consider” (Lloyd-Jones, 5:113: “reckon” … “to regard oneself as something” … “conclude”) is in the present tense, signifying that the believer is to continually consider this truth. Continual meditation on such positional truth is “half the battle” in our war against sin.

Two interesting observations can be made about this verse: 1) It is the first exhortation in the entire epistle. Paul lays a 5½-chapter, 148-verse theological foundation before giving his first practical directive; and 2) The command Paul gives in this verse is an emphatic one. The original literally reads: “you you reckon yourselves,” doubly emphatic by means of the repetition of the personal pronoun, “you” and the inclusion of the reflexive pronoun, “yourselves.”

Practically Dead to Sin and Alive to Righteousness (6:12-14)

Based on his connection to Christ (see 5:12-21), the believer is united to Christ’s death and resurrection and is, therefore, positionally dead to sin and alive to righteousness (see 6:1-11). Because the believer is positionally dead to sin and alive to righteousness, he is, therefore, to be practically dead to sin and alive to righteousness.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, (6:12)

In light of the positional truths of the preceding verses (the reason why the “therefore” that begins v. 12 is there for), the believer is to take action. The indicatives of the Christian life (Romans 6:1-11; cf. Philippians 2:13) ignite the imperatives of Christian living (Romans 6:12-14; cf. Philippians 2:12).282 For example, our “old self” has been "laid aside" (Colossians 3:9; cf. Romans 6:6); therefore, we are to “lay aside the old self” (Ephesians 4:22).

Because Christ has ended the reign of sin and death (Romans 5:21; cf. Romans 6:10a and comments on), and the believer is united to Christ in His death (Romans 6:3, 5a, 6a, and 8a), sin has been (positionally) and ought to be (practically) dethroned in the believer’s life (“do not let sin reign in your mortal body”). The sin that has made our bodies susceptible to death (“mortal”) has had its power put to death through the death of Christ, enabling those united to Christ, believers to not let it reign (“do not let sin reign”) to not obey its lusts (“so that you obey its lusts”).

282 “Let not sin reign—this is the imperative. And it flows from the indicative. It is only because sin does not reign that it can be said, “Therefore let not sin reign”” (Murray, p. 227).
The command to “not let sin reign” is a forceful one, “not” being the first word in the Greek sentence, for emphasis (the Greek literally reads: “not therefore do let reign the sin”).

The Greek verb translated “obey” literally means “to hear under” (hupakouo, the Greek preposition, hupo, meaning “under” + the Greek verb, akouo, meaning “to hear”). The believer is not to submit to sin (under) by listening to its siren call (hear).

and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (6:13)

Sanctification involves both a do and a don’t. Don’t give yourself over to sin and unrighteousness (“do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness”); do give yourself over to God and righteousness (“present … your members as instruments of righteousness to God”).

Sanctification is a war. The Greek noun translated “instruments” is literally “weapons” (so Moo and Calvin; cf. John 18:3, 2 Corinthians 6:7, and 10:4, where the same Greek noun is so translated). The enemy (Satan, 1 Peter 5:8) would like nothing more than to use us as weapons in his war against Christ and His cause. Let us not unwittingly let him do so by living unrighteously (“as instruments of unrighteousness”).

Once again, Paul roots an imperative (“present yourselves to God”) in an indicative (“as those alive from the dead”). Christians are those who have been spiritually resurrected; therefore, they are to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). We are to give ourselves over to God completely (“present yourselves to God”; cf. Romans 12:1), putting every member of our bodies (“your members”—eyes, ears, tongue, mind, hands, feet, etc.—at His disposal (cf. the words to the hymn, “Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated”).

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (6:14)

Once again, Paul roots an imperative (“sin shall not be master over you”; cf. v. 12’s “do not let sin reign in your mortal body”) in an indicative (“for you are not under law but under grace”).

To be “under law” (cf. Galatians 3:23, 4:5, and 5:18) means to be in a state where one’s only hope of heaven is meriting eternal life by means of works/law-keeping, an impossibility (Romans 3:20, 8:3, and Galatians 2:16).

To be “under grace” means to be in a state where one’s only hope of heaven is receiving eternal life as a gracious gift (Romans 3:24, 6:23, and Ephesians 2:8) through faith in Christ, Who perfectly kept the Law in the believer’s behalf (Romans 8:3). See especially Galatians 5:4 in this regard.
The transition from “under law” to “under grace” that takes place at conversion involves a transformation that enables the believer to not let sin master him283 (“sin shall not be master over you”; cf. Romans 3:9, where “under sin” means to be under the sway of sin’s power). Sin did not master Christ (see Romans 6:9 and comments on); therefore, sin should not master us (Romans 6:14), those united to Him (Romans 6:3-7).

Paul concludes the section of 6:1-14 on the same note he began it, teaching that grace limits sin (vs. 1-2), rather than leading to more sin; grace is a deterrent, not a catalyst, to sin.

Answering the Second Objection (6:15-23)

In 6:1-14, Paul asked and emphatically answered a question (6:1-2) that arose from something he had previously said (in 5:20b) and, in so doing, launched into an extended discussion of the believer’s position in Christ/union with Christ (6:3-7), which renders the believer dead to sin (i.e., separated from sin’s sway/power) and, thus, unable to live a sinful lifestyle (6:2).

In 6:15-23, Paul likewise asks and emphatically answers a question (6:15) that arose from something he had previously said (in 6:14b) and, in so doing, launches into an extended discussion of the believer’s change of slave masters, which renders the believer a slave to obedience (6:16), righteousness (6:18-19), and God (6:22) and, thus, unable to live a sinful lifestyle (6:15).

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! (6:15)

As mentioned previously (see comments on 6:1-2), there were those in Paul’s day who distorted his doctrine (cf. 2 Peter 3:16), particularly his teaching on grace, distorting it to the point that it gave justification to sin (cf. Jude 4). In 6:1, the distortion was that sinning was justifiable because it gave occasion for God’s grace to shine. Here in 6:15, the distortion was that sinning was justifiable because the believer is already under the umbrella of God’s grace and, thus, immune from being judged by God for his sin (“Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?”).

As in 6:2, Paul’s response is emphatic: “May it never be!” Only an unbeliever would think this way (cf. 3:8). “To make being ‘under grace’ an excuse for sinning is a sign that one is not really ‘under grace’ at all” (F. F. Bruce, quoted in Hughes, p. 130). Liberty from the Mosaic Law does not mean liberty from law/license to sin, for the believer is still under the “law of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2)/the “law of God” (Romans 7:25). As Paul will go on to show in the verses to follow, salvation results in a new lord and new laws (Henry, p. 405).

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283“To be ‘under law’ is to be subject to the constraining and sin-strengthening regime of the old age; to be ‘under grace’ is to be subject to the new age in which freedom from the power of sin is available” (Moo, p. 389).
Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? (6:16)

Once again (cf. 6:3, 6, and 9), Paul roots his exhortation in a theological truth ("do you not know"), the truth being that everyone is enslaved ("you are slaves") to one of two masters ("either ... or ...".). The slavery analogy was particularly appropriate in light of the historical context, because slaves made up approximately one-third of the populace of the city of Rome in that day (some have suggested that the percentage may have been as much as 50%). Therefore, it is likely that many of the members of the church in Rome either had been or currently were slaves (Hughes, p. 130; cf. 1:1 and comments on). Everyone is either a slave of sin (every unbeliever) or of obedience (every believer). The question isn't: Am I a slave?, but: Of whom or what am I a slave? No one is in a state of neutrality or absolute freedom (only God is absolutely free), equally inclined to choose either right or wrong at any particular moment. Everyone obeys someone or something. At conversion, one simply changes slave masters, being released from slavery to sin/Satan (cf. John 8:34, 2 Timothy 2:26, and 2 Peter 2:19) and becoming enslaved to obedience/righteousness/God/Christ (cf. Romans 1:1 and comments on, 1 Corinthians 7:22b, Ephesians 6:6, and 1 Peter 2:16).

Though Paul will go on to identify the object of the believer's slavery as righteousness (in vs. 18 & 19) and, ultimately, God (v. 22), it is interesting that he first identifies the object as obedience ("slaves ... of obedience"), indicative of the fact that obedience is a hallmark of the true believer (cf. 1 John 2:3-4).

Notice that throughout this passage Paul gives two, and only two, alternatives and that the two are mutually exclusive, either/or (cf. Christ's words in Matthew 6:24).

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284 Many in our society would no doubt balk at such a statement, for as Hughes (p. 133) puts it: “Obedience is not a popular word today. It is somewhat of a cultural obscenity.”

285 “The believer must face the fact that his salvation actually means a change of bondage” (Harrison, pp. 72-73); “On becoming a believer one is simply exchanging one form of slavery for another” (Harrison, p. 73).

286 “One is never ‘free’ from a master, and those non-Christians who think that they are ‘free’ are under an allusion created and sustained by Satan” (Moo, p. 399). The Prodigal Son (Luke 15) was one who thought that he was free, but found out that sin is a harsh taskmaster.

287 “[W]e have no right to sin. To sin means that we are doing something of which our Master and our Owner disapproves” (Lloyd-Jones, 5:293).

288 “Only two alternatives present themselves, to have sin for one’s master or to have God ...; there is no third possibility” (Cranfield, p. 141).
But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, (6:17)\textsuperscript{289}

The believer's bondage to sin has been broken ("you were slaves of sin"; cf. 6:6, 7, and 14), and "thanks be to God" (cf. 7:25) that it has. God gets ALL the credit AND glory\textsuperscript{290} for the believer's salvation; thus, Paul rightfully thanks God for the conversion of the believers in Rome (cf. 1:8 and comments on).\textsuperscript{291} Accordingly, the Greek verb translated "to which you were committed" is in the passive voice, indicating that the subject has been acted upon (if the subject was doing the acting, the verb would be in the active voice and read something like "to which you committed yourselves")\textsuperscript{292}, the One doing the acting being God.

Paul describes the conversion of the Roman believers in terms of obedience\textsuperscript{293} ("you became obedient"; cf. 1:5's "the obedience of faith" and comments on), and wholehearted obedience at that ("from the heart"). The gospel is something that must be obeyed (Acts 6:7, Romans 16:26, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, 1 Peter 4:17, and 1 John 3:23a).\textsuperscript{294}

\textsuperscript{289}Lloyd-Jones (5:205) calls this verse “one of the great striking and outstanding verses in the Bible.”

\textsuperscript{290}I have heard it said, “I don’t care who gets the credit, as long as God gets the glory.” This statement is flawed. God gets the glory precisely because He gets the credit. He cannot get the glory without also getting the credit.

\textsuperscript{291}“Notice that Paul does not praise them for what they have done, but thanks God for what he has done in them” (Morris, p. 262). “[I]t is not surprising that the Apostle began this statement in the way he did. How does it start? ‘God be thanked …’ Of course! There is nobody else to thank. ‘He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.’ Every mouth has been stopped; there is no room for boasting. Man has done nothing; man can do nothing. Who has moulded us anew? God! ‘He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.’ Yes, God be thanked, ‘I am what I am by the grace of God’” (Lloyd-Jones, 5:215-216).

\textsuperscript{292}While it is true that when a person gets saved, he exercises repentance and saving faith/commitment, he does so only because God has graciously granted him the ability to do so (see Acts 11:18, 14:27, and 2 Timothy 2:25). The proper way of stating this truth theologically is that man participates, not cooperates, in salvation. Salvation is unilateral/monergistic, not bilateral/synergistic.

\textsuperscript{293}Accordingly, the Greek verb translated “became obedient” is in the aorist tense in the Greek, indicating a point-in-time event.

\textsuperscript{294}“Paul uses ‘obey’ because he wants to underscore the aspect of submission to Christ as Lord of life that is part of becoming a Christian” (Moo, p. 401).
The object of their obedience was “that form of teaching,” indicative of the fact that there is a body of truth that must be believed in order for one to be saved (“the faith” of Jude 3).295

Interestingly, the Greek verb translated “were committed” is the same verb used to describe the giving over of unbelievers in judgment in 1:24, 26, and 28. Thanks be to God that those who were once being given over to the consequences of their sin have now been given over to the teaching of the gospel (cf. “An Oasis” following comments on 1:32).

and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (6:18)

Though the believer has been freed from sin’s sway/power (“having been freed from sin”; cf. Romans 6:7, 22, and 8:2, as well as Christ’s words in John 8:32 and 36), his freedom from sin ≠ freedom to sin (Moo, p. 396), for freedom from sin takes place at conversion, and at conversion the believer goes from being a slave of sin to a slave of righteousness (“you became slaves of righteousness”). Christian freedom is not the freedom to do what we want to do, but the freedom to do what God wants us to do. As Moo (p. 402) states: “Paul’s concept of freedom is not that of autonomous self-direction but of deliverance from those enslaving powers that would prevent the human being from becoming what God intended.”

As with the verb translated “were committed” in verse 17, the Greek verbals translated “having been freed” and “you became slaves” (more literally: “you were enslaved”) here in verse 18 are in the passive voice, indicative of the fact that God is the One who freed the Roman believers from their bondage to sin and enslave them to righteousness. Both these verbs are also in the aorist tense, indicative of the fact that the release from sin and the enslavement to righteousness occurred at a point in time, at conversion.

I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. (6:19)

Paul begins this verse by admitting that the slavery analogy he uses throughout this section is an imperfect one296, but one to which the Romans in their human frailty could readily relate (“I am speaking in human

295. What must one believe in order to be saved? One must believe the gospel message, which includes the fact of man’s condition (sin), God’s remedy for that condition (the person and work of Christ), and the response God requires in order for that remedy to be applied to the sinner (repentance and faith). In order to be saved, one must believe that he is a sinner who has fallen short of the standard of perfection demanded by a holy God and is, therefore, deserving of sin’s penalty, death; that the God-man, Jesus Christ, has met the standard by means of His sinless life and has paid the penalty by means of His sacrificial death; and that by responding in repentance and faith (i.e., a repentant faith or a believing repentance) he can be justified (declared righteous) in God’s sight as a result of Christ’s work (both His sinless life and His sacrificial death) being imputed to him.

296. “Paul is aware that the figure of slavery is unworthy, inadequate and apt to be
terms because of the weakness of your flesh”; cf. Romans 3:5).

Because the Roman believers are now slaves of righteousness (“you became slaves of righteousness” in 6:18b), Paul exhorts them to live in light of this truth (“present your members as slaves to righteousness”; cf. v. 13), to become in practice what they already are in position. Once again, an imperative of Christian living/a duty is based upon an indicative of the Christian life/a doctrine. The Romans are slaves of righteousness (an indicative, v. 18b); therefore, they should present their members as slaves to righteousness (an imperative, v. 19c).

The degree to which they once served sin (“just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness”) is the degree to which they were to now serve righteousness (“so now present your members as slaves to righteousness”). Wiersbe (p. 533) writes: “A friend once said to me, ‘I want to be as good a saint as I was a sinner.’” Lloyd-Jones (5:264) admonishes believers whose new life does not match the intensity of their old: “In the old life they gave up most of their leisure time to their pleasures; then when they become Christians they tend to say, ‘Of course, I live a very busy life and have not much leisure time; one service on Sunday is quite enough.’ They did not behave like that when they were in the world; they were not content then with but one session; they were not content with the minimum; they wanted the maximum. Is that not pathetic?”

In words reminiscent of the end of chapter 1, Paul points out that sin leads to further sin (“lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness”).

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (6:20)

The only sense in which an unbeliever is “free” is “in regard to righteousness.” Before the Fall, Adam was able to sin or able not to sin. After the Fall, Adam and all his descendants became unable not to sin. At conversion, one becomes able not to sin. At glorification, the believer becomes unable to sin.

Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. (6:21)

There is no benefit in being a slave of sin (“what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed?”). Slavery to sin leads only to death (“the outcome of those things is death”; cf. Genesis 2:17, Romans 5:12, 21, 6:16, 23, 7:5, and James 1:15).

A sign of true conversion is the fact that one goes from giving “hearty approval” to sin (1:32) to being ashamed of it (“things of which you are now ashamed”).

grievously misleading, as a way of indicating the believer’s relation to God. Hence his apology in v. 19a” (Cranfield, p. 141). “The illustration from slavery is inadequate because the relationship believers have with God is shorn of all the negative elements present in slavery” (Schreiner, p. 333).
But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. (6:22)

Contrary to (“But now”; cf. 3:21 and comments on, including footnote 159) the unbeneﬁcial nature of slavery to sin (v. 21), slavery to obedience/righteousness/God is beneﬁcial (“you derive your beneﬁt”), for it results in the believer’s sanctiﬁcation (“resulting in sanctiﬁcation”; cf. v. 19), which ultimately results in his receiving eternal life (“and the outcome, eternal life”; cf. 1 Peter 1:9) in the full and final²⁹⁷ sense at gloriﬁcation.

Notice how this verse alludes to three of the inseparable links in the chain of salvation: justification (“having been freed from sin and enslaved to God”; cf. v. 18), sanctiﬁcation (“resulting in sanctiﬁcation”; cf. v. 19), and gloriﬁcation (“the outcome, eternal life”). This verse implicitly teaches the truth taught explicitly elsewhere in Scripture: “no holiness, no Heaven” (cf. Matthew 7:16-23 and Hebrews 12:14).²⁹⁸

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (6:23)

In a verse reminiscent of 5:21 and one that Spurgeon (cited in Boice, 2:706) called “a divine statement of truth worthy to be written across the sky,” Paul summarizes what he has been saying in the previous two verses, once again contrasting the unbeneﬁcial nature of slavery to sin (v. 21) with the beneﬁcial nature of slavery to God (v. 22).

The slave master called sin (sin being personiﬁed) pays “wages” (v. 23a), giving the sinner enslaved to him what he has earned, death (cf. Genesis 2:17, Romans 5:12, 21, 6:16, 21, 7:5, and James 1:15), which ultimately means eternal separation from God (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

By contrast (“but”), the slave master called God gives a “free gift” (cf. footnote 256), earned by Christ, giving the sinner something he doesn’t deserve, “eternal life,” which ultimately means being with God for all eternity (John 14:3, Philippians 1:23, and 1 Thessalonians 4:17). This gift of eternal life (cf. Romans 3:24, 5:15, 16, 17, and Ephesians 2:8) only comes through a relationship with “Christ Jesus our Lord” (cf. John 17:3,
Romans 5:21, and 1 John 5:11).

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray.
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

(stanza 4 of “And Can It Be” by Charles Wesley)
Answering Further Objections (7:1-25)

Romans 7 has been called “one of the most famous chapters in the Bible” (Moo, p. 409), “one of the best-known chapters in the Word of God” (Boice, 2:715), “one of the most controversial chapters in the Bible” (Lloyd-Jones, preface to Volume 6), “one of the most disputed and complex chapters” in Romans (Schreiner, p. 343), and “formidable and frightening” (Boice, 2:715).

In chapter 6, Paul’s point was that the power of sin over the believer has been broken by means of the believer’s union with Christ in His death (6:6). In chapter 7, his point is that the power of the Law over the believer has been broken by means of the same (7:4 and 6).

In chapter 6, Paul responded to those who distorted his teaching on grace (6:1-2 and 15). In chapter 7, he responds to those who distorted his teaching on the Law (7:7 and 13).

Chapter 7 can be broken down into three sections: in 7:1-6, Paul deals with the believer and the Law; in 7:7-13 with the Law and sin; and in 7:14-25 with sin and the believer.

The Believer and the Law (7:1-6)

In this section, Paul states the principle that “the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives” (v. 1), illustrates the principle (vs. 2-3), and applies the principle to his readers (vs. 4-6).

Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? (7:1)

As he did so many times in chapter 6 (see vs. 3, 6, 9, and 16), Paul lays a theological foundation (“do you not know”), upon which he builds a superstructure of practical application/exhortation.

The “or” that begins this section shows that this section is connected to the previous one. The connection is with 6:14b’s “you are not under law.” Paul’s aim in this section is to explain how it is that the believer is not under the Law, i.e., not under the domination of the Law (see comments on 6:14).

As has been pointed out previously (see comments on 6:15), though the believer is no longer under the mastery of the Mosaic Law, this does not mean that he is free from all law (the error of the antinomian/libertine).

299Lloyd-Jones (6:1) goes on to say: “No other chapter, perhaps, has been more frequently the cause of discussion and disputation and argument.”

300Throughout this discussion, whenever Law is capitalized, I am referring to the Mosaic Law.
For the married\textsuperscript{301} woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. (7:2-3)

Having concluded verse 1 by stating the principle that “the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives,” Paul illustrates this principle from the realm of marriage in verses 2 and 3.

Paul’s point is that death breaks the marriage bond (“the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband,” v. 2; “if her husband dies, she is free from the law,” v. 3), thus (“So then,” v. 3) making it perfectly legal for one to remarry following the death of a spouse (“so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man,” v. 3; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:39).\textsuperscript{302}

While it is true that Paul’s analogy breaks down at two points—1) in the analogy, the husband dies, while the wife continues living, whereas in the point the analogy is trying to illustrate, the Law (= the husband) continues living, while the wife (= the believer) dies (v. 4) and 2) in the analogy, death means a cessation of existence, whereas in the point the analogy is trying to illustrate, death means a cessation of domination (the “wife,” the believer, does not die/cease to exist, but dies to the Law/is released from the Law’s domination), the main point is clear: death ends the Law’s domination.

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at

\textsuperscript{301}The Greek adjective translated “married” is \textit{hupandros}, which literally means “under man” (the Greek preposition, \textit{hupo}, “under” + the Greek noun, \textit{andros}, “man”). While some interpreters see no significance to this, others see it as consistent with the teaching elsewhere in Scripture that, in marriage, the husband is the head of the wife (1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23).

\textsuperscript{302}These verses are often used as a proof text for the “no divorce, no remarriage” position. Though these verses are certainly consistent with such a position, they do not in and of themselves decide the issue, nor do they necessarily cripple the other positions in the debate (the other positions being “divorce, no remarriage” and “divorce and remarriage”). As Moo (p. 413) states: “These verses are sometimes cited to prove that remarriage on any basis other than the death of one’s spouse is adulterous. Whether this is the biblical teaching or not, these verses at any rate are probably not relevant to the issue. Paul is not teaching about remarriage but citing an example to prove a point. In such a situation, one often generalizes to what is usually true in order to simplify the analogy.” Calvin (p. 247) likewise states: “But as it was not his purpose to decide here the character of the bond of marriage, he was not anxious to mention the causes which release a woman from her husband. It is therefore unreasonable that anything decisive on this point should be sought here.”
work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. (7:4-6)

Paul now applies ("therefore," v. 4) the principle stated in verse 1 and illustrated in verses 2 and 3.

The believer ("my brethren," v. 4) has died to the Law ("you also were made to die to the Law," v. 4; "we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound," v. 6; cf. Romans 6:2, where death to sin there ≈ death to the Law here, and Galatians 2:19); therefore, the Law no longer has jurisdiction over the believer ("we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound," v. 6). Every unbeliever is under the domination of the realm of the Law/sin/death (v. 5). At conversion, one dies to/is separated or released from this realm (vs. 4a and 6a) and "married" to the realm of grace/righteousness/life ("so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God," v. 4; "so that we serve in newness of the Spirit," v. 6). Death (to the Law) releases the believer from her old "husband," the Law (vs. 4a and 6a), enabling her to "marry" a new "husband," Christ (v. 4's "joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead").

The believer's death to the Law is "through the body of Christ" (v. 4), meaning that it is through the believer's union with the death of Christ on the Cross.

Significantly, the Greek verbs translated "made to die" (literally: "put to death") in verse 4 and "have been released" in verse 6 are in the Greek passive voice, indicative of the fact that God is the One doing the acting and is, therefore, the One to get the credit and glory (cf. footnote 290) for the believer's sanctification, his salvation from sin's power (cf. comments on 6:17 and 6:18).

The believer's "marriage" to Christ303 ("joined to another," v. 4) unites her to the resurrection of Christ ("to Him who was raised from the dead," v. 4), enabling her to "bear fruit for God"304 (v. 4; cf. Romans 6:4).

To be "in the flesh" (v. 5) is to be unsaved (cf. Romans 8:7-9).

Paul calls the "passions" (v. 5) that he and the Romans ("we" in v. 5) had while unbelievers305 "sinful"

303The believer’s marriage to Christ is an everlasting one. Unlike the husband in the analogy of 7:2-3, Christ will not die (6:9). Thus, when the believer is “married” to Christ (fully and finally at the marriage of the Lamb, Revelation 19:7-9), there is no “‘till death do us part.” The believer “shall ALWAYS be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

304Fruit bearing is possible only if one is united to Christ (cf. John 15:4-5). Bearing fruit “for God” means for the glory of God (cf. Romans 6:10's “lives to God,” Galatians 2:19's “live to God,” and Philippians 1:11's “to the glory and praise of God”; cf. also Matthew 5:16).

305Praise God, Paul can say “were” in verse 5 and “but now” in verse 6 (cf. 6:22)! Lloyd-Jones (6:83) says concerning this: “If the expression ‘But now’ does not move you, I take leave to query whether you are a Christian.”
passions because not all passions are sinful (the Greek noun translated “passions” is used in the New Testament to describe both good and bad desires; the ascetic and/or celibate would do well to make this distinction).

Such sinful passions were “aroused by the Law” (v. 5), a truth that Paul will develop in the following verses.

Instead of bearing fruit for God (v. 4), such sinful passions bore fruit for death (“to bear fruit for death,” v. 5; cf. Romans 6:21 and 23).

Paul’s words in verse 6, “bound”306 and “serve” (“serve” is the verbal form of the Greek noun for “slave”) are reminiscent of 6:16-22.

When a person gets saved, it’s “out with the old ["oldness of the letter" in v. 6] and in with the new ["newness of the Spirit" in v. 6]” (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Colossians 3:9-10).

Paul’s “Spirit”-"letter" contrast in verse 6 (cf. Romans 2:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:6) is not one between the “spirit of the law” and the “letter of the law,” but between the old era of the Law (the attempt to merit salvation by works/law-keeping, the era in which Paul and the Romans lived before their conversion) and the new era of the Spirit (receiving salvation as a gift based upon the merits of Christ, the era into which Paul and the Romans were ushered at conversion).
Far from being sinful ("On the contrary"; cf. 7:12 and 14), the Law helped identify sin for what it really was ("I would not have come to know sin except through the Law"; cf. Romans 3:20b and 5:20a), rebellion against the revealed will of God. Wiersbe (p. 535; so also Henry, p. 410) gives the analogy of a mirror: just as a mirror (a clean thing) shows us what is already there, how dirty we are physically, so the Law (a clean thing) shows us what is already there, how dirty we are spiritually. Henry (p. 410) also gives the analogy of sunlight rays: just as sunlight rays (a clean thing) show what is already there, the dust particles in the air, so the Law (a clean thing) shows us what is already there, how dusty we are spiritually.

Paul gives as a specific example the 10th commandment, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET" (cf. Exodus 20:17//Deuteronomy 5:21). Did Paul arbitrarily select this particular command? Most think not. Paul likely selected the command against coveting because coveting is a "foundational sin," as sin at its root is a desire to do what self wants more than what God wants. Not surprisingly, Paul elsewhere (in Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5) equates covetousness with idolatry.

But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. (7:8)

Though the Law was not the cause of sin [7:13], it was the occasion for sin (Schreiner, p. 344), for it was “through the commandment” (cf. Romans 7:11 and 13), “the commandment” being the 10th as representative of the whole Law, that sin ("But sin") launched its attack (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:56b). I say “attack” because the Greek noun translated "opportunity" was a word commonly used for a military base from which an attack was launched. Accordingly, Cranfield (p. 153) translates the start of verse 8: “But sin having obtained a base for its operations ....”

308“The tenth commandment strikes directly at the very root of sin, namely, man’s sinful heart, his evil desire” (Hendriksen, p. 220). Sin is not just an outward deed, but also an inward, illicit desire. See Genesis 6:5 and 8:21. Lloyd-Jones (6:118) reminds us that “to desire to sin is sin.”

309“Those whose lives are filled with coveting are guilty of the fundamental sin; by desiring what is forbidden they thereby show that they treasure and delight in someone or something more than they delight in the one true God. God is not their greatest treasure or pleasure” (Schreiner, p. 368).

310“The law becomes the occasion of sin in that the depravity residing in us is thereby aroused to activity” (Murray, p. 254).

311“… [Y]ou can also think of [sin] in terms of military operations, and in this sense it becomes a base in which you make your preparations, in which you train your troops and assemble your artillery and your armaments, and from which you set out upon your campaign” (Lloyd-Jones, 6:120-121).
Paul’s point here in verse 8 is that sin (personified; “But sin”) used the very command not to covet (“taking opportunity through the commandment”) as the means to produce the sin of coveting in Paul’s life (“produced in me coveting of every kind”), thus showing how perverse and pervasive the sin in man is. Rather than inhibiting sin, the Law actually incites it.\(^{312}\)

In the last half of verse 8, Paul makes the statement, “apart from the Law sin is dead,” meaning that sin is dormant\(^{313}\) until the Law comes and incites it (or that sin is imperceptible as sin until the Law identifies it for what it is; the immediate context strongly favors the first option—notice the “for” that connects the first half of verse 8 with the last half of verse 8). Henry (p. 407) states: “The law … did but stir up the corruption, and, like the sun shining upon a dunghill, excite and draw up the filthy steams.”

I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; (7:9)

Paul (“I”) was “once alive apart from the law,” meaning that there was “a time when he was living in a state of blissful indifference to the intensely searching demands that the law made” (Harrison, p. 80), a state of “complacent self-assurance” (Murray, p. 251). For Paul, there was a time when ignorance truly was bliss! It should be understood that Paul wasn’t really alive (all since the Fall are born in a state of spiritual death), but merely thought that he was\(^{314}\), that is, until “the commandment came,” i.e., came home to his consciousness (Murray, p. 251), or “hit home,” giving his sin nature a chance to come alive (“sin became alive”) and slay his “cheerful assumption of innocence” (Morris, p. 282)/his misconception that he was spiritually alive (“and I died”).

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\(^{312}\) “The law, in setting forth God’s standard, arouses sin by stimulating human beings’ innate rebelliousness against God” (Moo, p. 420). “The desire for what is forbidden is exacerbated by the very prohibition” (Schreiner, p. 367). “It is a distressing fact about human nature that any prohibition tends to awake in us a desire to transgress that prohibition” (Morris, p. 280). “A sure way to lose blossoms from the garden is to post a sign that says, ‘Don’t pick the flowers’” (Harrison, p. 80). “Have you considered what would happen if on Main Street of your town one of the stores painted this sign on their window: YOU ARE FORBIDDEN TO THROW STONES THROUGH THIS WINDOW. The window would not last twenty-four hours. Even human law’s prohibitions are to us like shaking is to a can of cola” (Hughes, p. 140). See also Boice’s (2:742-743) story about firecrackers in sixth grade.

\(^{313}\) By “dead,” Paul cannot mean nonexistent, for in 5:13 he stated that “until the Law sin was in the world.”

\(^{314}\) “... [H]e being inflated with a conceit as to his own righteousness, claimed life to himself while he was yet dead” (Calvin, p. 255).
and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; (7:10)

Though the Law, the 10th being representative of the whole ("and this commandment"), theoretically (I say "theoretically" because in actuality the Law could not give life because of human sinfulness—see Romans 8:3 and Galatians 3:21) could have given life if perfectly kept ("which was to result in life"; cf. Leviticus 18:5, Ezekiel 20:11, 13, Luke 10:28, Romans 10:5, and Galatians 3:12), It actually gave death ("proved to result in death"), due to human sinfulness.

for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. (7:11)

Once again (cf. v. 8's "but sin"), Paul identifies sin ("for sin"), not the Law, as the real culprit, reiterating (as he did in v. 8) that sin used the Law as a base from which to launch an attack against him ("taking an opportunity through the commandment").

So deceptive is sin ("for sin ... deceived me"; cf. Genesis 3:13, Ephesians 4:22, and Hebrews 3:13) that it can actually take a good thing, the Law ("taking an opportunity through the commandment") and use it ("through it") against us to slay us ("it killed me"; cf. vs. 9 and 10).

It is interesting to note that the verb translated "deceived" here in verse 11 is also used in both 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:14 in reference to Eve being deceived by Satan in the Garden. There, Satan likewise used a good thing, God’s command to Adam & Eve, against Adam & Eve to slay them spiritually.

So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (7:12)

Paul makes it clear that the Law, even though It ignites man’s sinfulness, is not responsible for man’s sinfulness. The Law is anything but sinful (cf. v. 7). It is as altogether wholesome ("holy," "righteous," "good"; cf. Deuteronomy 4:8, Romans 7:14, and 16) as the One of Whom and from Whom it is a revelation.315

To sum: Paul is not saying that grace is good and the Law is bad, but that both grace and the Law are good, while sin is bad (Sproul, p. 125).

Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. (7:13)

Verse 13 serves as a “bridge” (Moo, p. 424) between the previous section (vs. 7-12) and the following one

315“As holy, just, and good it reflects the character of God and is the transcript of his perfection. It bears the imprint of its author” (Murray, p. 253).
(vs. 14-25). It “has a hook which connects it to the previous verse [“Therefore” at the start of v. 13] and also a hook linking it to what follows [“For” at the start of v. 14]” (Lloyd-Jones, 6:165).

Paul once again (cf. Romans 6:1-2, 15, and 7:7) asks (“did that which is good become a cause of death for me?”) and emphatically answers (“May it never be!”) a question that naturally arose from something he had previously said (in vs. 9-11).

Just as the Law was not sinful (v. 7), neither was it the ultimate cause of Paul’s spiritual death (“did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be!”), though it was the instrumental (“through that which is good … through the commandment”; cf. “through the commandment” in v. 11) cause (Schreiner, p. 372).

Paul reiterates (cf. v. 12) that the Law is good (“that which is good … that which is good”). The real culprit is not the Law, but sin (“it was sin”; cf. vs. 8 and 11). Sin, not the Law, kills the soul (“effecting my death”; cf. vs. 5, 9, and 11). In fact, so insidious is sin that it used a good thing, the Law, to accomplish its deadly deed, thus showing its true colors (“in order that it might be shown to be sin”), clear-cut rebellion against the command of God (“through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful”). The Law shows the sinfulness of sin.

**Sin and the Believer (7:14-25)**

John Piper (in a 5-27-01 sermon on Romans 7:14-25 entitled “Who is This Divided Man?”, Part 1) calls this section “one of the most famous texts in the book of Romans and one of the most controversial.” Lloyd-Jones (6:176) calls it “what is beyond any doubt the most famous and best-known section in the entire Epistle. There is no section, certainly, which has so frequently led to debate and disputation ....”

In entitling this section “sin and the believer,” I am following the lead of several interpreters of the past (such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Henry) and most of the interpreters of the present (such as Combs, Hughes, Sproul, Witmer, Piper, Morris, Hendriksen, Schreiner, Boice, Murray, Cranfield, Wiersbe, and MacArthur) in taking this section as descriptive of Paul's struggle with sin as a believer, not as an unbeliever (those who hold to the second position include Douglas Moo and Robert Reymond). Schreiner (p. 379) calls the arguments on both sides “remarkably strong.” The points for and against both positions are laid out in great detail by the commentators.319

316Lloyd-Jones (6:112) translates the expression as “Far be it from our thoughts” and “Let it be unthinkable.”

317Augustine originally held the position that Romans 7:14-25 was descriptive of an unbeliever, but later switched positions (Lloyd-Jones, 6:177).

318See Appendix F (pp. 1127-1132) in Reymond’s *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*.

The strongest argument for the position that this passage is descriptive of an unbeliever is verse 14’s “sold into bondage to sin” (literally “sold under sin”; cf. comments on “under sin” in 3:9) and verse 23’s “making me a prisoner of the law of sin” (cf. v. 25's “with my flesh I am serving] the law of sin”). In light of what Paul says in 6:17 (“you were slaves of sin”), 18 (“having been freed from sin”), 20 (“you were slaves of sin”), 22 (“having been freed from sin”), and 8:2 (“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin”), how can this be said of the believer?

Some of the stronger arguments for the position that this passage is descriptive of a believer include:

1) All 26 verbs in these verses are in the present tense. By contrast, the past tense predominates in verses 7-13 (the implication being that vs. 7-13 describe Paul’s past life as an unbeliever and vs. 14-25 his present life as a believer)

2) How can verses 22 and 25b be said of an unbeliever (especially in light of 8:7)?

3) Does an unbeliever fight and hate sin and desire to do good the way this passage describes?

4) This section is part of the larger section of 6:1-8:16, which has sanctification as its focus.

This section reiterates the theme of the previous one: the Law is good (vs. 14a and 16), while sin is the real culprit (vs. 14b, 17, 18, and 20).

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. (7:14)

For the third straight verse, Paul extols the Law, calling it “spiritual,” meaning that Its source is the Holy Spirit, the divine agent of revelation (see Mark 12:36, Acts 1:16, 4:25, and 2 Peter 1:21).

By contrast (“but”), Paul (‘I”) is “of flesh.” Notice that Paul says “of flesh,” not “in the flesh,” the second phrase being descriptive of an unbeliever (see Romans 7:5 and 8:9). The “flesh” is the sin nature found in

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320 Moo (p. 465), commenting on this verse, states: “The believer, while he or she may, and will, struggle with sin, commit sins, and even be continually overcome by a particular, individual sin, has been freed from sin’s power (chap. 6; 8:2) and could therefore hardly be said to be ‘held captive in the “power” or “authority” of sin.’”

321 “The verses which follow depict vividly the inner conflict characteristic of the true Christian, a conflict such as is possible only in the man, in whom the Holy Spirit is active and whose mind is being renewed under the discipline of the gospel” (Cranfield, p. 155).

322 Paul calls the Corinthian believers (notice the “brethren” in 1 Corinthians 3:1) “men of flesh” in 1 Corinthians 3:1.
every descendant of Adam that rules a man prior to conversion and wrestles with him after conversion. This passage (Romans 7:14-25), like no other in Scripture, poignantly portrays this wrestling match.

Paul was not only “of flesh,” but also “sold into bondage to sin.” A believer cannot be enslaved to sin on an ongoing basis (see Romans 6:6, 17, 18, 20, and 22); thus, Paul is likely speaking of a temporary, abnormal re-enslavement to sin in practice. While, at times, the believer can be sold into bondage to sin (the verb is in the Greek passive voice), the unbeliever actively sells himself to sin (see 1 Kings 21:20, 25, and 2 Kings 17:17).

For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. (7:15)

Paul describes the turmoil within his soul. All too often, he found himself doing what he did not want to do (“I am doing the very thing I hate”) and not doing what he did want to do (“I am not practicing what I would like to do”; cf. v. 19).

The Greek verb translated “understand” can also be rendered “approve” (so Moo, Hendriksen, Calvin, and Cranfield; cf. KJV’s “allow”).

Can it be said of us that we “hate” doing wrong (cf. Psalm 97:10 and Romans 12:9)?

But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. (7:16)

Paul rightfully pins the blame on himself, not on the Law. The Law is good (“I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good”; cf. Romans 7:12 and 1 Timothy 1:8), while Paul, the sinner, is bad.

The “if” clause that begins this verse (“if I do the very thing I do not want to do”) reflects a Greek grammatical construction in which the “if” clause is assumed to be true. Thus, we could more accurately translate “since.”

323 “It is one thing to sell oneself to do iniquity; it is another to be sold under the power of sin. In the former case the person is the active agent, in the latter he is subjected to a power that is alien to his own will. It is the latter that appears here [in Romans 7:14]” (Murray, p. 261).

324 Commenting on this verse, Hughes (p. 142) quips: “Someone said after reading this that Paul must have been a golfer, because all golfers know that what you want to do you do not do, and what you do not want to do, that is the very thing you do.” 😊

325 Among other things, this verse implicitly teaches that sin is not just a matter of commission (doing wrong), but also omission (not doing right; cf. James 4:17).
So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. (7:17)

On the surface, this verse seems fraught with fodder for the psychoanalyst (schizophrenia, blame shifting). Paul’s point is simply this: the new person he is in Christ (the “I”) is not the source of his sinning; his indwelling sin nature is (“sin which dwells in me”; cf. v. 20). Sin remains resident, even after conversion. Sanctification is the process whereby the tenant called sin is gradually evicted.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. (7:18)

In contrast to the Law (v. 16), in the part of Paul called the flesh (notice how Paul adds the qualifier, “that is, in my flesh”), nothing good dwelt (“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh”). There is none good (Matthew 19:17//Mark 10:18//Luke 18:19, Romans 3:12), not even believers, not even “supersaints” like Paul. There is only One who is naturally good (Matthew 19:17//Mark 10:18//Luke 18:19).

Paul’s “new you” desired to do right (“the willing is present in me”), but his flesh (NIV: “sinful nature”) all too often gained the upper hand (“but the doing of the good is not”).

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. (7:19-20)

In verses 19 and 20a, Paul reiterates (cf. vs. 15, 16, and 18) the struggle between right and wrong raging within his soul (“the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want,” v. 19; “But if I am doing the very thing I do not want,” v. 20). As in verse 16, the “if” clause that begins verse 20 (“if I am doing the very thing I do not want”) is one that is assumed to be true and could, thus, be translated: “since . . .”

In verse 20b, Paul reiterates (cf. v. 17) the point that his sin nature is the source of his sinning (“I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me”).

Sin is “evil” (v. 19).

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326 The words ‘that is, in my flesh’ are a necessary qualification of ‘in me,’ since in the Christian the Holy Spirit dwells. They are, as Aquinas [a 13th century theologian] pointed out, an additional indication that it is the Christian who is being spoken about, since otherwise the qualification would be superfluous” (Cranfield, p. 167).

327 Hendriksen (p. 232) calls Paul a “sinner-saint.”
I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. (7:21)

One of the marks of a true believer is a genuine desire to do right (“wants to do good”).

Paul, being a believer, wanted to do right, but was hindered by a “principle” (literally: “law”) within him (“I find then the principle that evil is present in me”), the “law of sin” (v. 23).

The renowned 17th century Puritan, John Owen wrote his classic work on indwelling sin based on this verse.328

For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, (7:22)

This verse offers two strong supports for the position that Paul is speaking as a believer in this passage. First, Paul's attitude toward the Law is quite positive (“I joyfully concur with the law of God”; cf. Psalm 1:2, 119:16, 24, 47, and 97). To Paul, obeying God's commands was not a duty or a drudgery, but a delight. Second, Paul speaks of his “inner man.” The only other two occurrences of this phrase in Scripture (in 2 Corinthians 4:16 and Ephesians 3:16) are clearly used in reference to believers.

but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. (7:23)

Paul's joy in verse 22 is tempered by verse 23's “enemy within,”329 sin (“a different law in the members of my body ... the law of sin which is in my members”).

Sanctification is a war (“waging war”). The flesh/sin nature is one of the three enemies of our soul (cf. Galatians 5:17, James 4:1, and 1 Peter 2:11).330 In this respect, we are our own worst enemy.

As with verse 14, we must view verse 23's “making me a prisoner of the law of sin” as a temporary, abnormal re-imprisonment to sin in practice that takes place whenever the believer succumbs to temptation. According to 8:2, the believer has been positionally liberated from “the law of sin.” Thus, any such practical


329 The Enemy Within is the title of a highly recommended book on indwelling sin, written by Kris Lundgaard.

330 The other two are the world (1 John 3:13) and the devil (1 Peter 5:8). All 3 enemies are mentioned in both Ephesians 2:2-3 and James 3:15.
re-imprisonment is an aberration/anomaly.

**Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? (7:24)**

Paul cries out in anguish over the tension within his soul ("Wretched man that I am!"). The Greek adjective translated "wretched" is a strong, emotive word. According to Wiersbe (p. 537), it describes a person who is exhausted after a battle. According to Lloyd-Jones (6:222), it means “exhausted as the result of hard labour.” Paul was miserable (cf. the noun form, translated “miseries” in James 5:1) over his failure to do the right he wanted to do. Are we so grieved over the sin in our lives (cf. Job 42:6 in the KJV and NIV, as well as Isaiah 6:5)?

This verse provides yet another support for the position that Paul is speaking as a believer in this passage. As Hendriksen (p. 237) states: “No unbeliever would ever be able to be so filled with sorrow because of his sins!” John Stott (quoted in Morris, p. 296) echoes the same sentiment: “The unbeliever is characterized by self-righteousness, and would never acknowledge himself a ‘miserable creature.’”

Liberation ("Who will set me free") from “the body of this death” will ultimately take place for the believer at the moment of glorification. Paul’s “Who” (not “what”) is anticipatory of the answer given in verse 25.

**Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. (7:25)**

Paul emphatically answers the question ("Who will set me free from the body of this death?") posed in verse 24 (“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”). Christ is setting the believer free from the power of sin and will one day fully and finally do so (Romans 8:23). Christ is the key to justification (Romans 3:24, 5:9, 10, 11, 18, 19, and 21), sanctification (John 15:4-5, Romans 6:4-5, 11, and 7:4), and glorification (Romans 8:17).

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331“The farther men advance in the Christian life, and the more mature their discipleship, the clearer becomes their perception of the heights to which God calls them, and the more painfully sharp their consciousness of the distance between what they ought, and want, to be, and what they are” (Cranfield, p. 169). “The tension which appears in 7:14-25 between that which Paul delights in, loves, approves, and wills and that which he is and does in contravention is inevitable in a regenerate man as long as sin remains in him. These two complexes in him—righteousness, on the one hand, sin, on the other—are contradictory and the more sensitive he is to the demands of holiness, the more sensitive to that pattern after which his most characteristic self is formed, the more will the contradiction which still exists in him be focused in his consciousness. And the more sanctified he becomes the more painful to him must be the presence in himself of that which contradicts the perfect standard of holiness. The complaint, ‘Wretched man that I am!,’ is the honest expression of this painful experience of internal conflict and contradiction” (Murray, p. 258).
Paul rightfully thanks God ("Thanks be to God") for this reality (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:57, as well as comments on 1:8 and 6:17).

Until the time that God through Christ fully and finally liberates the believer from sin, the wrestling match/war called sanctification will continue unabated ("So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin").

One final note: Verses 23 and 25 are not teaching a “platonic dualism” in which the body is evil, while the spirit is good. “Flesh” (v. 25) encompasses not only sins of the body, but also sins of the spirit (Galatians 5:19-21).
Sanctification by the Spirit (8:1-16)

While the book of Romans is considered by many to be the greatest in Scripture (see the start of “Introduction to the Book of Romans”), one chapter is considered by many to be particularly great\(^{332}\), the “Great Eight” (John Piper). Moo (pp. 467-468) writes: “The inner sanctuary within the cathedral of Christian faith; the tree of life in the midst of the Garden of Eden; the highest peak in a range of mountains—such are some of the metaphors used by interpreters who extol chap. 8 as the greatest passage within what so many consider to be the greatest book in Scripture.” Philipp Spener (cited in Boice, 2:782) adds: “If the Bible was a ring and the Book of Romans its precious stone, chapter 8 would be the sparkling point of the jewel.”

In Romans 8, Paul concludes his focus on the believer’s sanctification begun in 6:1. Beginning in verse 17 and continuing through verse 30, Paul focuses on the believer’s glorification.\(^{333}\) Paul brings the first eight chapters of the book to a close with an incredible crescendo in verses 31 through 39.

Particularly conspicuous throughout chapter 8 is God the Holy Spirit. In chapters 1-7, He is mentioned only twice (in 1:4 and 5:5). In chapter 8, he is mentioned at least seventeen\(^{334}\) times (all within vs. 2-27). Another interesting fact concerning Romans 8 is that, though it is 39 verses long, it has no imperatives (Morris, p. 299; cf. comments on 6:11).

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus\(^{335}\). (8:1)

Whenever the interpreter encounters the word, “therefore” in Scripture, he must ask himself, “What is the therefore there for?” What is the “therefore” that begins Romans 8 there for? Interpreters are divided in their answers to this question. That Paul is making a connection to something he has previously said is indisputable. The difficulty lies in determining the connection. Is it more or less removed from the immediately preceding context of what he has just said at the end of chapter 7? Among interpreters who opt for a more remote connection is Harrison (p. 86): “The reader is hardly prepared by the contents of chapter 7

\(^{332}\)Morris (p. 299) calls it “one of the greatest chapters in the Bible.” Boice (2:781) calls it the greatest.

\(^{333}\)“...[T]he chapter gathers up various strands of thought from the entire discussion of both justification and sanctification and ties them together with the crowning knot of glorification” (Harrison, p. 85). Moo (p. 470) similarly states: “Like a snowball rolling downhill, Rom. 8 picks up many of the earlier themes of the letter....”

\(^{334}\)For now, I am following the NASB, which capitalizes the Greek word for spirit seventeen times, while leaving it uncapitalized four times (1x in v. 10, 2x in v. 15, and 1x in v. 16). According to some interpreters, some of the four should be capitalized.

\(^{335}\)The KJV rendering of this verse is longer than the rendering of the NASB due to a differing underlying Greek text. For various reasons, most textual scholars are of the opinion that the shorter reading is the more genuine one. Notice, however, that the same words are found at the end of verse 4 in all translations.
for the glorious pronouncements that there is no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus, and he finds it hard to associate the ‘therefore’ with anything in the immediately preceding context. The connection must be sought in the entire sweep of the thought as developed from chapter 3 on.” In support of this suggestion is Paul’s mention of condemnation in verse one, the antithesis of justification, the focus of 3:21-5:21. Moo opts for a less remote connection, tying 8:1 with all that Paul has said since 5:12, especially what he says in 5:12-21. Lloyd-Jones (6:259-260) ties it into chapter 5 specifically, pointing out that chapters 6 and 7 are a parenthesis of sorts in which Paul answers objections. He goes on to say (6:263): “This has nothing by way of a direct and immediate connection with, and is in no way a direct inference from the end of chapter 7.” Cranfield and Schreiner opt for an even less remote connection, tying 8:1 together with 7:1-6. A fourth, and the most natural, option would be to connect 8:1 with the immediately preceding context. At the end of chapter 7, Paul writes about the struggle between two competing “laws” (i.e., principles or powers) within him, the law of God and the law of sin, concluding that God through Christ will liberate him from the law of sin (v. 25a). Paul continues this train of thought in chapter 8, bringing God the Holy Spirit into the picture.

All three persons of the Godhead are agents in the sanctification of the believer: the Father (Exodus 31:13, Leviticus 20:8, 21:8, 15, 23, John 17:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:5-11, and Jude 1), the Son (Ephesians 5:25-27), and the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13, 15:16, 1 Corinthians 6:11, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Titus 3:5, and 1 Peter 1:2), though it is the Holy Spirit who actually does the work. Consequently, it is the Holy Spirit who is the immediate divine agent in the sanctification of the believer. God through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit liberates believers from the shackles of sin. This liberation begins at the moment of conversion through what has been called initial, positional, definitive, or objective sanctification (see chart on page 94), a concept Paul will allude to in verse 2.

Here in verse 1, Paul speaks of a corresponding concept, the escape from condemnation (“no condemnation”) that also comes with conversion. Because the believer (“those who are in Christ Jesus”) is united with Christ (“in Christ Jesus”; cf. the last half of chapter 5 and the first half of chapter 6), the One who absorbed the wrath of God for sin on the Cross, the believer is no longer under God’s wrath/condemnation. Paul makes this point in an emphatic way, the Greek adjective translated “no” being first in the sentence, for emphasis (in Greek, the verse literally reads: “no therefore now condemnation to the ones in Christ Jesus”).

Several interpreters have pointed out that Romans 8 stresses the believer’s security in Christ, particularly at the beginning (no condemnation) and end (no separation) of the chapter. Union with Christ is the believer’s

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336 In Exodus 31:13, Leviticus 20:8, 21:8, 15, and 23, God identifies Himself by one of His names, Jehovah m’qaddishkhem (“I am the LORD who sanctifies you”).

337 The Trinity works in tandem, each performing complementary roles. The Father plans (from the Father), the Son provides (through the Son), and the Spirit applies (by the Spirit). The Father is like an architect, the Son like a builder, and the Spirit like a construction worker (I am indebted to Dr. Rolland McCune for this analogy).

338 Union with Christ is the inseparable spiritual bond between Christ and the believer that forms at conversion and holds forever.
safe haven from the wrath of God. The “now” of this verse (cf. 3:21, 5:9, 6:19, 22, and 7:6) most likely signals the believer’s change in status—once under condemnation/God’s wrath, but now delivered from it (cf. John 3:36 and 5:24).

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (8:2)

The reason the believer is no longer under condemnation (v. 1) is because (“For”) at the moment of conversion (the Greek verb translated “has set you free” is in the aorist tense, indicative of a point-in-time event in the past) God liberated him from the power of sin (“has set you free from the law of sin and death”; cf. 6:18 and 22).

As mentioned previously (under comments on v. 1), the particular aspect of sanctification Paul is speaking of here in verse 2 is initial, positional, definitive, or objective sanctification, the setting apart of the believer from the power of sin at conversion. This aspect of sanctification invariably leads to the next aspect, progressive sanctification (v. 4f), with progressive sanctification invariably leading to the final aspect, final, complete, or perfect sanctification (v. 17f).


The antithesis of the life that the Spirit gives is the death that sin gives (“the law of sin and of death”; cf. 5:12, 6:23, 7:5, 9, 11, 13, and James 1:15). See Galatians 6:8 for the same antithesis.

Paul speaks of each of these, the Spirit on the one hand and sin on the other, as “law,” meaning a regulative power or influence. Thus, the “law of the Spirit” denotes the “authority, control, constraint, exercised upon believers by the Holy Spirit” (Cranfield, p. 174).

Once again (cf. 7:25 and 8:1), it is through Christ (“in Christ Jesus”), “on the basis of the merits of his atonement, and by means of the vitalizing power of union with him” (Hendriksen, p. 246), that this takes place, a fact that Paul will now develop in verse 3.

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, (8:3)

As Paul has already pointed out earlier in the letter (in 3:20 and 28), no one can be justified by the works of the Law (“For what the Law could not do”). Here in 8:3, he gives the underlying reason why. The Law could not justify, not because it was inherently deficient (7:7, 12-14, 16), but because man was (“weak as it was through the flesh”; cf. 7:14).

339“Christ is the sphere of safety for all who are identified with Him by faith” (Witmer, p. 469).
Because of man’s sinfulness ("the flesh"), he is unable to fulfill the Law. Thus, God has to intervene if man is to have any hope of being justified. God intervened ("God did"; He took the initiative in salvation; cf. comments on 3:25) by "sending [cf. John 3:17, 7:33, 17:18, 20:21, and Galatians 4:4] His own Son [cf. John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18, Romans 8:32, and 1 John 4:9]," Who did what sinful men could not, fulfilled the Law (Matthew 3:15) by means of His sinless, incarnate life.

Paul is careful to protect the sinlessness of Christ; therefore, he speaks of Christ as being “in the likeness of sinful flesh.”\textsuperscript{340} Though at times the Greek noun translated “likeness” can denote exact identity, here it most likely denotes close similarity (cf. 5:14 and 6:5). See also Philippians 2:7 (which uses the same Greek word for “likeness”). Christ was similar to fallen man in that He was fully human (and, thus, able to live the sinless, human life and die the sacrificial, human death necessary for man’s salvation). He was dissimilar, however, in that He was sinless (thus making His life and death sufficient for man’s salvation).

By doing what He did (both living a sinless life and dying a sacrificial death), Christ “condemned sin in the flesh,” “flesh” here being a reference to Christ’s flesh, i.e., His sinless human nature.\textsuperscript{341} Jesus paid it all! Because Christ condemned sin (v. 3), the believer, by virtue of being united with Christ, is no longer under condemnation (v. 1).

so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (8:4)

Christ did what He did “so that” the believer might be sanctified, not only initially (v. 2), but also progressively (v. 4f).

The “requirement of the Law” may be perfection (so Moo); if so, Paul is likely speaking in terms of justification. Perhaps a better option is that it is the requirement to love God and one’s fellow man (Matthew 22:34-40; cf. Romans 13:8-10 and Galatians 5:14); if so, Paul is speaking in terms of sanctification.

Because of what Christ did, the believer has the power to keep the Law ("the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us"), albeit imperfectly\textsuperscript{342} (see Luke 1:6, Romans 2:26, and footnote 123), doing the right

\textsuperscript{340} Homoioma \[the Greek noun translated “likeness” in v. 3\] rights the balances that the addition of ‘sinful’ to ‘flesh’ might have tipped a bit too far in one direction” (Moo, p. 480). Had Paul said “likeness of flesh,” rather than “likeness of sinful flesh,” the balance might have tipped a bit too far in the other direction, implying that Christ wasn’t fully human, but only appeared to be (the heresy known as Docetism). John Stott (quoted in Morris, p. 303) states in this regard: “Not ‘in sinful flesh,’ because the flesh of Jesus was sinless. Nor ‘in the likeness of flesh,’ because the flesh of Jesus was real. But ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh,’ because the flesh of Jesus was both sinless and real.”

\textsuperscript{341} The NIV interprets “flesh” not in reference to Christ, but in reference to man (“condemned sin in sinful man”).

\textsuperscript{342} “But ‘might be fulfilled’ is not to be taken to imply that the faithful fulfill the law’s
things for the right reason (love for God and love for one’s fellow man).

This ability comes through the power of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the Greek verb translated “might be fulfilled” is in the passive voice, indicative of the fact that Someone else is the active agent (the Holy Spirit) and that the object (the believer) is being acted upon (in keeping with this concept, the NASB translates “in us,” rather than “by us”).

At conversion, one’s lifestyle (“walk”) goes from being characterized as “according to the flesh” (flesh=sin nature; so NIV: “sinful nature”) to being characterized as “according to the Spirit.” The power of the Spirit gives the believer the ability to do (v. 4) what the Law in the power of the flesh could not (v. 3). F. F. Bruce (quoted in Hughes, p. 150) captures the contrast in the form of a poem: “To run and work the law commands, Yet gives me neither feet nor hands; But better news the gospel brings: It bids me fly, and gives me wings.”

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (8:5)

In verse 4, Paul drew a contrast between the unbeliever (those who walk according to the flesh) and the believer (those who walk according to the Spirit). That the contrast is between a believer and an unbeliever (and not between a “spiritual” believer and an “unspiritual” believer) becomes crystal clear in verse 9. In verse 5 and following, Paul develops the contrast, using a being/believing/behaving grid. What you do (behavior) is a reflection of what you believe (belief), and what you believe is a reflection of who/what you are (being).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The UNBELIEVER (in the flesh, v. 9)</th>
<th>The BELIEVER (in the Spirit, v. 9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being—are according to the flesh (v. 5a)</td>
<td>Being—are according to the Spirit (v. 5b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing—set minds on things of the flesh (v. 5a)</td>
<td>Believing—set minds on things of the Spirit (v. 5b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaving—walk according to the flesh (v. 4)</td>
<td>Behaving—walk according to the Spirit (v. 4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Those who are according to the flesh\textsuperscript{343} [unbelievers] set their minds on the things of the flesh,” while “those who are according to the Spirit [believers], [set their minds on] the things of the Spirit.” To set one’s mind on something means more than mere mental fixation. It involves the deepest desires, that upon

\textsuperscript{343}“To be ... according to the flesh is to have the flesh as the regulating principle of one’s life” (Harrison, p. 88).
For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, (8:6)

Paul continues the flesh-Spirit/unbeliever-believer contrast. The “mind set on the flesh” can be characterized as “death.” “[Paul] is saying that to be bounded by the flesh is itself death. It is a cutting off of oneself from the life that is life indeed” (Morris, p. 306).

By contrast, the “mind set on the Spirit” can be characterized as “life and peace” (see v. 2 for the same death-life contrast). At conversion, one passes from death to life (John 5:24), from being spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1) to being spiritually alive (Ephesians 2:5), from being separated from God (Isaiah 59:2) to being in fellowship with Him (John 17:3). To be in fellowship with God is also to be at peace with Him (cf. Romans 5:1).

because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (8:7-8)

While the mind set on the Spirit can be characterized as at peace with God (v. 6), the mind set on the flesh can be characterized as “hostile toward God” (v. 7). Unbelievers are God’s enemies (Romans 5:10; cf. Matthew 6:24, James 4:4, and 1 John 2:15).

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344 “This expression (‘to set the mind on’) denotes far more than a mental process. It includes not only concentration of thought, but also desire” (Harrison, p. 89). “To ‘mind the things of the flesh’ (vs. 5) is to have the things of the flesh as the absorbing objects of thought, interest, affection, and purpose ... In like manner to mind ‘the things of the Spirit’ (vs. 5) is to have the things of the Holy Spirit as the absorbing objects of thought, interest, affection, and purpose ....” (Murray, p. 285). Commenting on those who are according to the flesh, Hendriksen (p. 248) states: “they set their minds on—are most deeply interested in, constantly talk about, engage and glory in—the things pertaining to the flesh, that is, to sinful human nature.” Commenting on those who are according to the Spirit, Morris (p. 305) states: “Such people are not intermittently interested in the things of the Spirit; their whole being centers on them. What the Spirit does is their absorbing interest.”

345 Verses 6 and 7 form a chiasmus of sorts. In a chiasmus (named after the Greek letter, chi, which looks like an “x”), there are 4 elements, with the 1st and 4th elements corresponding to one another, and the 2nd and 3rd elements corresponding to one another. In verses 6 and 7, the 1st element, “death” in verse 6, corresponds to the 4th element, “hostile” in verse 7, while the 2nd element, “life” in verse 6, corresponds to the 3rd element, “peace” in verse 6.
The unbeliever’s hostility toward God is manifested by his insubordination to God’s Word (“does not subject itself to the law of God,” v. 7).346

Not only is the unbeliever unwilling to subject himself to God’s Word, he is unable to do so (“not even able to do so”; v. 7; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14).

Unbelievers (“those who are in the flesh,” v. 8) are not only unable to obey God’s Word, but they are, consequently, also unable to please God (“cannot please God,” v. 8).347 Pleasing God is something only the believer can do. In this regard, see Romans 12:1 (“acceptable” can be translated “well-pleasing”—so NASB marginal note), 14:18 (“acceptable”—same Greek adjective as in Romans 12:1), 2 Corinthians 5:9, Ephesians 5:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:1, Hebrews 11:5, and 1 John 3:22. These verses (vs. 7 and 8) are a key proof text for the twin truths of the total depravity and total inability of man.348

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (8:9)

In contrast to (“However”) those “in the flesh” (cf. 7:5 and 8:8), the Romans (“you”) were “in the Spirit.” To be “in the Spirit” is to be in the realm of or under the dominion of the Spirit349 (Henry, p. 416 gives the analogy of being “in love”). “In the flesh” and “in the Spirit” do not designate two classes of Christians, but unbelievers and believers. At conversion, one goes from being “in the flesh” to being “in the Spirit.” All unbelievers are “in the flesh,” whereas all believers are “in the Spirit.” Technically, it is incorrect to speak of a believer as “getting in the flesh.”

One who is “in the Spirit” is one in whom “the Spirit of God [cf. 1 Corinthians 2:11 and 12:3] dwells" (a

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346“The law of God reflects the divine character and will and the attitude to the law is the index of the relation to God” (Murray, p. 286). “Insubjection to the law is therefore construed as the concrete way in which enmity against God manifests itself, and the strength of the expression ‘enmity against God’ shows the gravity with which insubjection to the law is viewed” (Murray, p. 286).

347Rather than pleasing God, unbelievers please themselves (see 2 Corinthians 5:15). It has been said: “There are only two choices on the shelf: pleasing God or pleasing self.”

348Millard Erickson (The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology, revised edition, p. 202) defines total depravity as “a reference to the belief that humans begin life with all aspects of their nature corrupted by the effects of sin” and total inability as the “human incapacity to do anything meritorious in the sight of God by one’s own effort.”

349According to Morris (p. 307), to be “in the Spirit” is to be bound to, characterized by, or belong to the Spirit.

350The Greek verb translated “dwells” is oikeo, the noun form of which is oikos, the Greek word for house. At conversion, the Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence within the
Christian is both one who is in the Spirit and one in whom is the Spirit.

Paul’s “if indeed” does not necessarily imply doubt regarding the spiritual state of the Romans. Depending on the context, the Greek particle can be translated “since indeed” (as it is in Romans 3:30).

The Holy Spirit's indwelling (cf. Romans 8:11, Ephesians 2:22, 1 Corinthians 6:19, and 2 Timothy 1:14) is a distinguishing mark of the believer. Those indwelt by the Spirit are believers, while those not indwelt by the Spirit are not (“But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him”). Believers “belong to Him” (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. (8:10)

To have the Spirit of Christ in you (v. 9) is to have Christ in you (“If Christ is in you,” v. 10). Christ dwells in the believer through His Spirit. The believer is in Christ (Romans 8:1), and Christ is in the believer (Romans 8:10; cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 3:17, and Colossians 1:27).

The presence of Christ in the believer does not preclude the believer from dying physically (“though the body is dead”). The believer’s body is “dead,” meaning mortal (cf. “mortal body” in Romans 6:12, “body of this death” in Romans 7:24 and “mortal bodies” in Romans 8:11) subject to death, due to sin (“because of sin”; cf. Romans 5:12 and 6:23).

Should the word, “spirit” in “the spirit is alive” (literally “is life”) be capitalized (thus, a reference to the Holy Spirit) or not (thus, a reference to the regenerated human spirit of the believer)? Though the NASB and the NIV opt for “spirit” with a small “s” (so also Boice and Lloyd-Jones), the overwhelming majority of commentators (such as Calvin, Moo, Murray, Hendriksen, Cranfield, Harrison, Hughes, and Morris; so also KJV and NKJV) opt for “Spirit” with a capital “S.” The main support for the first option is the resultant antithesis between the material (“body”) and immaterial (“spirit”) components of man (consistent with the believer.

Lloyd-Jones (7:61) gives a practical application of this doctrine: “Realize who is dwelling in your body, then you will find it difficult to abuse or misuse that body.”

In Romans 8:9, the Holy Spirit is alternately called “the Spirit of God” and “the Spirit of Christ” (cf. Acts 16:7, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 4:6, Philippians 1:19, and 1 Peter 1:11). The Holy Spirit can be called both because He proceeds both from the Father (John 14:26) and from the Son (John 15:26 and 16:7). The Council of Constantinople (381 A. D.) declared that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father. The Council of Toledo (589 A. D.) added that the Holy Spirit also proceeded from the Son. An interesting tidbit from church history is that the “Great Schism” that took place between the Eastern church and the Western church in 1054 A.D. was precipitated by disagreement over this doctrine, with the Eastern church rejecting the so-called “filioque clause” (**filioque** is Latin for “and from the Son”).
corresponding dead-alive and sin-righteousness antitheses). Support for the second option includes the following: 1) All the uses of this word (5x) in the immediately preceding (v. 9) and succeeding (v. 11) verses clearly refer to the Holy Spirit; 2) The immediately succeeding verse (v. 11) speaks of the Holy Spirit in terms of life; and 3) Earlier in the chapter, the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of life” (v. 2), and the mind set on the Holy Spirit is called “life” (v. 6). Though the believer will die physically due to sin, he will, through the Spirit’s indwelling, live spiritually due to righteousness, the righteousness of Christ imputed to him.353

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (8:11)

Though the believer’s “mortal” body (cf. Romans 6:12, 7:24, 8:10, and 2 Corinthians 4:11) will (short of the Rapture) die (v. 10), it will one day (for the deceased church age believer, at the Rapture—1 Thessalonians 4:16) be brought back to life354 (“will also give life to your mortal bodies”) by God the Father (“He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead”) through the Spirit (“through His Spirit who dwells in you”), just as Christ’s body was (cf. especially 1 Corinthians 6:14 and 2 Corinthians 4:14, as well as Romans 4:24, 6:4, Galatians 1:1, Ephesians 1:20, and Colossians 2:12).

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— (8:12)

Paul draws a conclusion (“So then”) from what he has previously said (in vs. 4-11).355 Because believers (“brethren”) are not “in the flesh” (v. 9), they are not obligated (“we are under obligation, not”; cf. the same word in Romans 1:14) “to the flesh, to live according to the flesh” (cf. Romans 8:4).356

353While Morris (p. 310) views “righteousness” in verse 10 as referring to both justification and sanctification, most commentators (so Cranfield, Moo, Schreiner, Hendriksen, Combs, Harrison, and Hughes) view it as referring solely to justification (though, of course, one cannot ultimately separate the two).

354While Calvin views the life spoken of in verse 11 in terms of spiritual newness of life (Romans 6:4)/sanctification, most commentators view it in terms of physical newness of life/resurrection (so Cranfield, Murray, Moo, and Schreiner).

355As he did in 6:12, Paul goes from exposition to exhortation (Hendriksen, p. 254)/from instruction to exhortation (Harrison, p. 91), exhorting the Romans to live in light of who they are, basing an imperative of Christian living (do not live according to the flesh) upon an indicative of the Christian life (believers are not in the flesh/obligated to the flesh).

356In verse 12, Paul states only the negative side (“not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh”), leaving the positive side (“to the Spirit, to live according to the Spirit”; cf. Romans 8:4) unstated (so the dash in the NASB). Because believers are “in the Spirit” (v. 9), they are under obligation to the Spirit, to live according to the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:25).
“The ‘flesh’ is the complex of sinful desire, motive, affection, propension, principle, and purpose, and ‘to live after the flesh’ is to be governed and directed by that complex” (Murray, p. 293). Though the believer has been positionally emancipated from his obligation to the flesh, he still must practically, through the Spirit’s enabling (v. 13), free himself from its chains. Moo (p. 494) states in this regard: “Like freed slaves who might, out of habit, obey their old masters even after being released—‘legally’ and ‘positionally’—from them, so we Christians can still listen to and heed the voice of that old master of ours, the flesh.”

for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (8:13)

A person who lives (habitually/as a general pattern; “are living” is a present tense verb) “according to the flesh”357 (cf. Romans 8:4 and 12) is an unsaved person. Consequently, Paul warns the Romans not to live this way, lest they die eternally358 (“you must die”).

Paul’s readers, being believers, would not habitually live so, nor would they suffer such a fate, yet Paul does not hesitate to threaten them with such a warning. Such “warning passages” in Scripture are one of the means God uses to keep believers persevering, lest they apostatize.359

In contrast (“but”) to those who live according to the flesh (unbelievers) are those who “are putting to death [habitually/as a general pattern; “are putting to death” is a present tense verb] the deeds of the body360”

357“To live ‘according to the flesh’ is to live with one’s horizon bounded by the flesh, that is, by the concerns of this life” (Morris, p. 312).

358Eternal death is the permanent separation of the unbeliever from God in hell (Revelation 20:14-15).

359“The Arminian believes that a regenerate believer may, indeed, fall back into a ‘fleshly’ lifestyle so that the threat of this verse becomes real. But the Calvinist believes that the truly regenerate believer, while often committing ‘fleshly’ acts, will be infallibly prevented from living a fleshly lifestyle by the Spirit within. I believe that the strength of the assurances Paul has given to justified believers throughout these chapters (see especially 5:9-10, 21; 8:1-4, 10-11), along with the finality of justification itself, favors the ‘Calvinist’ interpretation. But such an interpretation in no way mitigates the seriousness of the warning that Paul gives here. In a way that we cannot finally synthesize in a neat logical arrangement, Paul insists that what God has done for us in Christ is the sole and final grounds of our eternal life at the same time as he insists on the indispensability of holy living as the precondition for attaining that life. Neither the ‘indicative’—what God has done for us in Christ—nor the ‘imperative’—what we are commanded to do—can be eliminated. Nor can they be severed from one another; they are inextricably connected” (Moo, pp. 494-495).

360While Cranfield (p. 185) views “body” in verse 13 as synonymous with “flesh” (i.e, the sin nature), others (such as Witmer, p. 471 and Moo, p. 495) view it as the physical body, the vehicle whereby one’s sin nature expresses itself (cf. Romans 6:6’s “body of sin”).
Rather than suffering eternal death, such individuals will enjoy eternal life (‘you will live’—in the full and final sense/glorification).\footnote{Verse 13 is paradoxical. Living (according to the flesh) leads to dying, while dying (putting to death the deeds of the body) leads to living.} See Romans 8:6 and Galatians 6:8 for the same death-life contrast.

As has been pointed out previously (see comments on 6:13 and 7:23), sanctification is a war. The deeds of the body are to be put to death (cf. Colossians 3:5).\footnote{Though the believer is positionally dead to sin (Romans 6:2 and 11), he still has to practically put it to death.} We must kill sin, or sin will kill us (John Owen). Believers slay sin with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Accordingly, Paul is careful to remind the Romans that it is “by the Spirit” (and only by the Spirit) that they are able to put to death the deeds of the body.\footnote{Moo (p. 496) writes: “We face here another finely nuanced balance that must not be tipped too far in one direction or the other. Human activity in the process of sanctification is clearly necessary [put to death the deeds of the body]; but that activity is never apart from, nor finally distinct from, the activity of God’s Spirit [by the Spirit].” Henry (p. 418) likewise writes: “… [W]e cannot do it without the Spirit working it in us, and the Spirit will not do it without our doing our endeavour.” Augustine once said much the same: “Without God we cannot; without us God will not.” Scriptures that speak of both the divine and human elements in sanctification include 1 Corinthians 15:10, Philippians 2:12-13, and Colossians 1:29.}

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (8:14)

Verse 14 is a bridge, a segue of sorts between verse 13 and verse 15 (notice the “for”s that begin verses 14 and 15).

Those who by the Spirit are putting to death the deeds of the body (v. 13b) are those “who are being led by the Spirit of God” (v. 14a). To be led by the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:18) is to be under the Holy Spirit’s control or governance.\footnote{“To be ‘led by the Spirit’ probably means ... to have the direction of one’s life as a whole determined by the Spirit” (Moo, p. 498). Schreiner (p. 423) describes being led by the Spirit as “the Spirit’s governing authority in one’s life that is manifested in human obedience.”} It is roughly synonymous with being filled with the Spirit (see especially Luke 4:1; cf. Ephesians 5:18, which in conjunction with its parallel in Colossians 3:16 reminds us that the Holy Spirit leads through His Word) or walking by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16 and 25). This is something God does (“are being led” is in the passive voice) through our responsible, necessary, and active participation (“you are putting to death,” v. 13) and the Spirit’s empowering (“by the Spirit of God”; cf. v. 13’s “by the Spirit”).
Those who are being led by the Spirit of God (v. 14a) thereby give evidence that they are “sons of God” (v. 14b). While Jesus Christ is God the Father’s only “natural Son,” believers are sons of God (cf. Romans 8:19, 9:26, 2 Corinthians 6:18, and Galatians 3:26) by adoption\(^ {365} \) (see Romans 8:15, 23, Galatians 4:5, and Ephesians 1:5).

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (8:15)

As mentioned previously (see comments on v. 14), verse 14 is a segue between verses 13 and 15, with the first half of verse 14 being a bridge with the last half of verse 13 and the last half of verse 14 being a bridge with verses 15 and following. At the end of verse 14, Paul introduced the concept of the believer’s adoption, a concept that he continues to unfold in verse 15.\(^ {366} \)

Being a son of God (v. 14) means, negatively, not receiving “a spirit of slavery” and, positively, receiving “a spirit of adoption as sons” (cf. Galatians 4:5).

As in verse 10, there is debate as to whether neither, one, or both of the two occurrences of the Greek word for “spirit” should be capitalized in verse 15. The NASB capitalizes neither (though, in a marginal note, it allows for capitalizing the second occurrence), thus suggesting the meaning of disposition or frame of mind (its meaning in such passages as Romans 11:8, 1 Corinthians 4:21, Galatians 6:1, 2 Timothy 1:7, and 1 Peter 3:4) for both. The KJV, NKJV, and the NIV capitalize only the second (so also Combs, Hendriksen, Cranfield, and Boice; cf. the similar construction in 1 Corinthians 2:12). Some capitalize both (so Murray\(^ {367} \), Morris, Calvin, Moo, Henry, and Lloyd-Jones). In the opinion of this writer, the last option is the most preferable one (see Lloyd-Jones, 7:198-200 for a good defense of this position).

The Greek verb translated “received” (both occurrences) is in the aorist tense, signifying a past, point-in-time event, the conversion of Paul’s readers. At the point of conversion, one receives the Holy Spirit.

Far from producing enslaving fear (“a [S]pirit of slavery leading to fear again”; cf. Hebrews 2:15), the Holy Spirit produces familial affection (“a [S]pirit of adoption\(^ {368} \) as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”).

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\(^ {365} \) Adoption is the act of God whereby He legally places the believer into His family, giving him all the rights and privileges pertaining to such a status. It signifies “being granted the full rights and privileges of sonship in a family to which one does not belong by nature” (Morris, p. 315).

\(^ {366} \) According to Combs, Romans 8:15 deals with the present aspect of adoption, while Ephesians 1:5 deals with the past aspect and Romans 8:23 the future aspect.

\(^ {367} \) Murray (p. 297) translates: “Ye did not receive the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of bondage but as the Spirit of adoption.”

\(^ {368} \) According to Moo (p. 502), the Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of adoption” because
At conversion, one goes from being a slave of sin (John 8:34, Romans 6:6-7, and 2 Peter 2:19) and Satan (2 Timothy 2:26) to a son of God (Galatians 4:1-7).

It is through the Holy Spirit ("by which"; cf. "by the Spirit" in v. 13 and "by the Spirit of God" in v. 14) that the believer gives expression to his status as a son ("we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’"). See also Galatians 4:6.

The "Abba" in the cry, "Abba! Father!" (cf. Mark 14:36 and Galatians 4:6) is Aramaic. "The word is from the babbling of a little child (like ‘papa’) and is the familiar term used in the home" (Morris, p. 315).

**The Spirit Himself**\(^{369}\) **testifies with**\(^{370}\) **our spirit that we are children of God, (8:16)**

This verse, which Lloyd-Jones (7:285) calls “one of the most glorious statements concerning Christian experience found anywhere in the Bible,” is a key proof text for the doctrine known as the internal witness of the Spirit. The internal witness of the Spirit, among other things, testifies to the fact that the believer is a child of God (cf. 1 John 3:24b and 4:13). This subjective witness is never independent of, but works in tandem with the objective witness of the believer’s belief and behavior (1 John 2:3; cf. the preceding context of Romans 8:13b and following).\(^{371}\) In other words, to the degree that the believer perseveres in faith and in good works, to that degree he will be assured of his sonship.

Notice that Paul alternately speaks of believers as “sons” (vs. 14 and 15; cf. Romans 8:19, 9:26, 2 Corinthians 6:18, and Galatians 3:26) and as “children” (v. 16; cf. John 1:12, 11:52, Romans 8:21, 9:8, Philippians 2:15, 1 John 3:1, 2, 10, and 5:2). While there may be a slight difference in emphasis between the

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369 The KJV translates very literally: “The Spirit itself ...” (the Greek noun for spirit is neuter in gender; thus, the neuter “itself”). This is a case where translating literally is undesirable, as such a rendering leaves the impression that the Holy Spirit is not a person. The NKJV rightly translates “Himself.”

370 There is some disagreement among interpreters as to whether verse 16 should be translated “The Spirit Himself testifies to our spirit” (so Calvin, Hodge, Cranfield, and Morris) or “with our spirit” (so Murray, Witmer, Harrison, Schreiner, Hendriksen, and Moo). While the second is likely the better option (the Greek verb, summartureo literally means “testify with”: the Greek preposition, sun, meaning “with” or “together with” + the Greek verb, martureo, meaning “to witness” or “to testify”), either option essentially yields the same result.

371 “This testimony is always agreeable to the written word, and is therefore always grounded upon sanctification; for the Spirit in the heart cannot contradict the Spirit in the word” (Henry, p. 418).
two designations\textsuperscript{372}, they are essentially synonymous.

Because the believer has confidence through the internal witness of the Spirit that he is a child of God (v. 16), he can confidently cry out to his heavenly Father (v. 15).

\textsuperscript{372}Harrison (p. 93) makes the following distinction: “‘Children’ emphasizes family relationship based on regeneration, while ‘sons’ stresses legal standing.”
Romans 8:17-30

In 1:16-17, Paul stated his “thesis” for the book of Romans, declaring that in the gospel (the gospel being the theme for the book of Romans) “the righteousness of God is revealed” (1:17). In 1:18-3:20, he gave the bad news that all men (3:9-20), whether Gentile (1:18-32) or Jew (2:1-3:8), are unrighteous (3:10) and in desperate need of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. In 3:21 (“but now”), Paul began giving the gospel, the good news (“gospel” literally means “good news”—see comments on 1:1) that the unrighteous can become righteous positionally (justification/imputed righteousness) (3:21-5:21), practically (sanctification/imparted righteousness) (6:1-8:16), and perfectly (glorification/impeccable righteousness) (8:17-30). Justification, sanctification, and glorification, though distinct, are inseparably-linked chains in the salvation process. See especially Romans 8:30 and Philippians 1:6 in this regard (see also the chart introducing comments on 6:1-8:16). Beginning in 8:17, Paul’s focus turns from sanctification (6:1-8:16) to glorification (8:17-30).373

and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (8:17)

From verse 16 to verse 17, Paul’s train of thought seamlessly passes from the track of sanctification to the track of glorification. At the end of verse 16, he made mention of the fact that believers are children of God. He continues this train of thought at the start of verse 17 (“and”) by adding that if believers are children of God (“if children”), then they are “heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (cf. Galatians 4:7).

The inheritance that awaits the believer376 (cf. Acts 20:32, 26:18, Ephesians 1:11, 14, 18, Colossians 1:12, 3:24, Titus 3:7, and 1 Peter 1:4) is glorification. It includes God Himself (“heirs of God”377; cf. Psalm 16:5,

373Glorification is the act of God whereby He perfects both the nature and body of the believer. John Murray (Redemption Accomplished and Applied, p. 175) defines glorification as “the complete and final redemption of the whole person when in the integrity of body and spirit the people of God will be conformed to the image of the risen, exalted, and glorified Redeemer.”

374That 8:17-30 may be viewed as a distinct section with glorification as its focus is seen by the fact that both the first verse of the section (v. 17) and the last verse of the section (v. 30) speak of being glorified. In this respect, verses 17 and 30 serve as “bookends.”

375Paul’s shift in focus from sanctification to glorification does not, however, occur abruptly at verse 17, as he has touched on glorification already in 8:11 and 13.

376Unlike an earthly inheritance, the believer’s heavenly inheritance does not eventually run out (1 Peter 1:4). Also unlike an earthly inheritance, the believer’s heavenly inheritance does not take effect upon the testator’s death, for the Testator is immortal (1 Timothy 1:17 and 6:16).

377Taking “of God” as an “objective genitive,” i.e., identifying God as the object of the

This inheritance is the result of the believer’s union with Christ (“fellow heirs with Christ” and “glorified with Him”; cf. Ephesians 1:10-11’s “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance,” Colossians 3:4, and 2 Timothy 2:12a). Because the believer is united with Christ, the “heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2), the believer will assuredly inherit all that God has promised him (cf. Romans 8:32 and Revelation 21:7).

Paul is quick to remind the Romans, however, that receiving their heavenly inheritance is conditioned upon earthly suffering (“if indeed we suffer with Him”; cf. 1 Peter 5:10). Just as the believer is united with Christ in glorification (“glorified with Him”), so also the believer is united with Christ in suffering (“suffer with Him”; see Acts 9:1-5, 2 Corinthians 1:5, Philippians 3:10, and 1 Peter 4:13). Just as suffering was a prerequisite to glorification in the life of Christ (Luke 24:26, Philippians 2:6-11, Hebrews 12:2, and 1 Peter 1:11), so also suffering is a prerequisite to glorification in the life of the one united to Christ (cf. Philippians 3:10-11, 2 Timothy 2:12, and 1 Peter 4:13). “No pain, no gain.” This suffering includes not only suffering peculiar to Christians (Matthew 5:10-11, Acts 5:41, and 2 Timothy 3:12), “that element of suffering which is inseparable from faithfulness to Christ in a world which does not yet know Him as Lord” (Cranfield, p. 193), but also suffering (illness, disease, death, etc.) that comes with living in a sin-cursed world (see the succeeding context).

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (8:18)

Though suffering and glorification may be compatible (v. 17), they are incomparable (v. 18), with the second far surpassing the first. Paul compared “the sufferings of this present time” with “the glory that is to be revealed” and came to the settled conclusion (“consider” that future glorification is so glorious that

378“Thou mine inheritance, now and always” (from the song, “Be Thou My Vision”).

379There is some disagreement among interpreters as to the precise force of the Greek particle translated “if indeed” by the NASB in verse 17 (cf. comments on the same particle in Romans 8:9). The particle can be translated with varying degrees of conditionality, depending on the context. Among those who see a lower degree of conditionality are Hendriksen (p. 243: “since the fact that we are now sharing in his sufferings”); Cranfield (p. 190: “seeing that we are now suffering with him, in order that we may hereafter be glorified with him”); and Morris (p. 318: “[the particle] does not introduce a doubt about what follows; it [and here Morris quotes from Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida]’is a rather emphatic term and implies that Paul assumes that his statement represents the circumstances as they do in fact exist’”). Among those who see a higher degree of conditionality are Schreiner (p. 428) and Moo (p. 506).

380Hughes (p. 158) brings out the flavor of the verb: “I have thought it over carefully—I have weighed the evidence and thus reckon it to be so.” So also does Cranfield (p. 194), who
present suffering pales in comparison.\textsuperscript{381} He says much the same in 2 Corinthians 4:17: “For momentary [there is a relative quantity to it], light [there is a relative quality to it] affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”\textsuperscript{382} See also Matthew 5:11-12 and Hebrews 11:24-26. This conviction was not merely a theoretical one to Paul—he knew what it was to suffer (see especially 2 Corinthians 11:23-27) and he also received a glimpse of glory (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

Is the “glory that is to be revealed” (cf. 1 Peter 5:1) to be revealed “to us” (so NASB, Harrison, Murray, and Moo) or “in us” (so NIV, KJV, NKJV, Hendriksen, Cranfield, and Boice)? Cranfield (p. 194) confesses: “It is exceedingly hard to decide how the Greek preposition can be translated most satisfactorily.”\textsuperscript{383} Though both ideas are biblically legitimate, the second one (“in us”) seems more in keeping with the context (see especially verses 19 and 23).

Other passages that speak of “glory” in terms of the eschatological (end time) inheritance of believers include Romans 2:7, 10, 5:2, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, and 2 Timothy 2:10.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (8:19)

Just as 8:14 served as a bridge between what preceded and succeeded it, so does 8:18. In verse 17, Paul spoke of the compatible concepts of suffering and glorification. In verse 18, he asserted that though these concepts are compatible, they are incomparable, with future glorification being so glorious, present suffering pales in comparison. In verse 19, he shows just how glorious the glorification of believers is. It is so glorious the entire created order anxiously longs for and eagerly waits for it.

Paul’s practical purpose in all of this is to stimulate his readers to endure suffering. As Schreiner (pp. 437-438) writes: “Paul encourages believers to endure temporary sufferings by giving them a glimpse of the

describes it as “a firm conviction reached by rational thought.” Henry (p. 420) calls it “a very serious and deliberate consideration.” The same verb is used by Paul elsewhere in Romans in 2:3 (“suppose”), 3:28 (“maintain”), 6:11 (“consider”), and 14:14 (“thinks”).

\textsuperscript{381} John Piper (in a 4-21-02 sermon on Romans 8:14-18, entitled “Children, Heirs, Fellow Sufferers”) cites John Newton in this regard: “Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, and his [carriage] should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him, if we saw him wringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, ‘My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken!’”

\textsuperscript{382}“... [S]o ‘weighty,’ so transcendently wonderful, is this glory that suffering flies in the air as if it had no weight at all” (Moo, p. 511).

\textsuperscript{383} Perhaps due to the difficulty, some translate in a more generic way: “... [T]he glory reaches out and includes us in its scope” (Moo, p. 512); “the glory that shall be ours” (Schreiner, p. 433); “[T]he glory apprehends us and is bestowed upon us” (Schreiner, p. 434).
beauty that awaits the children of God.”

See also James 1:12 in this regard.

Most interpreters are of the opinion that when Paul speaks of “creation” in verse 19, he excludes men and angels; thus, he is speaking of “the whole of subpersonal creation” (Morris, p. 320).

Paul is clearly using the literary device of personification when he says that the creation is anxiously longing and eagerly waiting for the revealing of the sons of God.

The Greek noun translated “anxious longing” (cf. Philippians 1:20, where the same noun is translated “earnest expectation”) is “a picturesque term describing a person leaning forward out of intense interest and desire” (Harrison, p. 94).

The Greek verb translated “waits eagerly” is used elsewhere in Romans 8:23, 25, Galatians 5:5, Philippians 3:20, and Hebrews 9:28, each time with an eschatological (end time) overtone.

The “revealing of the sons of God” (cf. Colossians 3:4) is “the ‘unveiling’ of the true nature of Christians” (Moo, p. 515). While the full manifestation of the Christian’s true nature is presently veiled due to the bonds (cf. vs. 20 and 21) of living in a sin-sick body in a sin-cursed world, this veil will one day be torn away, and the believer will “SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN” (Matthew 13:43, citing Daniel 12:3).

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384 “Given the wonder of the glory awaiting believers, they should endure present sufferings with eagerness, knowing that all suffering in the present can be borne because the reward before them is incomparably delightful” (Schreiner, p. 440). “It is however the design of Paul, as it will presently appear more fully, highly to extol this inheritance promised to us, that we may be contented with it, and manfully despise the allurements of the world, and patiently bear whatever troubles may press on us in this life” (Calvin, p. 301). “... [W]hen we console ourselves with the hope of a better condition, the feeling of our present miseries is softened and mitigated, so that they are borne with less difficulty” (Calvin, p. 310). “There is nothing like a believing view of the glory which shall be revealed to support and bear up the spirit under all the sufferings of this present time” (Henry, p. 420). “It will be worth it all when we see Jesus, Life’s trials will seem so small when we see Christ; One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase, So bravely run the race till we see Christ” (from the hymn, “When We See Christ” by Esther Kerr Rusthoi).

385 Murray (p. 302) and Lloyd-Jones (8:49) in like manner speak of non-rational creation; Moo (p. 514) of subhuman creation; and Schreiner (p. 435) of nonhuman creation.

386 The noun is apokaradokia, which, according to Moo (p. 513), is from the Greek words apo (“away from”), kara (“head”), and dechomai (“to stretch”). Lloyd-Jones (8:48) describes it as “an uplifted head stretching forth.” Hendriksen (p. 243) translates verse 19: “For the creation, with outstretched head, is eagerly looking forward to the revelation of the sons of God.” Lloyd-Jones (8:48) says that the creation is “craning its neck.” J. B. Phillips translates with the words, “the creation is on tiptoe.”
For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (8:20-21)

In verses 20 and 21, Paul gives the reason why (“For,” v. 20) the created order anxiously longs for and eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God (v. 19). The reason is that “the creation was subjected to futility” (v. 20), a futility from which it will be freed when believers experience ultimate glorification (v. 21). Most likely, this subjection to futility refers to the Fall (the tense of the verb, translated “was subjected,” in verse 20 signifies a point-in-time event in the past) and the curse on the ground that came as a consequence of the Fall (Genesis 3:17-19). This curse accounts for the death, disease, decay (“change and decay in all around I see,” from the hymn, “Abide With Me”), etc. that has plagued the physical world since the Fall. Man’s fall into sin had cosmic consequences.388

Once again (as in v. 19), Paul uses the literary device of personification when he speaks of the created order as having a will (“not willingly,” v. 20). Paul’s point is that the created order was not subjected to futility through any fault of its own, but through man’s fall into sin.

While there have been interpreters in church history who have interpreted the pronoun, “him” in verse 20 as referring either to Adam or to Satan, all of the interpreters I consulted (such as Sproul, Witmer, Harrison, Hendriksen, Morris, Cranfield, Murray, Moo, and Schreiner) rightly identify God as the referent (so NASB’s capitalization of the pronoun), indicative of the fact that God was the One who imposed the curse on the ground in Genesis 3.

Just as man’s fall into sin had a negative effect upon the created order (v. 20), so the ultimate glorification of believers will have a positive effect upon it (v. 21). When believers are set free (“the freedom of the glory of the children of God,” v. 21), then the created order also will be set free (“the creation itself also will be set free,” v. 21).389 Although Paul does not explicitly make the point here, such cosmic reconciliation is made

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387 According to William Sanday and Arthur Headlam (cited in Harrison, p. 94; emphasis theirs), the word, “futility” in verse 20 conveys the idea of “the disappointing character of present existence, which nowhere reaches the perfection of which it is capable.” In the same vein, Cranfield (p. 196) writes: “... [T]he sub-human creation has been subjected to the frustration of not being able properly to fulfill the purpose of its existence.” Hendriksen (p. 268) makes the following analogy: “It may be compared to a very powerful world-champion boxer or wrestler, who is chained in such a manner that he cannot make use of his tremendous physical prowess.”

388 Witmer (p. 472) points to the “dominion mandate” (see Genesis 1:26-30 and Psalm 8:6-8) as the underlying reason why the created order also paid a price for man’s sin: “God had cursed the physical Creation as part of His judgment on people for sin because of their position and authority over the Creation as God’s representatives.”

389 Sproul (p. 142) interestingly makes the case that verse 21 may be understood to imply that believers will one day be reunited with deceased pets: “Little children, for example, who lose pets often ask me the question, Will their dog or their cat be in heaven? Most theologians
possible only by Christ and His work on the Cross (see Colossians 1:20).

Though not a highly significant interpretive matter, the NASB’s choice to take “glory” as modifying “the children of God” ("the freedom of the glory of the children of God," v. 21), rather than “freedom” (so KJV: “the glorious liberty of the children of God”; so also NIV: “the glorious freedom of the children of God”), is more in keeping with the context.

The cosmic redemption/reconciliation of which Paul speaks in these verses (cf. Matthew 19:28 and Acts 3:21), which Boice (2:874) describes as a resurrection of creation, most likely refers to the physiological changes that the created order will experience during the Millennium, rather than to the creation of the new heavens and new earth spoken of in 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1-5.

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. (8:22)

To communicate just how excruciating the created order’s slavery to corruption is (v. 21a), Paul uses a very vivid analogy here in verse 22, labor pains ("the pains of childbirth"). This is an apt analogy. Just as the pain of childbirth gives way to the joy of a newborn child (John 16:21), so the created order’s pain ("the whole creation groans and suffers the pain"—Paul is once again personifying the created order) of being enslaved to corruption will one day give way to the joy of liberation from it (v. 21b), the groaning will give way to glory (Wiersbe, p. 540).

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (8:23)

Not only does the created order look forward with great anticipation to the day of its liberation ("And not only this"; cf. vs. 19 and 21), so also does the believer ("but also we ourselves").

Just as the created order “groans” as it awaits the day of liberation (v. 22), so also do believers ("even we ourselves groan within ourselves"; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1-4). Likewise, just as the created order “waits eagerly” (v. 19) for that day, so also do believers ("waiting eagerly"; cf. Romans 8:25).

answer that question by saying, ‘No, of course not, because they don’t have souls.’ I don’t know whether they have souls or don’t have souls—I know they are not created in the image of God in the sense that we are—but I have every reason to expect a new earth that is populated by glorified dogs and cats and canaries and redeemed snakes, if you will!”

390 “[T]heir groans are not the despairing cries of the hopeless. Rather, they are the impatient yearnings of those who have been saved in hope and hunger for that ‘glory’ which has been promised them” (Moo, p. 469). Lloyd-Jones (8:92-93) gives the analogy of the groaning of a child eagerly awaiting his or her coming birthday.
The reason believers groan and wait eagerly for the day of liberation is because they have “the first fruits of the Spirit” (i.e., the first fruits, which is the Spirit). The “first fruits” were the first fruits of the harvest, the implication being that there would be more fruit to follow. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit is elsewhere (in 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, and Ephesians 1:14) called a “pledge,” a deposit or down payment of sorts. At the moment of conversion, God the Holy Spirit indwells the believer (1 Corinthians 6:19). The Spirit’s presence in the believer is God’s promise to him that there is more in store, that He will one day set him free from his slavery to corruption, from “the body of this death” (Romans 7:24). See also Romans 8:11 and Ephesians 1:14.

Paul describes this liberation as “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” The believer’s adoption can be viewed from past (as in Ephesians 1:5), present (as in Romans 8:15), and future perspectives. Paul clearly has the future perspective in view here in verse 23, the time when the believer receives his inheritance. The redemption of the church age believer’s body will take place at the Rapture. On that day, the bodies of all deceased church age believers will be resurrected/glorified and reunited with their already-glorified spirits (1 Thessalonians 4:16; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 and 53-54). Also on that day, the bodies of believers living on earth will be glorified, along with their spirits (1 Thessalonians 4:17; cf. Philippians 3:20-21, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and 2 Thessalonians 1:10). On that day, the redemption of all church age believers will be complete (cf. Ephesians 4:30).

For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (8:24-25)

Here in verses 24 and 25, Paul speaks of the believer’s glorification as a “hope” (cf. his describing of the created order’s glorification as a “hope” in v. 20), as he does elsewhere (in Romans 5:2, Ephesians 1:18, Colossians 1:5, 27, Titus 2:13, and 3:7). In Scripture, hope is a “know so,” not a “hope so”; it is a confident expectation. By its very nature, hope, being a future reality, cannot be physically seen (“hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?,” v. 24). Thus, the believer must see it with the eyes of faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), taking God at His word, while awaiting its arrival (cf. Galatians 5:5 and Hebrews 11:1).

This wait is by no means a passive one, but an active, eager (cf. vs. 19 and 23), persevering (cf. Romans 2:7, 5:3-4, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, and Hebrews 10:36) one (“with perseverance we wait eagerly for it,” v. 25). Lloyd-Jones (8:111) gives the analogy of an energetic dog being held back by its leash.

391“A farmer’s ‘firstfruits’ were the initial harvesting of his first-ripened crops. The first installment was a foretaste and promise that more harvest was to come” (Witmer, p. 472).

392The Greek noun translated “pledge” in 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, and Ephesians 1:14 was used to describe an engagement ring.

393Cranfield (p. 200) calls it “the final public manifestation of our adoption.”

394“The future bodily resurrection of believers will be the full harvest of redemption” (Harrison, p. 95).
In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (8:26-27)

These verses are somewhat mysterious. Paul connects them with what he has previously said through a Greek particle, translated “in the same way” (v. 26). What is the connection? Cranfield (as does Hughes, Wiersbe, and Boice) sees the connection in the repetition of the concept of groaning: the created order groans (v. 22), the believer groans (v. 23), and the Holy Spirit groans (v. 26). Moo (so also Murray, Schreiner, and Harrison) suggests a different connection: “In vv. 24-25, Paul has argued that the nature and solidity of our Christian hope enable us to wait for its culmination with fortitude. Now, he says, ‘in the same way [as this hope sustains us], the Spirit also comes to our aid.’ To be sure, this is not the only way that v. 26 might be connected to its context. Especially popular, for instance, is the view that ‘in the same way’ compares the groaning of the Christian (v. 23) with the ‘groaning’ of the Spirit. But the ‘groans’ of the Spirit come rather late in v. 26 for this to be the point of comparison; and, while there is an obvious literary parallelism between the ‘groaning’ of creation (v. 22), the Christian, and the Spirit, the groaning of the Spirit is very different in its nature and purpose from the other two ‘groanings’” (pp. 522-523).

The Holy Spirit, like the hope of glory, is a help in the midst of hardship. According to verse 26, the Holy Spirit “helps our weakness.” The Greek verb translated “helps” pictures “someone helping another carry a heavy load” (Witmer, p. 473).

In context, the “weakness” Paul is speaking of seems to be the inability that we, as sinners living in a sin-cursed world, often have of discerning and, therefore, praying in accordance with the will of God (“we do not know [what] to pray,” v. 26).

When such a phenomenon occurs, “the Spirit Himself intercedes for us” (v. 26). Like God the Son (Romans 8:34), God the Holy Spirit intercedes for the believer. The difference is that God the Son’s intercession takes place in heaven, while God the Holy Spirit’s intercession takes place in the believer’s heart (Murray; so also Hughes and Moo).

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395 Most interpreters (e.g., Cranfield, Moo, Schreiner, and Lloyd-Jones) are of the opinion that the Greek word translated “how” by the NASB in verse 26 is better translated “what” (so also KJV and NIV).

396 A.T. Robertson (quoted in Hughes, p. 163) explains the verb (suntantiambanomai) as follows: “The Holy Spirit lays hold of our weaknesses along with (syn) us and carries His part of the burden facing us (anti) as if two men were carrying a log, one at each end.”

397 As in 8:16, the KJV translates the personal pronoun too literally in verse 26 (“itself”). See footnote 369 for further explanation.
There is disagreement among interpreters as to the precise person doing the groaning ("groanings," v. 26). According to some (such as Hendriksen, Boice, Wiersbe, and Moo\textsuperscript{398}), the Holy Spirit is doing the groaning. According to others (such as Morris, Murray, Lloyd-Jones, and Schreiner\textsuperscript{399}), the believer is doing the groaning. This second option seems preferable; the groanings are the Spirit-induced groanings of believers.

The character of the groanings ("too deep for words," v. 26) involved is also a debated point. Are they merely unuttered/unexpressed or are they unutterable/inexpressible/incapable of being uttered? While some interpreters opt for the first (so Calvin and Morris; cf. KJV, NIV, and NASB), most opt for the second (so Schreiner, Hendriksen, Cranfield, Lloyd-Jones, and Moo).

The One who "searches the hearts" (v. 27) may be God the Son (Revelation 2:23; so Sproul), but is more likely God the Father (1 Chronicles 28:9 and Jeremiah 17:10; so Witmer, Murray, and Schreiner).

Because "He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is\textsuperscript{400}" (v. 27a) and because the Holy Spirit "intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (v. 27b), the Spirit’s intercession in the believer’s behalf is always effectual (cf. 1 John 5:14-15). “The main burden of these two verses [vs. 26 and 27], then, is that the Spirit counterbalances the handicap of believers in prayer by interceding for them in accordance with God’s will” (Schreiner, p. 444).

\textsuperscript{398}Moo (pp. 525-526) writes: “Moreover, it is likely that the groans are not the believer’s but the Spirit’s. While we cannot, then, be absolutely sure (and we have no clear biblical parallels to go by), it is preferable to understand these ‘groans’ as the Spirit’s own ‘language of prayer,’ a ministry of intercession that takes place in our hearts (cf. v. 27) in a manner imperceptible to us.”

\textsuperscript{399}Schreiner (pp. 445-446) writes: “Some have said that since the groanings are attributed to the Spirit we are entirely oblivious to the Spirit’s intercession on our behalf. In other words, the Spirit is constantly interceding for us and we are not conscious of his aid, nor are the groans specified here ours .... We are fortified with hope because we know that the Spirit interposes for us. It seems more likely to me that the groanings are genuinely those of believers that originate from the Holy Spirit .... These groanings are not audible. They are the inexpressible longings that arise in every believer’s heart to do and know the will of God. That the groanings arise in the heart of believers is suggested by verse 27, which says that ‘God searches the hearts.’ This is most naturally understood to refer to the hearts of believers. God searches the hearts of believers and finds unutterable longings to conform their lives to the will of God. The Holy Spirit takes these groanings and presents them before God in an articulate form. Even though believers cannot specify their requests to God adequately since they do not know his will sufficiently, the Holy Spirit translates these groanings and conforms them to God’s will.”

\textsuperscript{400}Cranfield (p. 202) nicely ties the end of verse 26 and the start of verse 27 together: “The Spirit’s groanings are not spoken [end of v. 26], because they do not need to be, since God knows the Spirit’s intention without its being expressed [start of v. 27].”
And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (8:28)

So far, in the major section of 8:17-30, Paul has given the Romans two motivations for enduring the “sufferings of this present time” (v. 18): the incomparable hope of glory (vs. 17-25) and the intercessory ministry of the Holy Spirit (vs. 26-27). Here in verse 28, a verse that Lloyd-Jones (8:159) calls “one of the most comforting statements in the whole range of Scripture,” he gives them a third motivation (similar to the first): God in His providence uses all things, even suffering, for the believer’s ultimate good (for good).

While the NASB (and the NIV), based upon one textual reading, make God the subject of the direct object clause, God causes ..., most interpreters (such as Hendriksen, Cranfield, Murray, Moo, and Schreiner; cf. KJV, NASB margin, and NIV margin), based upon a different textual reading, make all things the subject. Even if the second is the correct reading, God’s agency is nevertheless implied. “Whether the subject is ‘God’ or ‘all things’ is not a matter of vital importance, for in either case the idea is that all things work together for good because of God’s agency” (Schreiner, p. 449).

While some things (from a purely human perspective) are not good in and of themselves, God in His providence uses them for the believer’s good by using them for a good purpose (according to His purpose; cf. Genesis 50:20 and Ephesians 1:11), conforming the believer to the image of Christ (v. 29).

The expression, those who love God401 (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9, 8:3, James 1:12, and 2:5), is descriptive of every believer; it is not an expression of degree (how much a believer loves God; ≈ a light dimmer), but of kind (whether one is a lover of God, i.e., a believer; ≈ an on-off switch).

While those who love God describes the believer’s status from a human standpoint/perspective, those who are called according to His purpose describes it from a divine standpoint/perspective, with the second being the reason for the first (cf. 1 John 4:19).

Called” is a reference to what is known as the “effectual call,” the summons to salvation that God’s own will infallibly hear and to which they will respond (cf. John 10:27, Acts 2:39, Romans 1:6-7, 8:30, 9:11, 24, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 9, 24, 26, Galatians 1:6, Ephesians 4:1, 4, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 5:24, 2 Thessalonians 2:14, 1 Timothy 6:12, 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Peter 1:15, 2:9, 5:10, 2 Peter 1:3, 10, Jude 1, and Revelation 17:14).402

401 In the original, the words “to those who love God” appear first in the clause, for emphasis. Only believers can claim the promise of Romans 8:28.

402 The “effectual call” may be distinguished from the “general call,” the summons to salvation that is given to all who hear the gospel (as in Matthew 11:28 and Revelation 22:17). Boice (2:914-915) distinguishes the general call from the effectual call by describing the first as “external, general, and universal” and the second as “internal, specific, and effectual.”
For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (8:29-30)

Verses 29 and 30 undergird Paul’s point in verse 28. We know all things work together for the believer’s good (v. 28) because (“For,” v. 29) God is using such things, even the “bad” things, to conform the believer to the image of Christ (v. 29) at glorification (v. 30).

In these verses, Paul mentions several of the links in what has come to be called the “golden chain” of salvation.403

The first link he mentions is foreknowledge (“those whom He foreknew,” v. 29). There has been disagreement among interpreters over the meaning of foreknowledge.404 According to some, God foreknew a what, the fact that certain individuals would exercise saving faith. Based on this advance knowledge, God elected them to salvation.405 According to others, however, God did not foreknow a what, but a who (“whom He foreknew,” v. 29; cf. Romans 11:2).

Based on the relational tint of the Hebrew verb (remember, that the New Testament authors were for the most part Jews, so, even though they wrote in Greek, they thought in Hebrew) meaning “to know,” yada (see, for example, Genesis 4:1), to “foreknow” (in this context) means to “enter into a relationship with before”

403 These verses also provide a framework for what has been called an “ordo salutis” (Latin for “order of salvation”). An ordo salutis is an attempt to arrange the events involved in the application of redemption in a logical order. One such ordo salutis: election (≈ foreknowledge in Romans 8:29), calling/regeneration, repentance, faith, Spirit baptism, union with Christ, justification, adoption, sanctification, eternal security, perseverance, glorification.

404 “...[F]ew questions have provoked more difference of interpretation than that concerned with the meaning of God’s foreknowledge as referred to here” (Murray, p. 315).

405 Henry Thiessen (Lectures in Systematic Theology, p. 258) articulates this position: “... God in his foreknowledge foresaw those who would respond to his offer of salvation and actively elected them to salvation. That is, election is that sovereign act of God in grace whereby he chose in Christ for salvation all those whom he foreknew would accept him.” The Living Bible translates the verse this way: “For from the very beginning God decided that those who came to him—and all along he knew who would ...” Matthew Henry (p. 423) counters this: “Not, whom he did foreknow to be holy those he predestinated to be so. The counsels and decrees of God do not truckle [submit] to the frail and fickle will of men.” In like manner, Boice (2:913, emphasis his) points out: “If all the word means is that God knows beforehand what people will do in response to him or to the preaching of the gospel and then determines their destiny on that basis, what, pray tell, could God possibly see or foreknow except a fixed opposition to him on the part of all people?”

406 In other contexts, foreknowledge can mean mere prescience of a fact (such as in Acts 26:5 and 2 Peter 3:17).
This Hebrew verb can also have a foreordination tint (see, for example, Jeremiah 1:5). This same tint carries over to the Greek verb used here, as seen by its translation as “foreordained” by the KJV translators in 1 Peter 1:20. Both tints (relational and foreordination) are carried over into the Greek verb meaning “to know,” ginosko, in Matthew 7:23. The foreordination tint is carried over into the Greek noun meaning “foreknowledge,” prognosis (literally “to know before”: the Greek preposition, pro, meaning “before” + the Greek noun, gnosis, meaning “knowledge”) in Acts 2:23.

Further support for this understanding of foreknowledge here in Romans 8:29 is seen by the parallel in Ephesians 1:4-5, where God’s love (end of v. 4) immediately precedes His predestination of the believer (start of v. 5). Here in Romans 8:29, His foreknowledge immediately precedes His predestination. Thus, love and foreknowledge may be viewed as parallel.

Witmer (p. 474; emphasis his) sums it up by saying: “Believers are those God foreknew. This does not mean simply that God foreknows what believers will do, but that God foreknows them. Nor does divine foreknowledge merely mean an awareness of or acquaintance with an individual. Instead it means a meaningful relationship with a person based on God’s choice (cf. Jer 1:4-5; Amos 3:2) in eternity before Creation.” Murray (p. 318) adds: “It is not the foresight of difference but the foreknowledge that makes difference to exist ....”

The second link in the chain of salvation Paul mentions is predestination (“He also predestined,” v. 29). The Greek verb translated “predestined” (v. 29) is proorizo, which literally means to determine before (the Greek preposition, pro, meaning “before” + the Greek verb, orizo, meaning “to determine”).

Believers are predestined407 (cf. Ephesians 1:5 and 11) “to become conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (v. 29; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:49 and 1 John 3:2). In this context, Paul is speaking of the believer’s ultimate conformity to the image of Christ in glorification. Elsewhere (in 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Colossians 3:10), he speaks of it as already occurring to some degree in sanctification. To be “conformed” is to be squeezed into the mold or pattern of something. Rather than being squeezed into the mold of the world (Romans 12:2), the believer is to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Paul temporarily breaks the linguistic chain of verses 29 and 30 at the end of verse 29 in order to draw greater attention to God’s ultimate purpose in conforming believers to the image of Christ. It is so that Christ would “be the firstborn among many brethren.” To be the firstborn was to be in a position of supremacy/preeminence (Psalm 89:27). As believers are conformed to the image of Christ, Christ’s supremacy/preeminence is seen (cf. Colossians 1:15, 18, Hebrews 1:6, and Revelation 1:5). Redemption is ultimately not about us, but about Christ. It is for our good (v. 28), but more so for God’s glory (v. 29). “Brethren” is a reference to the fraternal relationship that exists between Christ and believers (cf. Hebrews 2:11).

407Wiersbe (p. 541) makes the point that it is only believers who are predestined, not unbelievers.
The third link in the chain of salvation Paul mentions is calling ("called," v. 30; cf. v. 28 and comments on).

The fourth link he mentions is justification ("justified," v. 30; cf. comments on 3:24).

The fifth and final link he mentions is glorification ("glorified," v. 30; cf. comments on the entire section of 8:17-30). Interestingly, the Greek verb translated “glorified,” like the previous four verbs (foreknew, predestined, called, and justified), is in the past tense, though it is a future event. The implication is that the believer’s glorification is so certain to take place that it can be spoken of as already having taken place, a point which nearly all interpreters make (so Witmer, Hendriksen, Hughes, Morris, Murray, Schreiner, Henry, Boice, and Lloyd-Jones) and one which Lloyd-Jones (8:212) calls “in certain ways the most daring statement in the whole of Scripture.”

The golden chain of salvation cannot be broken. All those who are foreknown are predestined. All who are predestined are called. All who are called are justified. And all who are justified are glorified. God finishes what He starts (Philippians 1:6). Believers are eternally secure. Amazingly, those who once fell short of the glory of God (3:23) are destined to be glorified by God (8:30).
Paul concludes the “Great Eight,” the eighth chapter of Romans with a flourish, in what has been called “The Christian’s Triumph Song” (Morris, p. 334)/“a hymn of triumph” (Moo, p. 469) and “a mountaintop paragraph … the Everest of the letter and thus the highest peak in the highest Himalayan range of Scripture” (Boice, 2:952). This section neatly divides into two subsections, 8:31-34 and 8:35-39. The entire section is marked by a series of questions, most of which are rhetorical. The first subsection answers the question found in verse 31b: “If God is for us, who is against us? The second subsection answers the question found in verse 35a: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?”

**What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (8:31)**

Paul begins the section of 8:31-39 by asking the question, “What then shall we say to these things?” (cf. 4:1, 6:1, 16, 7:7, 9:14, and 30), clearly connecting what he is about to say with what he has said previously (“then”).

To what does “these things” refer? On one end of the spectrum are those who take “these things” to refer to everything Paul has said in the book of Romans up to this point (so Morris, Cranfield, Hendriksen, and Lloyd-Jones). On the other end of the spectrum are those who take “these things” to refer to what Paul has said in the immediately preceding verses (so Sproul). In between are those who take “these things” to refer to everything Paul has said since the beginning of chapter 5 (so Moo and Schreiner). That chapters 5-8 may be viewed as a unit is seen by the emphasis in these chapters on the agency of Christ (“through” Christ in 5:1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19, 21, 7:4, 25, and 8:37; “by” Christ in 5:9, 10, and 15) and the believer’s union with Christ (“in” Christ in 6:11, 23, 8:1, 2, and 39; “into” Christ in 6:3; “with” Christ in 6:4, 5, 6, 8, 8:17, and 32). That chapters 5-8 may be viewed as a unit is also seen by the fact that many of the themes

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408 Morris (pp. 334-335) writes: “The whole should be seen as the conclusion and summing up not of the immediately preceding section, but of the whole of the letter up to this point … Paul’s ‘therefore’ [in v. 31; NASB: “then”] introduces the following paragraph as a logical inference from what he has been saying; this will refer to the whole letter, not just verses 29-30.”

409 In the opinion of this interpreter, 8:31-39 is not a conclusion to the first eight chapters of Romans. Rather, Paul waits until the end of chapter eleven, concluding the first eleven chapters (the doctrinal portion of the book) with a doxology (11:33-36) before beginning the practical portion of the book (chapters 12-16). A similar phenomenon is found in the book of Ephesians, where Paul concludes the doctrinal portion of the book (chapters 1-3) with a doxology (3:20-21) before beginning the practical portion (chapters 4-6).

410 Notice in this regard how each of the four chapters in this unit end with such an emphasis: “through Jesus Christ our Lord” in 5:21; “in Christ Jesus our Lord” in 6:23; “through Jesus Christ our Lord” in 7:25; and “in Christ Jesus our Lord” in 8:39.
introduced in the first section of the unit (5:1-11) are addressed again at the end of the unit (hope in 5:2, 4, and 5 and again in 8:20, 24, and 25; glorification in 5:2 and again in 8:17, 18, 21, and 30; tribulation/suffering in 5:3 and again in 8:17, 18, 35, and 36; God’s love for the believer in 5:5 and 8 and again in 8:35 and 39; and the death of Christ for the believer signaling God’s unfailing future favor for the believer in 5:9 and 10 and again in 8:32). While somewhat persuaded by the position that the “these things” refers to all of chapters 5-8, this interpreter is more comfortable with the position that they refer to the immediately preceding context of verses 28-30, as the succeeding context of verses 32-34 seem to show.

Paul answers the question of verse 31a with another, albeit rhetorical, question in verse 31b: “If God is for us, who is against us?” The “if” does not imply any doubt as to whether or not God is for the believer. He is (cf. Psalm 118:6), as the rest of the section will so eloquently explain.411

Since God is for the believer, no one can be “against” the believer. Paul does not mean by this that the believer has no adversaries. According to verses 35 and 36, the believer has many adversaries. What he means by this is that no one can prevail against the believer (Sproul, p. 155). If the infinite Creator is on our side, no finite creature (cf. 8:38-39) can thwart God’s plan for our lives (cf. 8:28-30 and 32-34).

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? (8:32)

In support of his point that no one can prevail against the believer because God is for him (v. 31b), and in a verse that Lloyd-Jones (8:378) calls “one of the greatest statements of the doctrine of the atonement, and one of the most comforting and re-assuring statements to be found anywhere in Scripture,” Paul asks another (cf. v. 31b) rhetorical question in verse 32.

Just as no one can prevail against the believer because God is for him (v. 31b), so God will give the believer everything necessary for his full and final salvation (v. 32b) because God gave the believer His Son (v. 32a). As in 5:9 and 10, Paul argues from the greater to the lesser: if God has done the comparatively greater thing of giving His beloved Son, then He will certainly do the comparatively lesser thing of finishing the believer’s salvation.

Paul describes God’s giving of His Son in terms of a negative and a positive. Negatively, God “did not spare His own Son” (cf. Genesis 22:12 and 16).

411 At conversion, the believer goes from being God’s foe to being His friend, from having God against him to having God for him.

412 The Greek possessive pronoun translated “own” emphasizes the equality of essence between the Father and the Son, i.e., the fact that both are fully and equally God (cf. especially John 5:18, as well as Romans 8:3 and comments on). By not sparing His own Son, God spared no expense in accomplishing the believer’s redemption.
Positively, He “delivered Him over for us all.” The Greek verb translated “delivered over” is the same one translated “gave over” in 1:24, 26, and 28 and “were committed” in 6:17 (see the box entitled “An Oasis” at the end of comments on chapter one). On a purely human level, Christ was delivered over by Judas Iscariot, the Jewish chief priests and elders (“delivered” in Matthew 27:2; same Greek verb), the Jewish people (‘delivered” in Acts 3:13; same Greek verb), and Pilate (“handed over” in Mark 15:15; same Greek verb). On an ultimate, divine level, He was delivered over by God the Father (cf. the same Greek verb translated “delivered over” in Romans 4:25 and a different Greek verb translated “delivered over” in Acts 2:23; cf. also Isaiah 53:6b, 10a, and 2 Corinthians 5:21a). According to Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 5:2, and 25, God the Son delivered Himself over (“gave up” in all three; same Greek verb).

The Father delivered the Son over “for us all,” signifying the substitutionary nature of the Atonement (“for” meaning “in behalf of”; cf. comments on 5:6-8). In this context, the “all” refers to Paul and his fellow believers in Rome.

Because God gave His Son to die in the believer’s behalf (v. 32a), He surely will “freely” give the believer “with Him [His Son]” everything necessary for full and final salvation (“all things”) (v. 32b).

Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; (8:33)

In further support of his point that no one can prevail against the believer because God is for him (v. 31b), Paul asks yet another (cf. vs. 31b and 32) rhetorical question in verse 33a: “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?”

Just as no one can prevail against the believer because God is for him (v. 31b), and just as God will give the believer everything necessary for his full and final salvation (v. 32b) because God gave the believer His Son (v. 32a), so no one can “bring a charge against” (cf. the same Greek verb used in Acts 19:38) God’s elect (v. 33a) because “God is the one who justifies” (v. 33b). Paul does not mean by this that the believer has no accusers. According to Zechariah 3:1 and Revelation 12:10, Satan accuses the believer. What he means by this is that no one, including Satan, can make an accusation against a believer stick. When a person is converted, God, the “Judge of all the earth” (Genesis 18:25), renders a decisive verdict of “not guilty”

413 Acts 4:27 puts the onus on the Gentiles, as well.

414“Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews, for envy;—but the Father, for love” (Octavius Winslow, quoted in Murray, p. 324).

415 The Greek verb translated “freely give” is charizomai, the noun form of which is charis, the Greek word for “grace.” Salvation is by grace, not only in its commencement (Ephesians 2:8) and continuation (1 Corinthians 15:10), but also in its culmination. “‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home” (from stanza 3 of the hymn, “Amazing Grace” by John Newton).

416 Every spiritual benefit the believer derives from his salvation is due to his union with Christ (cf. “in Christ” in Ephesians 1:3).
(justification), a verdict that cannot be overturned. Any charges pressed against the believer are not even given a hearing. According to Moo (p. 541) and Schreiner (p. 462), Paul is primarily thinking in future terms, i.e., who will bring a charge against (future tense verb in the original) God’s elect in the eschaton/end times.

Nicolaus L. von Zinzendorf wrote of this in the hymn, “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness”: “Bold shall I stand in that great day; For who aught to my charge shall lay? Fully through thee absolved I am, From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.”

who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (8:34)

In further support of his point that no one can prevail against the believer because God is for him (v. 31b), Paul asks yet another (cf. vs. 31b, 32, and 33a) rhetorical question in verse 34a: “who is the one who condemns?”

Just as no one can prevail against the believer because God is for him (v. 31b), just as God will give the believer everything necessary for his full and final salvation (v. 32b) because God gave the believer His Son (v. 32a), and just as no one can bring a charge against the believer (v. 33a) because God is the one who justifies the believer (v. 33b), so no one can condemn the believer (v. 34a) because Christ died, rose from the dead, ascended to the Father’s right hand, and intercedes for the believer (v. 34b).

Because the believer is in Christ, he is no longer under condemnation (Romans 8:1); therefore, no one can condemn the believer. If no one can even bring a charge against a believer (v. 33a), then certainly no one can condemn a believer (v. 34a). No one can condemn (v. 34a) one whom God has justified (v. 33b).

According to verse 34b, no one can condemn a believer because of the work of Christ. This includes His death (“Christ Jesus is He who died”), His resurrection (“yes, rather who was raised”), His ascension

417 There is some question as to whether the Greek participle translated “condemns” in verse 34 is a present participle (“condemns”) or a future participle (“will condemn”). Both participles are spelled the same; the only difference is in the way they are accented. Morris, Cranfield, and Schreiner opt for the future tense, in keeping with the future tense of “will bring a charge against” in verse 33. If so, Paul once again (cf. the end of comments on v. 33) has the future in view. Even if the participle is a present, it could be a “gnomic (i.e., timeless) present” and, therefore, based on the context, understood as a future.

418 In verses 31-33, Paul focuses on God the Father; in verses 34-37 on God the Son; and in verses 38-39 on both (“the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,” v. 39). For most of chapter eight, his focus has primarily been on God the Holy Spirit.

419 The One who could have condemned us to eternal death instead condemned our sin by His death on the Cross (Romans 8:1-3).

420 “… Jesus’ death would have been of no avail in fulfilling the ends in view apart from the resurrection” (Murray, pp. 328-329). See also Romans 4:25 and comments on.

As Paul penned verses 33 and 34, he undoubtedly had Isaiah 50:8-9a in mind: “He who vindicates Me is near; Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up to each other; Who has a case against Me? Let him draw near to Me. Behold, the Lord GOD helps Me; Who is he who condemns Me?"

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (8:35)

Paul begins the second subsection of 8:31-39 with yet another (cf. vs. 31b, 32, 33a, and 34a) rhetorical question: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” The answer: ABSOLUTELY NOTHING (vs. 38-39)!

Based on verse 37’s “Him who loved us,” “of Christ” here in verse 35 is clearly a “subjective genitive” (Christ as the subject of the verb; Christ’s love for the believer), not an “objective genitive” (Christ as the object of the verb; the believer’s love for Christ).

Paul lists seven things that will not separate the believer from Christ’s love for him: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. For the flavor of “tribulation” and “distress,” see

421 In what sense does Christ intercede for believers? Does He do so in a vocal sense, i.e., does He actually plead our case before the Father on an ongoing basis? Or does He do so by His mere presence in heaven at the right hand of the Father, such presence being an ongoing testimony to the fact that His atoning work has reconciled the Father and the believer? As Henry Swete (quoted in John Walvoord, Jesus Christ our Lord, p. 247) states: “For the intercession of the Ascended Christ is not a prayer, but a life. The New Testament does not represent Him as ... standing ever before the Father, and with outstretched arms ... and with strong crying and tears pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God ....” Morris (p. 338) agrees: “His presence at God’s right hand in his capacity as the one who died for sinners and rose again is itself an intercession.” So does Calvin (p. 325): “But we must not measure this intercession by our carnal judgment; for we must not suppose that he humbly supplicates the Father with bended knees and expanded hands; but as he appears continually, as one who died and rose again, and as his death and resurrection stand in the place of eternal intercession, and have the efficacy of a powerful prayer for reconciling and rendering the Father propitious to us, he is justly said to intercede for us.” For the contrary view, see Wayne Grudem (Systematic Theology, pp. 627-628).

422 Boice (2:985) writes: “The English word tribulation comes directly from the Latin noun tribulum, which meant a ‘threshing sledge.’ In the ancient world at the time of the grain harvest, the stalks of grain were brought to the threshing floor and a wooden threshing instrument, like a sled covered on the bottom with strips of metal, was dragged over the stalks to separate the heads of grain from the chaff. This instrument was called a tribulum because it pressed out the grain.
According to Boice (2:986), the Greek noun translated “persecution” “contains the idea of being pursued by someone intent on our harm. It denotes harm that is relentless.” “Nakedness” signifies a lack of adequate clothing due to poverty. Commenting on “peril,” Robert Haldane (quoted in Boice, 2:987) states: “If God were not their protector, even in this land of freedom, the followers of the Lamb would be cut off or injured. It is the Lord’s providence that averts such injuries, or overrules events for the protection of his people. …[L]et the Christian habitually consider his safety and protection as secured by the Lord, rather than by the liberality of the times. That time never yet was when the Lord’s people could be safe, if circumstances removed restraint from the wicked. Those who boast of their unbounded liberality would, if in situations calculated to develop their natural hatred of the truth, prove, after all, bitter persecutors.” “Sword” signifies execution. Paul, the human author of these words certainly knew what it was like to experience the first six (see 1 Corinthians 4:11-13, 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 6:4-5, 8-10, 11:23-27, and 12:10). According to church history, he eventually experienced the seventh.

One of the reasons nothing can separate believers from Christ’s love for them is because Christ “always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25; cf. Romans 8:34b).

Just as it is written, “FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.” (8:36)

In support of the seventh and final item listed in verse 35, “sword” (i.e., execution), Paul, as he often does in the book of Romans (see #2 under “Two Outstanding Features of Romans” in the introductory lesson), quotes the Old Testament (“Just as it is written”), citing Psalm 44:22 here in verse 36.

This vivid picture produced the idea embodied in the word tribulation, because circumstances frequently press down on people so forcefully and unremittingly that it seems to them that they are being threshed like stalks of grain.”

According to Boice (2:987), “today as many as 600,000 Christians are killed every year for their faith.”

“We should not forget that when Paul spoke about these adverse circumstances which Satan and the other enemies of the cross used in order to bring about separation between believers and their Lord, he was not speaking as an armchair theologian or philosopher. On the contrary, as II Cor. 11:23-29 indicates, he had already suffered the first six of these seven hardships before writing this epistle to the Romans. Moreover, by means of the seventh, i.e., the sword, he was going to be put to death. The apostle was speaking not only by inspiration but also from experience, therefore, when he stated that none of these things can bring about separation between believers and their Lord, he knew what he was saying” (Hendriksen, p. 291)!

“The OT context of Ps. 44 is instructive because the psalmist laments the suffering of the righteous, who have not abandoned God’s name and yet are subjected to humiliation, defeat, and mockery. What Paul affirms in Romans is that such mockery and suffering are inevitably the lot of Christians” (Schreiner, p. 464).
Sproul (p. 159) calls this verse “a capsule summation of the life of the apostle Paul” (perhaps this could be said more so of verse 35).


But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. (8:37)

Not only do the items listed in verse 35 (the “these things” of v. 37) fail to separate the believer from Christ’s love for him (v. 35), but they also fail to prevent the believer from being ultimately victorious, and not only victorious, but supervictorious (v. 37). The Greek verb translated “overwhelmingly conquer” (hupernikao) is an intensified form of the Greek verb, “to conquer” (nikao), having been intensified with the Greek preposition, huper, meaning “over, above, beyond” (cf. the English equivalent, “hyper,” as in hyperactive, hypersensitive, etc.). Sproul (p. 160; so also Wiersbe, p. 542) translates “superconquerors.”

It is through Christ (“through Him who loved us”), and only through Christ, the Victor (John 16:33 and Colossians 2:15) that believers are victorious (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:57 and 2 Corinthians 2:14). The Greek participle translated “loved” is in the past tense, causing some commentators (such as Moo and Cranfield) to conclude that Paul specifically has the Cross in mind.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (8:38-39)

Paul explicitly and emphatically answers the question he posed at the start of verse 35. Nothing in all creation either will or can separate the believer from the love of Christ (v. 35)/love of God (v. 39) for him. It is, indeed, as the songwriter has written, “love that will not let me go” (cf. Jeremiah 31:3).

This was a truth of which Paul was “convinced” (v. 38; I suspect Paul didn’t need much convincing), meaning to “have come, through a process of persuasion, to a settled conclusion” (Lloyd-Jones, 8:448).

426... [I]t is not through any courage, endurance or determination of our own, but through Christ, and not even by our hold on Him but by His hold on us, that we are victorious” (Cranfield, p. 211).

427From the song, “O Love That Will Not Let Me Go” by George Matheson.

428Another man who was convinced of this truth was John Chrysostom, the renowned fourth century preacher, of whom Hughes (p. 171; quoting from Henry Hart Milman) writes: “When Chrysostom was brought before the Roman Emperor, the Emperor threatened him with banishment if he remained a Christian. Chrysostom replied, ‘Thou canst not banish me for this world is my father’s house.’ ‘But I will slay thee,’ said the Emperor. ‘Nay, thou canst not,’ said
To the seven items listed in verse 35, Paul adds nine more specific ones in verses 38 and 39, most in contrasting pairs (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:22).

He begins with “death” (v. 38), most likely because that’s where he ended in verse 35. Rather than separating us from the love of God, death unites us with the One who loves us (2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23).

“Angels” (v. 38), “principalities” (v. 38), and “powers” (v. 38) are all likely designations for angelic beings (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24, Ephesians 1:21, 3:10, 6:12, Colossians 1:16, 2:10, 15, and 1 Peter 3:22). Based on the other contrasted pairs (death-life, things present-things to come, and height-depth), Paul most likely has both good/benevolent and bad/malevolent angels in mind (the NIV translates “demons” instead of “principalities” in v. 38).

“Things present” (v. 38) and “things to come” form a chronological, horizontal pair, while “height” and “depth” form a spatial, vertical pair (cf. Psalm 139:8).

To the nine specific items listed in verses 38 and 39, Paul adds a final, general, all-encompassing one, “any other created thing” (v. 39).429

The love of God is “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 39) in that “it is in giving ‘his own Son’ that God’s love is above all made known to us [cf. Cranfield, p. 213], and only in relation to Christ do we experience the love of God for us” (Moo, p. 547). “… [N]o love of God can be known except in and through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Lloyd-Jones, 8:449).

“Things future, nor things that are now,
Not all things below nor above,
Can make Him His purpose forego,
Or sever my soul from His love”
(from the song, “A Debtor to Mercy” by Augustus Toplady)

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the noble champion of the faith, ‘for my life is hid with Christ in God.’ ‘I will take away thy treasures.’ ‘Nay, but thou canst not for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there.’ ‘But I will drive thee away from man and thou shalt have no friend left.’ ‘Nay, thou canst not, for I have a friend in heaven from which thou canst not separate me. I defy thee; for there is nothing that thou canst do to hurt me.’”

429 “Lest a picky reader think that Paul has omitted something that could threaten the believer’s security in Christ, Paul concludes with the comprehensive ‘any created thing’” (Moo, p. 546).