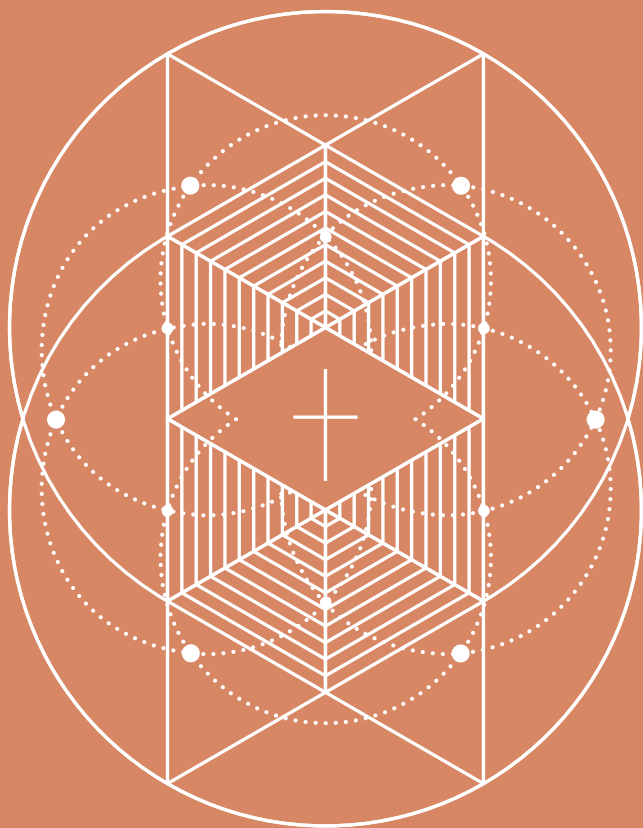


John Calvin

Commentary on Romans



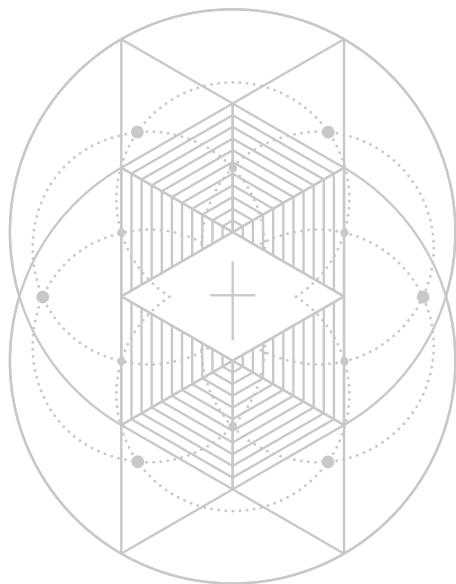
THEOLOGICAL
FOUNDATIONS



TIMOTHY
GEORGE
EDITOR

John Calvin

Commentary on Romans



TIMOTHY GEORGE
EDITOR

BH
ACADEMIC
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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INTRODUCTION

Timothy George

Johannes Calvinus, better known to us as John Calvin, was born in Noyon, France in 1509. That was the same year in which Martin Luther began his teaching career at the University of Erfurt. Calvin may have been the best disciple Luther ever had. Luther was the greater theological genius, but Calvin was the Reformation's premier exegete. His great accomplishment was to take Luther's central theological message and to transplant it in the urban setting of Geneva where it took on a life of its own, ensuring Geneva's status as a leading center of influence for the emerging Reformed tradition.

By the time Calvin embraced the Protestant cause in the early 1530s, there was already a developing Reformation literature. Calvin's own *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the first edition of which was published at Basel in 1536, was a major contribution. Calvin is so closely identified with the *Institutes* that he has sometimes been called "a man of one book." But as Calvin explained in a later edition of the *Institutes*, he saw that work as a kind of introduction or handbook to the study of Scripture itself. Calvin would eventually publish commentaries on most of the Old Testament and on nearly every book of the New Testament (the ones missing are 2-3 John and Revelation). Calvin was a biblical theologian. He believed that the Bible was the divinely inspired Word of God, written in space and time in human language, given to strengthen God's people, his holy church.

But why Romans? For one thing, there was a veritable Pauline renaissance during the age of the Reformation with at least 70 commentaries on Romans published between 1500 and 1650. A number of these are by Catholic scholars including Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto with whom Calvin engaged in a public exchange defining the central differences between Rome and the Reformation. Luther had launched the Reformation with his own 1515/1516 *Lectures on Romans*. In his preface to Romans in his 1522 German New Testament, Luther extolled the epistle in this way:

This Epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest Gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.¹

Calvin read and appreciated other Protestant commentaries on Romans, including those by Philip Melanchthon, Luther's successor in Wittenberg; Heinrich Bullinger, who succeeded Zwingli as the reformer of Zurich; and Martin Bucer, the reformer of Strasbourg and Calvin's host while he wrote the first edition of his own Romans commentary. But the high esteem in which he held these scholars did not blind him to their defects in biblical exegesis. Melanchthon, he thought, was too laconic, while Bucer was long-winded and hard to follow. How was Calvin to approach his own exposition of Paul's letter to the Romans?

Unlike Luther, who was trained in the traditions of scholastic theology, Calvin was a legal scholar and the product of the French renaissance. The skills of humanism, honed by Erasmus and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, guided Calvin's exegetical work. He paid close attention to history, language, context, nuance, and hermeneutics. He was what Luther once called *bonus textualis*, a good man with the text. Calvin had already given public lectures on Romans during his first sojourn in Geneva, and he incorporated some of this material into his Romans commentary of 1539.

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 365.

Calvin outlines his approach to biblical commentary writing in the dedicatory letter he addressed to Simon Grynaeus, a leading New Testament scholar with whom Calvin had friendly conversations about the best way to interpret the Scriptures. Calvin and Grynaeus agreed that lucid brevity (*perspicua brevitatis*) should be the goal of every biblical interpreter. Calvin models both of these virtues—clarity and economy of thought—in his work on Romans. Like all good humanist scholars, Calvin sought to recover and restate in an intelligible manner “the mind of the author.” Originality is not the goal of biblical scholarship, rather it is fidelity to the text, its context, and the divine intention behind the inspired words of Scripture. Bruce Gordon, who has written a fine biography of Calvin, makes another point worth considering, that of Calvin’s embrace of the tradition. “The model set up by Calvin in his dedication of a conversation between the reformers extended to his treatment of church fathers, who were central to his attempt to understand Paul’s writings.”² Calvin was well aware of contemporary exegetes, but he widened the circle of discussion to include the church fathers, theologians, and scholars of both the medieval and patristic ages. Augustine was Calvin’s favorite church father, and he quoted the Doctor of Grace more than any other source apart from the Bible itself. However, he was drawn more and more to the exegetical works of John Chrysostom. But Calvin could be quite critical of both Augustine and Chrysostom, neither of whom could be followed as a precise model.

What is at the heart of Calvin’s theology? Scholars have suggested various answers to this question: the sovereignty of God, union with Christ, sanctification, and the church as the body of Christ. However, Calvin was not a systematic theologian, and it is best not to impose any particular grid over his thought. In the Romans commentary, Calvin imposes no overarching pattern on the apostle but follows closely where Paul’s argument took him, again seeking the mind of the author. Many of the central themes of Romans come together in chapter eight, which Calvin clearly loved and quoted more often in the *Institutes* than he did any other chapter in Romans. Through justification by faith and the impartation of the Holy Spirit, Christ has delivered us from the curse of the law: no longer are we

² Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale, 2011), 106–7.

condemned. Writing to a scattered flock facing distress, persecution, and death, Calvin proclaimed the doctrine of final perseverance. Calvin comments on Paul's statement that "we are more than conquerors":

We always escape the struggling, and swim out of the waters of affliction and persecution in which we were plunged . . . It sometimes indeed happens that believers seem to have been overcome by their afflictions, and to lie as if nearly worn out and destroyed, so great is the trial, or rather humiliation with which they are afflicted by the Lord. But an issue is always so granted them in this case that they come off conquerors. To make believers recognize the source of this invincible courage, he again repeats what he had formerly mentioned; for he not only teaches that God, because we are loved by him, places his hand underneath us for the purpose of affording support and protection in our most grievous distresses, but confirms the opinion that he has already stated concerning the love of Christ.

Romans 9–11 is the *locus classicus* of Paul's doctrine of divine election. It is significant, however, that Paul does not dive into the depths of predestination at the very beginning of his letter. Calvin follows the course of Paul's argument in Romans, beginning with the doctrine of creation, the law and human sinfulness, justification by faith, the giving of the Holy Spirit and the bestowal of faith. Only at this point in the order of salvation does he enter into a discussion of the mystery of election. The purpose is twofold: to give God all glory and to inculcate gratitude in those who have been saved by grace. Calvin recognized that predestination could be a "labyrinth" and that vain curiosity should be eschewed at all costs. Commenting on Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!" (CSB), Calvin says

The apostle here, for the first time, breaks forth into language which arises spontaneously in the 'feelings of believers', from a pious consideration of the works of an infinite Creator. Paul restrains, in passing, the audacity of impiety, which is accustomed to rail against the judgments of God. When, therefore, we hear *the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and goodness of God*, we cannot express how much power this admiration ought to have in repressing the

rashness of the fleshly mind. For Paul, after having disputed from the word and Spirit of the Most High, overcome, at last, by the sublimity of so great a secret, can do nothing else than exclaim in astonishment, that the riches of the wisdom of God are too great for our reason to fathom their depths. Should we, therefore, at any time, enter upon a discourse concerning the eternal counsels of a merciful Father, we ought always to restrain and curb both our genius and language, speaking with sobriety, and within the limits prescribed by the word of God, and our disputation should at last end in wonder and astonishment. For we ought not to feel ashamed, if our wisdom does not surpass his, who, being carried into the third heavens, saw mysteries that man could not utter; nor could he find any other conclusion for so elevated a subject, than this humiliation of his own powers.

The first edition of Calvin's commentary on the epistle to the Romans was published at Strasbourg in 1540. A French translation appeared ten years later published at Geneva in 1550. The first English translation was done by Christopher Rosdell and published in London in 1577. Since then, a number of English translations have appeared of variable quality. This edition reproduces the translation of Francis Sibson, a scholar at Trinity College, Dublin, which was first published in London, in 1834, the first American imprint two years later at Philadelphia in 1836. The occasional notes dispersed throughout the commentary are those of Sibson. We have also retained the pattern of capitalization from the original translation.

Chapter I.

¹ PAUL, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, ²(Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) ³ Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: ⁵ By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name; ⁶ Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: ⁷ To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul—I should be disposed entirely to omit mentioning the name of Paul, because the importance of the subject does not require us to dwell long upon it, and nothing can be added which has not been repeatedly stated by other interpreters. Since, however, I can easily satisfy one class of my readers without much fatiguing the rest, this question shall be discussed in a few words. Luke himself (Acts 13:7–9) confutes the opinion of those, who suppose the Apostle to have assumed this name as a trophy of the subjugation of the Proconsul Sergius to Christ, for he proves that name to have been given our apostle before that period. Nor do I think it probable he was thus named on his embracing Christianity. I think this conjecture was approved

by Augustine merely on account of its affording him an opportunity to pursue a train of shrewd philosophical remarks, in his discourse to show that the proud Saul had become a little disciple of Christ. There is greater probability in the opinion of Origen, who considers him to have had two names. For it is not inconsistent with the appearance of truth to suppose that the family name of Saul had been given him by his parents to mark his religion and kindred, and the surname Paul had been also added as a proof of his right to be a Roman citizen; because, indeed, they did neither wish this honour, which was highly esteemed at that time, to be concealed in their son, nor did they set so high a value upon it as to cancel the mark of his descent from Israel. Perhaps, too, he therefore used the name of Paul more frequently in his Epistles, because it was more distinguished and common among the churches to which he wrote, more highly valued in the Roman empire, and less known by his relations. For it was his duty not to neglect the avoiding of all unnecessary suspicion, dislike, and hatred, which were then attached to the Jewish name, both at Rome, and in the Provinces and to abstain from everything, by which the rage of his countrymen could be inflamed, or his own personal safety endangered.

Servant of Jesus—He distinguished himself by these titles, for the purpose of securing authority to his doctrine. He effects this in two ways: by asserting, in the first place, his call to the office of an apostle, and, in the next, by informing them that it was connected with the Church at Rome. For it was of great importance not only that he should be considered to be an apostle by a call from God, but should be known also to be destined for the Church of Rome. He therefore says he is a servant of Christ, called to the office of an apostle, for the purpose of intimating that he had not rushed into such a situation in a rash manner. He immediately after states that he was separated, as a means of giving stronger confirmation to the fact of his not being one of the people, but a distinguished apostle of the Lord. In this sense he had descended from a general term to a species, since an apostleship is a particular kind of ministry. For everyone, who sustains the office of teaching, is ranked among Christ's servants; but apostles are much superior to all others in their degree of honour. But the separation, which he afterwards mentions, expresses both the end and use of his apostleship, for he was desirous briefly to point out the design with which he had been called to that function. The title, therefore, of the servant of Christ, which he applies to himself, was

enjoyed by him in common with all other teachers, but, by claiming that of an apostle, he prefers himself to others; since, however, a person who of his own accord thrusts himself into an office is entitled to no authority, he admonishes us that he is appointed of God. The following, therefore, is the sense of the passage: "I, Paul, am not any ordinary minister of Christ, but an apostle, constituted such by the calling of God, not by any rash effort of my own." Then follows a more clear explanation of his apostolic office, by which he was appointed to preach the gospel; for I do not agree with those who refer the calling mentioned by the apostle to the eternal election of God, understanding by it either his separation from his mother's womb, stated by himself in Galatians (1:15), or his destination to preach to the Gentiles, related by Luke. For he simply glories in his having God as the author of his office, that no one may think he assumes this honour to himself of his own private rashness and presumption. It must here be observed, that all are not fit for the ministry of the word, which requires a special calling; nay, it is the duty of those who consider themselves as possessing the best qualifications, to take care lest they hurry into it without a call. We shall consider, in another place, what the calling of apostles and bishops mean, observing, particularly, that preaching the gospel is the office of an apostle. This evidently shows the folly of those "dumb dogs" who are distinguished for nothing else but a mitre, a crozier, and such-like mummeries, while they yet boast of themselves as the successors of the apostles. The name of servant signifies nothing more than a minister, for it relates to an office.

I mention this to remove the vain fancy of such as, without any reason, indulge in philosophical observations upon the word "servant," while they imagine the bondage of Moses to be opposed to that of Christ.

Which he had before promised—Paul establishes the faith of the gospel by its antiquity, because the force of a doctrine is much diminished by novelty, as if he had said that Christ had not dropped down suddenly upon the earth, or introduced a new kind of doctrine never heard of before, since he himself, together with his gospel, had been promised, and always expected from the beginning of the world. In the next place, because antiquity is often fabulous, he adds, "Witnesses, and those likewise of a classical character, namely, the prophets of God, with a view to remove all suspicion." In addition to this, he states, in the third place, that their testimony is supported by proper signature, even by the holy Scriptures. We may hence infer what the

gospel is, since we are taught that it was not preached or promulgated, but only “promised” by the prophets. If the prophets, therefore, promised the gospel, the consequence is, that it was exhibited when the Lord was finally manifested in the flesh. All who confound the promises with the gospel are evidently deceived, since the gospel is properly the solemn preaching of the manifestation of Christ, in whom the promises themselves are exhibited.

Concerning his Son—A remarkable passage, which teaches us the whole gospel is contained in Christ, so that everyone, who removes a single foot from Christ, withdraws himself from the gospel. For since he is the living and express image of the Father, we need not be astonished that he alone is proposed to us as the object to whom all our faith is directed, and in whom it consists. This, therefore, is a certain description of the gospel, by which Paul intimates what it summarily comprehends. I have translated the following words, “Jesus Christ,” in the same case with his Son, because I consider it to agree better with the context. We must hence, draw the following conclusion, that every person, who makes a proper advancement in the knowledge of Christ, acquires an acquaintance with the whole scope of the gospel, while, on the contrary, all such as desire to obtain wisdom out of Christ, act the part not only of fools, but of madmen.

Who was made—It is our duty to seek for two things in Christ, if we are desirous to find salvation in him, divinity and humanity. The divinity contains power, righteousness, and life in itself, which are communicated to us by the humanity; wherefore the apostle hath expressly mentioned both in the sum of the gospel, because Christ has been exhibited in the flesh, and declared himself to be the Son of God in it, as John also (John 1:14,) after he had said that the word was made flesh, adds, “he was the glory as of the only begotten Son of God” in the flesh itself. The special notice which he takes of the family and origin of Christ, from his ancestor David, is not without its use; for this particular sentence directs our attention to the promise, and removes all doubt of his being the very person who was formerly promised. The promise made to David had acquired so great celebrity as to leave no doubt of its being a commonly received opinion among the Jews that the Messiah was called the Son of David. The position, therefore, that Christ was descended from David, contributes to the certainty of our faith. He adds, *according to the flesh*, for the purpose of convincing us

that he possessed something superior to the flesh, which he had brought down from heaven, and had not received from David, namely, the glory of the Deity, which is afterwards mentioned. Moreover, by these expressions, Paul not only declares the true essence of flesh in Christ, but manifestly distinguishes between his divine and human nature, thus refuting the impious dotage of Servetus, who imagined Christ's flesh was compounded of three uncreated elements.

Declared the Son of God—Or determined, if such a translation meets your approbation; as if he had said, “The virtue of the resurrection resembles the decree by which he was pronounced the Son of God,” as in Psalm 2:7, “This day have I begotten you,” for that begetting is referred to knowledge. Although some make this passage to comprehend three separate proofs of the divinity of Christ, understanding, first, by virtue, miracles; secondly, the testimony of the Spirit; and, lastly, the resurrection of the dead, I prefer joining them together, and refer all these three to one, in the following manner: Christ was determined to be the Son of God, by openly exerting his truly heavenly power, which was also that of the Spirit, when he rose from the dead. This power is understood when it is sealed to the hearts of believers by the same Spirit. The expression of the apostle supports this interpretation, for he says Christ had been declared by power, because, indeed, the power peculiar to God had shown forth in him, and afforded an undoubted proof of his divinity. This also displays itself in his resurrection, as in another passage, (2 Cor 13:4) the same Paul, while he confesses that the weakness of the flesh had appeared in Christ's death, commends the power of the Spirit in the resurrection. This glory, however, is not made known to us, until the same Spirit seals it to our hearts. We can have no doubt that Paul includes also the evidence experienced by individuals in their own hearts, with the admirable power of the Spirit which Christ manifested by rising from the dead; because he expressly mentions sanctification, as if the apostle had said, the Spirit, by sanctifying individual believers, ratifies and confirms that proof of its power which it once displayed. For the Scripture often applies epithets to the Spirit of God, adapted to the present subject. Thus he is denominated by our Lord (John 14:7) “the Spirit of truth,” from the effect stated in that passage. Moreover, divine power is, therefore, said to have shone forth in the resurrection of Christ; because he rose, as he has frequently testified, by his own power: “destroy this temple, and in three

days I will raise it up” (John 2:9); “no one taketh away my life from me” (John 10:18). For he obtained a victory over death, to which he had yielded according to the weakness of his flesh, not by any precarious assistance, but by the heavenly operation of his own Spirit.

By whom we have received—After finishing his description of the gospel, which he inserted as recommendatory of his office, he now returns to assert his calling, to which he observed a strong testimony had been afforded the Romans. Grace and apostleship are separated by the figure *hypallage*, and mean either apostleship freely bestowed, or the grace of the apostleship—he thus intimates that his appointment to such a rank had been wholly the work of divine beneficence, not of his own dignity. For though in the presence of the world, his office is accompanied with almost nothing but dangers, labours, hatred, and infamy; yet, with God and his saints, it is considered one of no vulgar and ordinary dignity; and, therefore, justly esteemed to be of grace. The following interpretation, if the reader prefers it, conveys the same sense: “I have received grace to be an apostle.” The expression, in the name, is explained by Ambrose, of his appointment to preach the gospel instead of Christ, according to the following passage: “We are ambassadors for Christ.” (2 Cor 5:20) The opinion of those, however, who consider name to mean knowledge, appears to be more sound, because the gospel is preached for this very purpose, (1 John 3:23) that we may “believe in the Son of God.” And Paul himself is called an elect vessel, to carry the name of Christ among the Gentiles. (Acts 9:15). The expression, therefore, for the name conveys the same sense as if Paul had said, “that I may manifest the character of Christ.”

To the obedience of faith—That is, we have received the commandment to carry the gospel to all the Gentiles, with a view to their obeying it by faith. He, in turn, admonishes the Romans of their duty from the design of his calling, as if he had said, “My part indeed is to perform the office entrusted to me, namely, the preaching of the word; it is yours to listen to the word with all obedience, unless you wish to make the calling which I have received from the Lord to be of none effect.” Whence we infer, that the command of God is obstinately resisted, and his whole order perverted, by those who reject, in an irreverent and contemptuous manner, the preaching

of the gospel, for its very design is to compel us to obey God. The nature of faith deserves our notice on this occasion, which is, therefore, distinguished by the name of obedience, because the Lord calls us by the gospel, and we answer him by faith, when he calls us; as, on the contrary, unbelief is the source of all our stubbornness against God. I prefer the translation “into the obedience of faith,” rather than for obedience, since the last interpretation can only be applied improperly and figuratively, although it is once used, (Acts 6:7); for faith is, properly, that by which the gospel is obeyed.

Among all nations; among whom, &c.—It was not sufficient for him to receive the appointment of an apostle, unless his ministry had respect to the disciples; and on this account he adds, that his apostleship extends to all nations. Afterwards he more plainly calls himself an apostle of the Romans, when he says, that they also were comprehended in the number of the nations, to whom a minister was given. Moreover, the apostles receive a common command concerning the preaching of the gospel through the whole world, for they are not appointed as shepherds and bishops over certain churches. But Paul, beside the general province of the apostolic function, was appointed, by special authority, a minister for preaching the gospel among the nations. The circumstance of his being prevented to pass by Macedonia, and to speak the word in Asia, (Acts 16:6) is not opposed to this statement, as if limits were thus fixed to the extent of his boundaries, because it was necessary for him to go at that time to another place, and the harvest there was not yet fully ripe.

The called of Jesus Christ—He assigns a reason, which applies more immediately to themselves, because, indeed, the Lord had now afforded in them a proof, by which he declared that they were called to the communication of the gospel. Whence it followed, if they were desirous of the continuance of their own calling, that they ought not to reject the ministry of Paul, who had been appointed by the same election of the Lord. The sentence, “called of Jesus Christ,” I therefore consider to be declaratory, as if the word *namely* had intervened, and it means they are partakers of Jesus Christ by his calling. For they are not only chosen in Christ by their heavenly Father among his sons, who are to be the heirs of an everlasting life, but, after their election, are committed also to his care and faithful protection as their shepherd.

To all that are at Rome—He shows, in a beautiful order, what deserves to be praised in us. First, that the Lord, in his kindness, has taken us into his favour and love; secondly, has called us; thirdly, has called us to holiness, which praise is finally enjoyed by us, if we do not neglect our calling. A very faithful doctrine is here suggested for our consideration, and I leave it, after making this short allusion, to the meditation of each of my readers. Certainly the praise of our salvation does not, according to Paul, depend upon our own power, but is derived entirely from the fountain of God’s gratuitous and paternal love towards us; for Paul makes this to be the beginning of God’s love to us what other cause but his own mere goodness can moreover be assigned for his love? On this also depends his calling, by which, in his own time, he seals the adoption in those who were first gratuitously chosen by him. From these premises the conclusion follows, that none truly associate themselves with the faithful who do not place a certain confidence in the Lord’s kindness to them, although undeserving and wretched sinners; and being roused by his goodness, they aspire to holiness, “For he hath not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness” (1 Thess 4:6). Since the Greek admits of being translated in the second person, I see no cause for changing it.

Grace and peace—There is nothing, in the first place, deserves more to be desired by us than to have God propitious, which is the meaning of grace. In the second place, the prosperity and success of all our affairs proceed and flow from him, which is the sense of the word “peace;” for, though every thing may appear to smile upon us, if God is angry, our very blessing is changed into a curse. The only foundation, therefore, of our happiness is the kindness of God, which is the source of our enjoying true and solid prosperity, while our very adversity itself promotes our salvation. We understand, also, by our supplicating peace from the Lord, that every blessing we enjoy is the fruit of divine beneficence. Nor ought we to omit mentioning, that he at the same time prays for the attainment of those blessings from the Lord Jesus. For our Lord deserves to be treated with this honour, who is not only the servant and dispenser of our Father’s kindness to us, but works all things in common with him. The proper meaning, however, of the apostle is, that all the blessings of God come to us by Christ. Some consider we ought rather to understand by the word “peace,” tranquillity of conscience; and, I grant, it sometimes admits this construction; but since the apostle was undoubtedly desirous to allude here to the sum of all blessings, the first

interpretation, proposed by Bucer, suits the passage much better. The apostle, therefore, feeling a desire to pray that the sum of all happiness should be conferred on the pious, has immediate recourse, as on a former occasion, to the fountain itself, namely, the grace of God, which not only is the source of our eternal happiness, but the cause of all blessings in this life.

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; ¹⁰ Making request (if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God) to come unto you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; ¹² That is, that I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me.

First, I thank—Here he commences in a manner very suitable to the cause, since, from reasons derived both from his own character and that of the Romans, he seasonably prepares them to submit to his instructions. When the apostle mentions the renown of their faith, an argument is drawn from their own character, for he intimates that they were obligated, by the public commendation of the churches, not to reject the apostle of the Lord, unless they wished to disappoint the opinion which all men entertained of them. Such conduct is considered to be inconsistent with good manners, and in some measure to resemble a breach of faith. As this testimony, therefore, ought with very good reason to induce the apostle, who had conceived a confident opinion of their obedience, to undertake, according to his office, to teach and instruct the Romans, so they were obligated in turn not to despise his authority. He disposes them, from a consideration of his own character, to submit to his instructions by testifying his sincere love to them. And nothing has a more powerful effect to secure confidence in a counsellor, than the opinion of his studying and contriving for our interest from sincere affection. In the first place, it is worthy of remark, that he so praises their faith as to refer it to God, by which we are taught faith to be the gift of God. For if thanksgiving is the acknowledgment of a kindness, whoever thanks God for faith confesses it to be his gift. And

when we find the apostle always commences his rejoicings with thanksgiving, we may learn this instruction from it, that all our blessings are kindnesses from God. We ought also to habituate ourselves to such forms of expression, as may rouse us with greater eagerness to acknowledge God to be the giver of all blessings, and to excite others at the same time to a similar train of thoughts. If it is right to observe this in blessings of small importance, we ought to do it much more with respect to faith, which is neither an ordinary nor a common gift of God. Besides, we have here an example how thanks ought to be given through Christ, according to the precept of the apostle, (Heb 13:15), showing how we both seek and obtain mercy from the Father in his name. Finally, he mentions his own God, which is a special privilege of the faithful, on whom alone God confers this honour. For there is a mutual relation expressed in the promise, “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Jer. 30:22). Though I prefer restricting it to the character which Paul supported, as an approval of the obedience paid by him to the Lord in the preaching of the gospel. Thus Hezekiah calls God the God of Isaiah, when he wishes to give him the character of a true and faithful prophet (Isa 37:4). He is called, by way of excellence, the God of Daniel, because he vindicated the purity of the worship of the Most High. (Dan 6:19).

By the whole world—The commendation of good men was regarded by Paul as that of the whole world, in estimating the faith of the Romans. For unbelievers, who rather execrated this faith, could not give a sincere or probable testimony concerning it. We must, therefore, understand that the faith of the Romans was proclaimed in the whole world, by the voice of all believers who could form a proper opinion and give a just decision on this point. It was of no importance to find this small and ignoble band of men wholly unknown to the wicked at Rome, since their judgment had not the smallest weight with Paul.

For God is my witness—He shows his love from its effects, for had he not been warmly attached to them, he would not have commended, with so much earnestness, their salvation to the Lord, nor would he have especially desired to promote the same with so much ardour by his own exertion. The solicitude and the desire of the apostle are undoubted proofs of his attachment, for they can never exist unless they arise from love. But since he knew

it to be of importance to convince the Romans of his sincerity, if he wished to establish their confidence in his preaching, he confirms it by an oath, a necessary method for giving certainty to our discourse, when we consider it worth our while to confirm and settle upon a sure foundation whatever is liable to doubt. For if an oath is merely an appeal to God for confirming our discourse, every one must grant the wisdom of the apostle's oath, which he took without infringing the precept of Christ. Hence it is evident that the design of Christ was not as the too superstitious Anabaptists dream, entirely to abolish oaths, but rather to restore the true observance of the law. For the law, while it allows an oath, condemns only perjury, and unnecessary swearing. If, therefore, we wish to swear properly, we should imitate the gravity and devotion which appear in the apostles in taking oaths. To understand this form of an oath fully, we must consider, that while we appeal to God as a witness, he is summoned also, as a punisher of our sin, if we swear deceitfully, which Paul, on another occasion, expresses in the following words, "I call God for a record upon my soul" (2 Cor 1:23).

Whom I serve with my spirit—Far as profane men, who make a mockery of God, are accustomed to appeal to his name as a mere pretext, with equal assurance and rashness, Paul commends his piety in this place with a view to secure for himself the confidence of the Romans. For such persons, as are under the influence of a lively fear and reverential awe of God, will tremble to take a false oath, Paul also opposes his spirit to a mere external mask; for as many falsely pretend to be worshippers of God, who are such only in appearance, he bears witness that he worships from the heart. Perhaps, also, he had regard to the ancient ceremonies by which alone the Jews appreciated the worship of God. He means, therefore, that although not exercised in ceremonial observances, he is nevertheless a sincere worshipper of God, as in Phil 3:3, "We are the true circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh." He boasts, therefore, of his worshipping God with sincere piety of the heart, which is true religion and right worship. It was also of importance, as we have already mentioned, with a view to confirm the certainty of his oath, that Paul should testify his piety towards God. For impious persons make a mock at perjury, which pious characters dread more awfully than a thousand deaths. For wherever there is a serious fear of God, the same reverence of his name must exist. It amounts to the same thing as if Paul had said, that he was well acquainted

with the sanctity and religion required in taking an oath, while he did not, after the example of profane persons, call God to witness in a rash manner. And his conduct teaches us to entertain such a deep sense of piety, whenever we take an oath, that the name of Christ, which we express with our lips, may have its own power on our hearts. He then proves from a sign, namely, his ministry, in what manner his worship of God does not arise from mere pretence. For by his ministry he exhibits the most full proof that he was devoted to the glory of God, who denied himself, and did not hesitate to undergo all the difficulties of ignominy, of poverty, of death, and hatred, for exalting the kingdom of God. Some explain the sentence, as if Paul wished to recommend the worship with which he honoured God, because it is agreeable to the command of the gospel, where a spiritual worship is certainly prescribed. But the former interpretation, namely, his obedience to God manifested by his preaching the word, corresponds much better with the context. He, however, distinguishes himself in the mean time from hypocrites, who are influenced by another motive than the worshipping of God, since most of them are impelled by ambition, or something of a similar nature, and there is no cause to consider them all as discharging their ministerial duty from the heart, and with fidelity. The sum is, that Paul devotes himself with sincerity to the duty of teaching, because the circumstance of his piety, which he has mentioned, makes it correspond with the present subject. Hence we deduce a useful doctrine, calculated to supply the ministers of the truth with no small courage, when informed that by preaching the gospel they perform a worship grateful and precious to God himself. For what should prevent them from preaching, when they know their labours to be so pleasing to God and approved by him, as to be considered a distinguished part of worship? He also denominates it the gospel of the Son of God, by which Christ becomes eminent, being pointed out in this instance by the Father, that while the Son is glorified, he in turn glorifies the Father.

How unceasingly—He continues to manifest the increasing force of his love by the constancy of his prayer. For it was a striking instance of his affection to find the apostle make mention of the Romans in all the prayers he poured forth to the Lord. The sense of the passage becomes clearer if the adverb always is understood to mean *in all my prayers, as often as I address God in my supplications, I add also the mention of you Romans*. He speaks not of any

invocation of God, but of prayers, to which the saints voluntarily devote themselves, having laid aside all other cares. For the apostle might often have a sudden ejaculation, without remembering the Romans; but whenever with an express intention, and deep meditation, he prayed to God, his attention was directed to the Romans among others. He, therefore, particularly speaks of prayers, to which saints devote themselves with determined purpose, as we see the Lord himself seeking a place of retirement for such an object. The frequency, or rather the continuance of his habit of praying, is intimated by his saying, that he devoted himself to prayer without ceasing.

Making request, if by any means—Because it is not probable we shall, from our heart, study to promote the welfare of that person whom we are not prepared to assist by our labour, he now adds, that he is ready to testify, in the presence of God, his love by another argument, namely, by requesting to be of use to them. The full sense of the passage will appear by supplying *also*, and reading as follows: “Making also request, if by any means I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God;” and he thus declared, that he not only expects prosperity in his journey by the grace of God, but he makes the success of his journey to depend on the encouragement and approbation of the Lord. All our wishes ought to be ordered according to this rule.

For I long to see you—He could, although absent, confirm their faith by his doctrine; but a plan is always best formed when people are present; he was, therefore, desirous to see them. He explains, also, his design in undertaking the trouble of such a journey to have been, not his own, but their advantage. By spiritual gifts, he means the powers he possessed either of teaching, or of exhortation, or of prophecy, which he knew he had acquired from the grace of God. He has well marked the lawful use of these gifts by the word *impart*; for different gifts are, therefore, peculiarly conferred upon each, that all may kindly contribute to mutual welfare, and convey to one another the powers which each individually possesses (Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 12:11).

To the end you may be established—He modifies his remarks on communication, lest he should appear to consider them as not yet properly initiated into Christ, and as characters who had not yet learned the first elements of the gospel. He says, therefore, that he was chiefly desirous to afford them his assistance on that point, where such as have made the greatest progress still

require aid; for we all want to be strengthened, until we have attained the “measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). And not satisfied with this proof of his modesty, he corrects his remark by showing that he does not usurp the office of teacher without a desire to receive mutual instruction from them; as if he had said, I am desirous to confirm you according to the measure of grace conferred upon myself, that I may receive from your example a new accession to the alacrity of my faith, by which we may mutually profit each other. See how great moderation appears to reside in his pious breast, since he does not refuse to seek confirmation from ignorant learners. Nor does he state this merely in a dissembling manner, for there is none, however weak, in the church of Christ, who cannot be of some use for our advance in grace, but malignity and pride prevent us from deriving such fruit by mutual and reciprocal instructions. Such is the nature of our pride, such the inebriating effect of our foolish boasting, that each of us, while he despises and bids adieu to others, considers he has a sufficient abundance in himself. I translate the Greek word, with Bucer, *exhortation*, rather than *consolation*, since it agrees better with the context.

¹³ Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise. ¹⁵ So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

Note I would not have you ignorant—He now confirms the testimony he had given of his constant supplication to God to allow him on some occasion to visit them, since it might have appeared a vain profession if he had neglected to embrace the opportunities which presented themselves. For he says the power was wanting, not the endeavour, having frequently been prevented from his intended purpose of visiting the churches at Rome. We hence learn that the Lord frequently overthrows the plans of his saints with a view to humble them, and, by such a state of humiliation, to keep their minds constantly exercised in looking to his providence, on which they are thus taught to depend, although their plans, in a proper sense, are not frustrated, because they enter into no deliberations without the will of God.