

# ROMANS

## Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary

General Editors

T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner,  
Andreas J. Köstenberger

Assistant Editors

James M. Hamilton, Kenneth A. Mathews,  
Terry L. Wilder

## David G. Peterson





*Romans*

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Lexham Press, 1313 Commercial St., Bellingham, WA 98225

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ISBN 9781683594277

Library of Congress Control Number 2020941696

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

## General

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
BDAG	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , ed. Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000)
BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , ed. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907)
BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , ed. F. Blass and A. Debrunner (trans. R. W. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961)
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium

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<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
CSB	Christian Standard Bible (2016)
<i>DPL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> , ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993)
ed(s).	editor(s)
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 3 vols., ed. Horst R. Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–93)
ESV	English Standard Version (2001)
ET	English Translation
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
ETS	Erfurter theologische Studien
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>FilN</i>	<i>Filología neotestamentaria</i>
GNT	Greek New Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>

*List of Abbreviations*

<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KJV	King James Version (1611)
lit.	literally
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSJM	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , ed. G. G. Liddell and R. Scott, rev. H. S Jones and R. McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968)
LTPM	Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs
LXX	Septuagint (Greek) Text of the OT
ms(s)	manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic (Hebrew) Text of the OT
NAB	New American Bible (2002)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible (1970)
<i>New Docs</i>	<i>New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity</i> , ed. G. H. R. Horsley and S. Llewelyn (North Ryde, NSW: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1976–)
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , 4 vols., ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–78)
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997)
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version (2011)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to <i>Novum Testamentum</i>



## ROMANS

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha (1995)
ns	new series
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTG	New Testament Guides
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
par.	and parallels
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
repr.	reprint
rev.	revised
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SBLDS	Society for Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society for Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SD	Studies and Documents
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTSU	Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt
SP	Sacra Pagina
Str-B	<i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i> , 6 vols., ed. H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck (Munich: Beck, 1922–61)
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 10 vols., ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TR	Textus Receptus (Received Text)
trans.	translator(s)
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>

*List of Abbreviations*

<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UBS	United Bible Societies
<i>VE</i>	<i>Vox Evangelica</i>
vol(s).	volume(s)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

Early Jewish and Christian Sources

'Abot. R. Nat.	'Abot of Rabbi Nathan
Apoc. Ab.	Apocalypse of Abraham
Apoc. Mos.	Apocalypse of Moses
b. Sanh.	Sanhedrin (Babylonian Talmud)
Bar	Baruch
2 Bar.	2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)
3 Bar.	3 Baruch (Greek Apocalypse)
CD	Damascus document
Did.	Didache
1 En.	1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)
2 En.	2 Enoch (Slavonic Apocalypse)
1–2 Esd	1–2 Esdras
Exod. Rab.	Exodus Rabbah
4 Ezra	4 Ezra (= 2 Esdras 3–14)
Gen. Rab.	Genesis Rabbah
Herm. Sim.	Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes
Herm. Vis.	Shepherd of Hermas, Vision
Ign.	Ignatius
<i>Eph.</i>	<i>To the Ephesians</i>
<i>Magn.</i>	<i>To the Magnesians</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>To Polycarp</i>
Jdt	Judith

## ROMANS

Josephus	
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>War</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>
Jos. Asen.	Joseph and Aseneth
Jub.	Jubilees
Let. Aris.	Letter of Aristeas
1–4 Macc	1–4 Maccabees
m. Sanh.	Mishnah Sanhedrin
Midr. Cant.	Midrash Canticles (Song of Songs)
Mart. Pol.	Martyrdom of Polycarp
Odes Sol.	Odes of Solomon
Philo	
<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo (On the Life of Abraham)</i>
<i>Cher.</i>	<i>De cherubim (On Cherubim)</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit (Who is the Heir?)</i>
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami (On Abraham's Migration)</i>
<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De vita Mosis (On the Life of Moses)</i>
<i>Mut.</i>	<i>De mutatione nominum (On the Change of Names)</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De posteritate Caini (On the Posterity of Cain)</i>
<i>Praem.</i>	<i>De praemiis et poenis (On Rewards and Punishments)</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De Specialibus legibus (On Special Laws)</i>
<i>Virt.</i>	<i>De virtutibus (On Virtues)</i>
Pss. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
Qumran documents	
1QH	Hodayot (Thanksgiving Hymns)
1QpHab	Pesher Habakkuk
1QM	Milhamah (War scroll)
1 QS	Serek Hayahad (Rule of the Community)
1 QSb	Appendix b to the Rule of the Community
4QFlor	Florilegium
4QMMT	Halakhic letter
11QMelch	Melchizedek scroll
4QPat	Patriarchal blessings

*List of Abbreviations*

4QpIsa	Isaiah pesher
4QpPs <sup>a</sup>	Psalm pesher
Pesiqt. Rab.	Pesiqta Rabbati
Sib. Or.	Sibylline Oracles
Sir	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
T. Ash.	Testament of Asher
T. Benj.	Testament of Benjamin
T. Job	Testament of Job
T. Jos.	Testament of Joseph
T. Jud.	Testament of Judah
T. Levi.	Testament of Levi
T. Naph.	Testament of Naphtali
T. Reu.	Testament of Reuben
T. Sim.	Testament of Simeon
Tg. Neof.	Targum Neofiti
Tob	Tobit
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

**Greco-Roman Sources**

Diatr.	Epictetus, <i>Diatribai (Dissertationes)</i>
Did. Sic., <i>Hist.</i>	Diodorus Siculus, <i>Bibliotheca historica</i>
Hor., <i>Sat.</i>	Horace, <i>Satires</i>
Plato, <i>Apol.</i>	Plato, <i>Apology</i>
Plut., <i>Cohib. ira</i>	Plutarch, <i>De cohibenda ira</i>
Quint., <i>Inst.</i>	Quintilian, <i>Institio oratoria</i>
Tacitus, <i>Ann.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Annales</i>



## INTRODUCTION

**P**aul wrote Romans toward the end of his extensive ministry in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, from Jerusalem and Syria to the province of Illyricum (cf. 15:19). Most likely, he composed the letter during his three-month winter stay in Corinth (cf. 16:1, 21–23; Acts 20:1–3 [“Greece”]; 1 Cor 16:6) before returning to Jerusalem. From there he hoped to visit Rome to begin a new sphere of ministry in the western part of the Empire, journeying as far as Spain (Rom 15:25–28). Various dates have been proposed, but all of them fall within the range AD 55–59, with the majority of scholars arguing for the winter of 57–58.<sup>1</sup> There is much agreement with regard to these introductory matters but considerable disagreement about the character, structure, and purpose of Romans.

### I. Character

Romans is sometimes treated as a compendium of Pauline theology or as a theological treatise on a particular theme or selection of topics. However, although it is the longest and theologically most dense Pauline writing we have, it begins and ends as a letter addressed to first-century Christians in the capital of the Roman Empire (1:1–15; 15:14–16:27).

Some scholars have argued that all or part of chapters 15 and 16 were later additions to Paul’s work. Most obviously, the doxology

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 43–50. Robert Jewett (*Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 18–22) argues for 56–57 as the date of composition and 60 as the year of Paul’s arrival in Rome.

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found at 16:25–27 in some of the best and earliest witnesses is either missing or placed after 14:23 or 15:33. Textual and literary issues combine to raise serious questions about the transmission history of these concluding chapters.<sup>2</sup> However, Gamble has convincingly argued that the sixteen-chapter version was original and that the final chapter exhibits the epistolary features and conventions of a typical Pauline letter. Gamble accounts for the existence of shorter forms of Romans in some manuscripts as evidence of later attempts “to convert the letter from a specific communication to a particular community into a document suitable for a wider and general audience.”<sup>3</sup>

Many believers in Rome are mentioned by name in 16:3–15, even though the apostle had not yet visited that city. Most were known to him from previous ministry contexts. Some could have sent him details about theological and pastoral issues that needed to be addressed in the Roman situation. Whatever the source of his local knowledge, it is important to identify the aspects of Paul’s argument that may have been specifically included in the letter for the benefit of the original recipients.

### A. The Epistolary Framework

In his opening salutation (1:1–7), the apostle does not address the recipients as “the church of God at Rome” (cf. 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1) or as “the churches of Rome” (cf. Gal 1:2) but as those “who are also called by Jesus Christ” and as those who are “in Rome, loved by God, called as saints” (1:6–7; cf. Phil 1:1; Col 1:2).<sup>4</sup> Right from the start, he is concerned to portray them as part of the wider movement among the nations that God

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<sup>2</sup> The different text forms are conveniently listed and discussed by Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 1996), 6–9. Jewett (*Romans*, 4–18) takes a more radical approach, concluding that Paul’s original letter consisted of 1:1–16:16 + 16:21–23 + 16:24. Text-critical issues are considered in my commentary at appropriate points in the exegesis.

<sup>3</sup> Harry Y. Gamble Jr., *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans: A Study in Textual and Literary Criticism*, SD 42 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 115–16. Longenecker (*Introducing Romans*, 28–30) endorses Gamble’s study and particularly notes how it explains the absence of references to Rome in 1:7, 15 in some later manuscripts.

<sup>4</sup> We only read of a church in the home of Prisca and Aquila (16:5a) and of churches in places outside of Rome (16:1, 4, 16, 23). Other household gatherings in Rome are not called churches (vv. 10b, 11b, 15d) but may have functioned as such. See §2.5.

is establishing through the preaching of the gospel about his Son. Paul's own calling to be an apostle is clearly linked to the progress of this gospel, as he works "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles" (1:5).

Three critical issues are raised in this greeting and then developed in the body of the letter: the centrality of the gospel to what God is doing in the world, Jesus Christ and what God has accomplished through him as the focus of the gospel, and Paul's God-given role in the exposition and propagation of this gospel.

In the introductory thanksgiving (1:8–12) Paul identifies the particular significance of the Roman Christians within this wider movement when he records his gratitude to God that news of their faith is impacting people "in all the world" (1:8). Then he reveals how he regularly prays for them and asks that God would make it possible for him to visit them (1:9–10). His immediate concern is, "so I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, to be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (1:11–12).<sup>5</sup>

Fee observes that a letter in antiquity was meant to serve as "a second-best substitute for a personal visit."<sup>6</sup> The "spiritual gift" (*χάρισμα πνευματικόν*) Paul has in mind is not some "gifting" by the Spirit, as in 1 Cor 12:8–10 and Rom 12:6–8, but

his understanding of the gospel that in Christ Jesus God has created from Jews and Gentiles one people for himself, apart from Torah. This is the way they are to be "strengthened" by Paul's coming, and this surely is the "fruit" he wants to have among them when he comes (v. 13). If so, then in effect our present letter functions as his "Spirit gifting" for them. This is what he would impart if he were

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<sup>5</sup> Longenecker (*Introducing Romans*, 138–41) observes that the thanksgiving sections of Paul's letters mostly speak about the issues and concerns of his addressees, but in Rom 1:8–12 his own desires and concerns dominate. This could suggest that Paul's interests, desires, and concerns should be given highest priority in evaluating the purpose of Romans, but see III below.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 486.



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there in person: this is what he now “shares” since he cannot presently come to Rome.<sup>7</sup>

In the formal beginning to the argument of the letter (1:13–17), Paul reiterates his desire to visit the Romans and to have “a fruitful ministry” among them.<sup>8</sup> His plan is once again set within the context of his wider commitment: “I am obligated both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome” (1:14–15). In what turns out to be a theme sentence introducing the argument to follow, Paul goes on to describe the gospel as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek,” and summarizes its message in terms of the revelation of the righteousness of God “from faith to faith” (1:16–17).

In the closing sections of the letter, the apostle returns to the theme of his commission to preach the gospel to the nations. He first attributes his writing to the Romans to the grace given to him by God “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest of the gospel of God” (15:14–16). This last expression is explained by saying that the aim of his ministry is “that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” Paul acts as a “priest” with the gospel when he enables people everywhere to present their bodies “as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God,” which he describes as (lit.) “your understanding service” (12:1, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν). His ministry makes possible “the obedience of faith” (1:5; 16:26), which involves obeying the call to believe in Christ (10:8–13, 16) and offering the obedient service that is the appropriate outcome of this faith.

When Paul speaks again of his long-standing desire to visit the Romans, he announces his intention to see them before moving on to Spain (15:22–24). But he first wants to visit Jerusalem

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 488–89. Longenecker (*Introducing Romans*, 158, 353–55) agrees that the “spiritual gift” Paul is uniquely able to give the Romans is his understanding of the gospel and its implications, as expressed in his letter (cf. 2:16; 16:25, “my gospel”). However, Longenecker disagrees with Fee about the heart of Paul’s message.

<sup>8</sup> Although some commentators would see the thanksgiving section of the letter extending to 1:15, Longenecker (*Introducing Romans*, 387) rightly observes that the beginning of the body opening of Romans is signaled by a disclosure formula that appears at the start of 1:13, οὐ θέλω δεῦ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν (“I do not want you to be unaware”), coupled with the vocative ἀδελφοί (“brothers [and sisters]”).

to deliver the collection from the Gentile churches he founded for “the poor among the saints” in that city (15:25–29). So he appeals to the Roman Christians to pray with him, “that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, and that, by God’s will, I may come to you with joy and be refreshed together with you” (15:31–32).

There is a degree of symmetry in the epistolary framework, as Paul seeks to inform his readers about his plans and involve them in the task given to him by God:

Paul’s apostleship to the nations (1:1–7)	—————>	Paul’s apostleship to the nations (15:14–21)
Paul’s longing to visit the Romans (1:8–15)	—————>	Paul’s longing to visit the Romans (15:22–33)

In the final chapter Paul commends Phoebe as the bearer of the letter (16:1–2), greets various acquaintances at Rome (16:3–16), warns his readers about “those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned” (16:17–19), and concludes with a grace benediction, further greetings, and a doxology (16:20–27).<sup>9</sup> The greetings in vv. 3–16 reveal important details about the background and present situation of twenty-six Christians in the city and identify two particular households (vv. 10b, 11b) and various other groups of unnamed believers (vv. 14b, 15d). Far from being incidental to Paul’s purpose, this chapter raises important questions about the nature of his argument in the body of the letter and its relevance to the situation of the original recipients.<sup>10</sup>

## B. The Body of the Letter

Within the body of the letter, there is a lengthy and sustained theological argument (1:16–11:36) before Paul turns to exhortation

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<sup>9</sup> Jewett (*Romans*, 23) proposes that Tertius as scribe and Phoebe as patron were both involved “in the creation, the delivery, the public reading, and the explanation of the letter in the course of 57 CE.”

<sup>10</sup> Paul S. Minear (*The Obedience of Faith: The Purpose of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans*, SBT 2nd Series 19 [London: SCM, 1970]) works backwards from the situation reflected in 14:1–16:27 through the earlier chapters to determine Paul’s purpose. But he is too precise in linking supposed groups in Rome with sections of the preceding argument.

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(12:1–15:13). Moo observes that the argument develops according to the inner logic of Paul’s own teaching: “even the questions and objections that periodically interrupt the argument arise naturally from the flow of Paul’s presentation.”<sup>11</sup> Moo concludes that the issues addressed here are so general as to be applicable to any group of Christians, but this view will be challenged below.

Most obviously Paul expounds the gospel he outlines in 1:3–4, 16–17, drawing out the implications for believers (1:18–32; 3:21–26; 5:1–11; 6:1–23; 8:1–39; 12:1–13:14). He wants all his readers to enjoy all the life-changing benefits of Christ’s saving work. Alternating with his exposition of the gospel and its implications, there are reflections on matters relating to the law and God’s purpose for Israel: circumcision and the written code, faith and works, the covenant with Abraham and his offspring, the process of election and the blessing of the nations, food and Sabbath laws (2:1–3:20; 3:37–4:25; 5:12–21; 7:1–25; 9–11; 14:1–15:7). More will be said about this in the discussion of the letter’s structure below. At this point, it is sufficient to note that Paul regularly pauses in his exposition of the gospel to address specifically Jewish concerns using a more defensive, argumentative style.

Among Paul’s extant letters, only in Galatians is there comparable attention to such matters. Galatians is widely considered to be challenging the teaching and influence of Judaizers in the churches founded on Paul’s first missionary journey. The larger-scale development of similar issues in Romans, sometimes using the rhetorical device of arguing with a Jewish opponent, is not simply a logical development of Paul’s gospel. Romans was not written for the same reason as Galatians, but Paul clearly considered a treatment of these questions important for the recipients of this letter.

The hortatory section begins in a general way (12:1–13:14) but moves to issues more specifically related to the situation of the Roman Christians (14:1–15:13). Some have denied this,<sup>12</sup> but I will develop this point below. The climax of the section is the challenge to live in harmony with one another, each one seeking to “please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (15:1–2). Christ himself

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<sup>11</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Robert J. Karris, “Romans 14:1–15:13 and the Occasion of Romans,” in *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried, rev. and exp. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 65–84.

is the inspiration for this pattern of behavior since he became “a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises to the fathers, and so that Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy” (15:8–9). The salvation-historical nature of Paul’s argument in this section specifically recalls the long section in chapters 9–11 about Jews and Gentiles being blessed together in the purpose of God. This in turn is a development of certain arguments in chapters 1–8. So Jew-Gentile questions are significant for a consideration of Paul’s purpose in writing both the doctrinal and hortatory sections of this letter.

A further observation is significant for understanding Paul’s rhetorical strategy in this letter. In 1:2 he announces that the gospel was promised long ago by God “through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.” Although there are biblical allusions throughout Romans, Paul mostly cites only biblical texts in the defensive sections.<sup>13</sup> He assumes readers will recognize the authority of these texts and the significance of his references. His aim is to ground his gospel in God’s revelation given to Israel and to convince his Christian readers that “whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures” (15:4).

The doxology in 16:25–26 relates Paul’s proclamation of Jesus Christ to “the revelation of the mystery kept silent for long ages, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic Scriptures, according to the command of the eternal God to advance the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles.” The gospel fulfills what the prophets foretold, but there was an element of mystery about what was promised in the OT that Paul needed to disclose and explain in his preaching and writing (cf. Eph 3:1–13; Col 1:24–28).

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ben Witherington III with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 20. In the sections where Paul expounds or applies the gospel, there are possibly six quotations (one in 1:16–17; one in 8:1–39; four in 12:1–13:14), but in the defensive sections there are at least fifty-five (eight in 2:1–3:20; seven in 3:27–4:25; two in 7:1–25; possibly thirty-two in 9:1–11:36; six in 14:1–15:13). See §2.2 for more detail.

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### II. Structure and Argument

How may we discern the structure of Romans? Are the sections and subsections of the letter to be determined “by subject matter, by the epistolary and rhetorical conventions reflected in the materials, or by some combination of these two approaches?”<sup>14</sup>

#### A. Thematic Approaches

Many modern commentators pursue a broadly thematic approach and see four main divisions in the argument.<sup>15</sup> For example, Moo rightly separates the epistolary framework from the body of the letter and views it as essentially an exposition of the gospel and its implications.<sup>16</sup> Schreiner’s headings more closely associate the opening and closing sections with the body of the letter and highlight God’s righteousness as the main theme throughout. Inside the epistolary framework he identifies five major divisions:<sup>17</sup>

1:1–17	The gospel as the revelation of God’s righteousness
1:18–3:20	God’s righteousness in his wrath against sinners
3:21–4:25	The saving righteousness of God
5:1–8:39	Hope as a result of righteousness by faith
9:1–11:36	God’s righteousness to Israel and the Gentiles
12:1–15:13	God’s righteousness in everyday life
15:14–16:23	The extension of God’s righteousness through the Pauline mission
16:25–27	Final summary of the gospel of God’s righteousness

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<sup>14</sup> Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 378.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, 13 vols (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004), 10:410–11.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 33–35.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), vii–viii. Compare Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), viii–xiii.

## B. Rhetorical and Epistolary Studies

Another approach involves comparing the letter with patterns of Greco-Roman oral, rhetorical, and epistolary conventions, which would have been familiar to Paul and his first-century addressees. For example, Longenecker examines oral patterning in Romans, and evaluates various forms of rhetorical analysis that have been applied to the letter. He follows Aune in arguing that the central section of Romans is an example of “protreptic speech,” which was the primary rhetorical tool used by philosophic writers “to attract adherents by exposing the errors of alternate ways of living and demonstrating the truth claims of a particular philosophical tradition over its competitors.”<sup>18</sup>

Some have classified Romans as “a letter of introduction,” even as an “ambassadorial letter of self-introduction,” though Longenecker disputes the adequacy of this approach.<sup>19</sup> He argues that it is much more like an ancient “letter essay,” that is, “instructional material set within an epistolary frame.”<sup>20</sup> Epistolary conventions appear in the opening and closing sections but only occasionally in the body of the letter.<sup>21</sup>

Longenecker provides important insights into the way the opening and closing sections of the letter function, and about the way the body of the letter is introduced. But there is more to be revealed about the structure and flow of the argument here and in the “protreptic” heart of the letter. In particular, I do not think he has justified his claim that the material in 1:16–4:25 represents matters on which Paul and the Roman Christians were in agreement or that “the material of 5–8 should be viewed as expressing the focus of what Paul writes in Romans.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> David E. Aune, *Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003): 383. Cf. David E. Aune, “Romans as a *Logos Protreptikos*,” in *The Romans Debate: 278–96*; Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 193–200. Witherington (*Romans*, 20) contends that “Romans is a deliberative discourse which uses an epistolary framework, and in some ways comports with a protreptic letter.”

<sup>19</sup> Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 215–16; cf. Robert Jewett, “Romans as an Ambassadorial Letter,” *Int* 36 (1982): 5–20; Jewett, *Romans*, 43–46.

<sup>20</sup> Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 217.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 220–25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

### C. A New Approach

I want to propose a different structure, drawing on insights from a variety of studies and majoring on four important literary factors: alternation, refrain, progression/digression, and recursion.<sup>23</sup>

#### 1. *Alternation*

In the body of the letter, Paul systematically alternates between two distinct types of material. In one strand he *confirms* or establishes his gospel and its implications for salvation and the transformation of believers. He focuses on Jesus's death and resurrection and the need for "the obedience of faith" without distinguishing between Jews and Gentiles. In the other strand he *defends* his gospel in the face of objections arising from the priority of Israel in God's plan, addressing the particular concerns of first-century Jews: their Scriptures, their pattern of interpretation, their self-understanding, and their traditions.<sup>24</sup>

Tobin similarly distinguishes the sections of Romans that read like expositions or explanations from those that are marked by "various rhetorical devices that create a much livelier, more engaged, and argumentative tone."<sup>25</sup> Apart from style and tone, Tobin notes that the expository sections characteristically "draw on and develop traditional cultic language and imagery about Christ's death as sacrifice" (3:25; 5:8–9; 8:3) but mostly do not quote from the Jewish Scriptures.<sup>26</sup> In contrast the argumentative sections are marked by extensive use of Scripture.

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<sup>23</sup> I am indebted to Grant S. Nichols and Richard J. Gibson ("Four Keys to the Literary Structure of Romans" [unpublished]) for these insights. They agree with Thomas H. Tobin (*Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: the Argument of Romans* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004], 3) that "literary cues are surer guides to the structure of Romans than the theologically oriented 'topics' are." Literary and topical factors must be taken together.

<sup>24</sup> Junji Kinoshita ("Romans—Two Writings Combined: A New Interpretation of the Body of Romans," *NovT* 7 [1964]: 262) outlines "two strata of argument" and proposes that we have an original letter to the Romans combined with a "manual of instruction on Jewish problems." But the two strands do not necessarily point to two different sources.

<sup>25</sup> Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 85. Witherington (*Romans*, 20) similarly observes "the alternation between sections with many allusions, quotes, and echoes of the OT, and sections with virtually none."

Using the language of Phil 1:7, we may say that Paul is engaged in “the defense (*ἀπολογία*) and confirmation (*βεβαίωσις*) of the gospel.” The second noun refers to the “process of establishing or confirming something, *confirmation, validation*” (BDAG). Paul uses the cognate verb in Rom 15:8 for Jesus’s validation of promises made to the patriarchs of Israel. In the sections of the letter where the gospel is expounded, he confirms or establishes it by demonstrating its coherence and efficacy. In the apologetic sections he responds to charges made against his gospel and shows how his message is consistent with the Scriptures of Israel.

## 2. Refrain

Harvey notes that in Romans 5–8 Paul employs “a repeated refrain that gives unity to the section and is suggestive for identifying divisions within the text.”<sup>27</sup> In 5:1, 11, 21; 7:25 the phrase “through our Lord Jesus Christ” is used, and in 6:23; 8:39 there is a variation (“in Christ Jesus our Lord”).<sup>28</sup> But if the simpler, preposition-less expression “the Lord Jesus Christ” and variations are treated as the refrain, a broader pattern emerges. This phrase is found in the epistolary framework three times (1:3, 7; 15:30) and in the body of the letter eight times (5:1, 11, 21, 6:23; 7:25; 8:39; 13:14; 15:6; cf. 4:24, “Jesus our Lord”).

The confession of Jesus as Lord and Christ is fundamental to Paul’s gospel, and each of these declarations seems to mark a significant development in the argument. “The Lord Jesus Christ” serves as a formal boundary marker for all the literary units from 5:1 to 15:6, with the exception of 11:36, where a doxology ends the section. Use of this formula in 13:14 and 15:6 raises the possibility that the alternation between gospel exposition and defense against Jewish issues continues in 12:1–15:7. Paul first expounds the lifestyle made possible by God’s merciful provisions in Christ, enabling believers to fulfill the law by acting in love (12:1–13:14). Then he addresses alternative ways of honoring God that potentially threatened the unity of the Roman Christians: matters of diet and the observance

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<sup>27</sup> John D. Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul’s Letters*, ETS (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 104.

<sup>28</sup> Harvey, *Listening*, 125. Harvey says the expressions in 5:1 and 8:39 are “probably best seen as an instance of ring composition.”



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of certain days in honor of the Lord (14:1–15:7). A celebratory coda in 15:8–13 forms a conclusion to this section and a transition to the next stage of the argument, where Paul becomes more explicit about his role in God’s plan for the nations (cf. 11:13–15).<sup>29</sup>

Observing Paul’s pattern of alternation in the light of his repeated refrain, the following structure emerges from the body of the letter:

<b>Confirmation of the gospel</b>	<b>Defense against Jewish objections</b>
1:18–32	2:1–3:20
3:21–26	3:27–4:25
5:1*–11*	5:12–21*
6:1–23*	7:1–25*
8:1–39*	9:1–11:36
12:1–13:14*	14:1–15:(6*)7
*Instances of the refrain	

### *3. Progression/Digression*

Tobin argues that the expository and argumentative sections of Romans are “interrelated to one another in four fairly complex ways.”<sup>30</sup>

a. The expository material develops in a linear fashion to give a coherent account of Paul’s gospel and its implications for Christian living. In these passages, “Paul consistently moves beyond the previous argumentative section to a new stage in the argument.”<sup>31</sup>

b. Each of the argumentative sections takes off from some aspect of the preceding expository section. So, for example, 2:1–3:20 picks up the theme of God’s wrath against human sin from 1:18–32 and

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<sup>29</sup> Richard J. Gibson (“Paul the Missionary, in Priestly Service of the Servant-Christ [Romans 15.16],” in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology and Practice*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner, LNTS [London: T&T Clark, 2011], 57–62) argues for 15:8–21 as a distinct literary unit with a chiasmic structure. But the thematic links between 15:8–13 and 15:1–7 are sufficient to classify this as a conclusion to the latter and a transition to the next stage of the argument.

<sup>30</sup> Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric*, 85.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

establishes that Jews and Gentiles are all under God's righteous judgment; 3:27–4:25 picks up the theme of faith from 3:21–26 and argues that justification by faith apart from works of the law is the scriptural pattern laid down for Abraham and his offspring.<sup>32</sup>

c. Tobin designates four “larger arguments” (1:18–3:20; 3:21–4:25; 5:1–7:25; 8:1–11:36) and says they are clearly intended as an articulated whole. They are “linear in the sense of being sequential and interlocking.” The equal sinfulness of Jew and Gentile (1:18–3:20) gives way to the righteousness of God available equally to Jews and Gentiles (3:21–4:25), which is shown to be incompatible with sin (5:1–7:25). Then 8:1–11:36 struggles with issues related to the interlocking eschatological fate of Jews and Gentiles, which have arisen from the arguments in 1:18–7:25.<sup>33</sup>

d. These larger arguments are also linear in the sense that Paul places them in a temporal sequence. The framework “is intentionally and essentially temporal or historical in character,” progressing from all humanity under sin (1:18–3:20), to the new situation established by Jesus (3:21–4:25), to the ethical implications of Jesus's death (5:1–7:25), to Paul's eschatological vision (8:1–11:36).

However, given Paul's careful use of the refrain “Jesus Christ our Lord” and the possible inclusion of 12:1–15:7 as a further large section containing both exhortation and argumentation, I suggest six basic units rather than Tobin's four: 1:18–3:20; 3:21–4:25; 5:1–21; 6:1–7:25; 8:1–11:36; 12:1–15:7 (with 15:8–13 being a coda to this final unit).

#### *4. Recursion*

In an essentially oral culture, certain devices provided clues to the organization, emphases, and development of a work for the listener. Among the elements of oral patterning available to Paul were recursive patterns often described as “chiasms.” Such patterns

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<sup>32</sup> Tobin (*ibid.*, 88) notes the disproportionate length of the argumentative sections and infers the need to understand Paul's message “not primarily in terms of themes or subject matter but in terms of issues between himself and the Roman Christian audience he was addressing.”

<sup>33</sup> Tobin does not include 12:1–15:7 in this material and thus concludes that Paul's argument moves in the direction of “a universalizing eschatology, which is explicitly the subject of 8:18–30 and 8:31–11:36.” But this is a limited view of Paul's purpose.

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may be discerned within and between the units of Romans outlined above.

Numerous examples of chiasm, inversion, ring composition, and concentric symmetry have been observed in single verses and larger segments of the letter.<sup>34</sup> For example, a concentric structure of Romans 5–8 is proposed by Moo. He treats 5:1 as “a transition in topic” and 5–8 as a unit, observing the density of verbal parallels between 5:1–11 and 8:18–39.

However, the parallels noticed by Moo can also be accounted for by recognizing a broader, recursive structure in the expository sections of Romans, where there is an overarching concentric symmetry (ABCDC´B´A´):<sup>35</sup>

- A Idolatrous worship, 1:18–32
- B Standing in grace, 3:21–26; 5:1–11
- C Transfer from death to life, 6:1–11
- D As those made alive, present yourselves to God,  
      6:12–14
- C´ Transfer from sin to righteousness, 6:15–23
- B´ Walking in the Spirit, 8:1–39
- A´ Acceptable worship, 12:1–13:14

This structure observes significant linguistic parallels between 1:18–32 and 12:1–2, where true worship is contrasted with the various forms of false worship that characterize human life.<sup>36</sup> The exhortations in 12:3–13:14 bring Paul’s exposition of the gospel and its fruit to a practical end by illustrating what acceptable worship entails. Believers are rescued by Christ from the consequences of sin and are set free to serve God in love, thus fulfilling the law. The tragic predicament of 1:18–32 has been reversed by “the mercies of God,” particularly expressed in the sacrifice of Jesus. Cultic

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<sup>34</sup> Harvey (*Listening*, 97–109, 119–54) carefully distinguishes these terms, evaluates criteria, and illustrates from the literature on Romans.

<sup>35</sup> There are verbal and thematic parallels between 3:21–26 and 8:1–4 in addition to the parallels between 5:1–11 and 8:18–39 noted by Moo. I acknowledge my dependence on Nichols and Gibson (“Four Keys,” 15–27) in this connection and in the following observations about the letter’s structure.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. David G. Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 169–79.

language is significantly applied both to the death of Jesus (3:25; 5:8–9; 8:3) and to the response of those united with him (6:13; 12:1).

In this recursive structure Romans 6 has a pivotal role. There is symmetry between 6:1–11 and 6:15–23 in the style of Paul’s argument, using different terms. The first passage explains how those united with Christ in his death and resurrection have been transferred from death to life. The second speaks of their release from sin’s dominion and a new slavery to righteousness. The first passage summarizes the message of 1:18–32; 3:21–26; 5:1–11 about the new life made possible for those who put their faith in Jesus. The second prefaces the argument developed in 8:1–39; 12:1–13:14 about believers offering themselves to God, using language revisited in 12:1 (cf. 6:13, 16, 19).

The two halves of Rom 6 are woven together in 6:12–14. In an unmistakable chiasm, Paul provides a succinct summary of his gospel and emphasizes the obligation laid on believers to live as those who have been brought by Christ from death to life:

- A Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires.
- B And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness.
- C But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God,
- B´ and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness.
- A´ For sin will not rule over you, because you are not under law but under grace.

Chapter 6 is the fulcrum for Paul’s movement from the justification and salvation of sinners by the death of Jesus to the inherent obligation to offer their justified and renewed selves to God. This movement facilitates the restoration of true worship and righteousness among the nations.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Against Moo (*Romans*, 294), Rom 6:1–7:25 is not “parenthetical to the main point of the section” but a pivotal point in Paul’s exposition of the gospel and its implications.

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There is also evidence of a recursive relationship in the defensive material. Here the symmetry takes the form of a ring composition (ABCC'B'A').

- A Judgment and identity: revealing the true children of God, 2:1–3:20
- B Faith, not law, as the defining characteristic of God's people, 3:27–4:25
- C Law not a source of life: Adam's sin, 5:21–21
- C' Law not a source of life: human experience, 7:1–25
- B' Faith in Christ, not law, as the way of salvation for Jews and Gentiles, 9:1–11:36
- A' Judgment and identity: resolving conflicts in the Christian community, 14:1–15:13

Judgment and identity are key themes in the outer ring of Paul's argument (2:1–3:20 and 14:1–15:13). In the first passage the propensity of self-righteous Jews to pass judgment on others is highlighted, and external circumcision is contrasted with that which is inward and real (2:25–29). In the concluding passage weak Christians, whose consciences are constrained by Jewish convictions regarding food and festivals, are warned not to pass judgment on the "strong," and the strong are warned not to despise the "weak." Circumcision, food, and Sabbath were three particular concerns that "marked off Israel most clearly from the other nations."<sup>38</sup> So the outer ring of Paul's defensive argument brings these identity issues together in relation to the new people of God in Christ. An inclusion is formed by the charge to welcome or accept one another at the beginning and end of this section (14:1; 15:7), particularly since "Christ also accepted you." However, as previously argued, the transitional passage 15:8–13 is a coda that forms an impressive conclusion to the exhortation in 14:1–15:7, while summarizing the argument about God's purpose for Jews and Gentiles outlined earlier in the letter.

An inner ring of Paul's argument in 3:27–4:25 and 9:1–11:36 is concerned to establish the relationship of the people of God in Christ to Abraham and the patriarchs. God's people are now defined by faith in Christ and not racial descent or obedience to the law. In the first passage the apostle is forced to explain how Abraham

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<sup>38</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), lxxi.

can be the father of both Jew and Gentile. In 9–11 Paul surveys the history of Abraham’s descendants to expose the way God’s election and mercy have been at work to establish a remnant chosen by grace from among the physical descendants of Abraham. At the same time, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Paul pursues his ministry to the nations in the hope that he may somehow arouse his own people to jealousy and save some of them.

The core of Paul’s engagement with Jewish issues is in 5:12–21 and 7:1–25. Here he addresses the expectation that through the law Israel would undo Adam’s sin and death as its penalty: the law would expel sin, guarantee righteousness, and bring life. Paul confronts this belief with the failure of the law to achieve these things and reiterates the need for Jesus’s death. The vocabulary of sin, law, death, and life saturates both contexts. Paul first exposes the failure of the law in salvation-historical terms (5:12–21). Rather than alleviating the problems of sin and death, the introduction of the law only ensured the multiplication of Adam’s transgression and the increase of sin (5:20). In 7:1–25 the personal and experiential dimension of this crisis is explored.<sup>39</sup>

#### D. Conclusions about Structure

The following thematic headings show how the two major strands of argument in the body of the letter are related and progress. These strands are set within the epistolary framework, which expresses Paul’s purpose in writing to the Romans in this way.

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<sup>39</sup> In addition to various parallels tying 5:12–21 and 7:1–25 together, an underlying symmetry is provided by explicit and implicit allusions to Adam’s sin.

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*1:1–17 Paul’s desire to minister to the Romans: the epistolary introduction*

***1:18–32 God’s righteous judgment against sin revealed***

2:1–3:20 Judgment and identity: revealing the true children of God

***3:21–26 God’s saving righteousness revealed: the redemptive sacrifice that makes justification possible***

3:27–4:25 God’s saving righteousness revealed: faith, not law, the defining characteristic of God’s people

***5:1–11 The fruit of justification: present and future***

5:12–21 Adam’s transgression and Christ’s gift: grace, not law, the source of life

***6:1–23 Dying and rising with Christ: freed from sin’s penalty to be slaves to God and to righteousness***

7:1–25 Released from the law to serve God in the new way of the Spirit

***8:1–39 The new way of the Spirit: life and adoption, perseverance and hope***

9:1–11:36 The way of salvation for Jews and Gentiles: the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ

***12:1–13:14 True and proper worship: love and obedience to God’s will***

14:1–15:13 Judgment and identity: resolving conflicts in the Christian community

*15:14–16:27 Paul’s mission plans and final messages: the epistolary conclusion*

These broad divisions will be followed in the commentary, though further subdivisions in the larger units will be observed. Since this commentary series aims to provide guidelines for exposition, it will be necessary to consider how much of Paul’s argument can reasonably be conveyed on a given occasion. In addition to the structural factors already considered, when segments for exposition

are suggested, issues such as the thematic unity and length of passages will be taken into account.

### III. Purpose

There are three major contemporary approaches to the purpose of Romans. Some would argue that, as in his other letters to churches, Paul is primarily occupied with the concerns of the community he addresses. He expounds his gospel in a way that will unite Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome. Others would argue that, right from the start, the apostle is focused on winning the support of the Roman Christians for the next phase of his missionary work and does not specifically address problems in their community. A third position involves some combination of these alternatives.<sup>40</sup>

I have noted the alternation between gospel exposition and intensive engagement with Jewish issues in Romans. This mirrors the pattern of Paul's missionary activity recorded in the latter half of the Acts of the Apostles. Luke regularly portrays Paul preaching to Jews first and then to Gentiles, often needing to dialogue with Jewish audiences about their objections to his message and responding to challenges about its consistency with Scripture. In these apologetic situations Paul speaks with particular boldness (Acts 9:27–28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8) and engages in reasoning (17:2, 17; 18:4, 19), sharp dispute, or persuasion (9:29; 15:2; 18:13; 28:23).

In the body of Romans, Paul expounds his law-free gospel and its implications while dealing with specifically Jewish issues concerning their heritage as God's covenant people. This is consistent with the portrayal of Paul's ministry in Acts, but how was it relevant for the Christians in Rome? The epistolary framework indicates his desire to minister to them in person and by letter and to win their support for the next stage of his ministry. How does the argument in the body of the letter relate to these expressed intentions?<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kruse (*Romans*, 8–11) summarizes a range of theories in connection with these three major approaches. Longenecker (*Introducing Romans*, 92–160) offers a more comprehensive discussion of alternatives. Donfried (*Romans Debate*) offers a range of essays on the topic, arguing for a variety of positions.

<sup>41</sup> Nichols and Gibson ("Four Keys") conclude that the dual character of the letter "correlates to two audiences, not necessarily within the Roman church to which he is writing, but which characterized his experience of preaching on his missionary



# BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL THEMES

## §1 Romans and the Story Line of the Bible

**M**ore than any other Pauline letter, Romans alludes to key events in the biblical narrative of God’s dealings with the world and its inhabitants and records prophetic perspectives on those events. Paul is concerned with the pattern of God’s historic interventions and how they relate to one another. Most importantly, he reflects on what they reveal about the character and purpose of God and how they prepare for and illuminate the work of Christ. Paul has a way of understanding OT Scripture that is critical for understanding the gospel and its implications. He wants to situate his readers within the unfolding story of God’s engagement with humanity, which has past, present, and future significance for them.<sup>1</sup>

### §1.1 Creation, Sin, and Judgment

God is introduced as Creator of all that exists, as Paul draws attention to what can be known about him from the natural world (1:18–23). People across time have clearly seen God’s eternal power and divine nature, “being understood through what he has made” (1:20). But this knowledge has left them without excuse because they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. “Instead, their

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<sup>1</sup> There are different ways of understanding the theology of Romans. A helpful consideration of two divergent methodologies is provided by Richard B. Hays, “Adam, Christ, Israel—the Question of Covenant in the Theology of Romans: A Response to Leander E. Keck and N. T. Wright,” in *Pauline Theology, Volume III: Romans*, ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 68–86.

thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles” (1:21–23).

This portrait of humanity in rebellion against God is not yet specifically linked to Adam’s sin or to death as its penalty (though see 1:32). Rather, Paul gives an account of what has characterized human life since Adam’s fall, reflecting some of the perspectives of Genesis 3–11. Paul mentions people being handed over by God “in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves” (1:24). Such is the outcome for those who “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator” (1:25).<sup>2</sup> Paul further describes people being handed over to “disgraceful passions,” resulting in unnatural sexual relationships (1:26–27), and being handed over to attitudes and practices that hinder authentic human relationships (1:28–32).

Paul identifies these consequences of humanity’s rebellion against God as a present manifestation of God’s wrath (1:18). Echoing the predictions of the eschatological prophets, Paul asserts that the wrath of God is soon to be fully and finally expressed in a day of universal judgment (2:5; cf. Isa 2:12–22; Amos 5:18–20; Zeph 1:14–18). The effect of sin in human life continues to be exposed in Rom 2:1–3:20, where the focus is specifically on Israel’s failure to be God’s holy people.

When Paul concludes that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23), he echoes the Jewish tradition that when Adam sinned he lost the glory that was his when he was created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27; Ps 8:5).<sup>3</sup> The gospel hope is that believers will encounter the glory of God at the end of the age through physical resurrection and be fully transformed into the likeness of God’s Son (5:2; 8:18–21, 29–30). Those who suffer with Christ will be glorified with him (8:17), making him “the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (8:29). However, Paul’s claim

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<sup>2</sup> Alluding to Ps 106:20 in Rom 1:25 (see also Deut 4:15–19; Jer 2:11), Paul includes Israel’s idolatry in his analysis of humanity’s failure to respond appropriately to God as Creator.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Apoc. Mos. 20:2–3; 21.6; 3 Bar. 4.16; Gen. Rab. 12:6; 1QS 4:22–23; CD 3:19–20; 4QpPs<sup>a</sup> 3.1–2.

that believers “will . . . reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (5:17) has a present application. Even now, those who have died with Christ begin to reign over sin and death and reflect something of the likeness of Christ in anticipation of that final encounter with him through resurrection (6:1–14).<sup>4</sup>

Paul’s specific explanation of how sin and death came into the world through Adam’s transgression (5:12–21) brings the teaching of Genesis 3 more precisely to the fore. Here the focus is on Adam’s disobedience to a specific command of God, which the apostle links with Israel’s subsequent disobedience to the law given through Moses (5:13–14). This prepares for the argument in 7:7–13 about the fatal effect of the law in revealing, provoking, and condemning sin in Israel (see §1.4).<sup>5</sup>

Paul’s typological comparison of Adam and Christ presents them as epochal figures. Adam’s sin determines the character of the present age, and Christ’s obedience determines the character of the coming age (5:15–21; cf. 1 Cor 15:22). Adam’s sin is “the bridgehead that paves the way for ‘sinning’ as a condition of humanity.”<sup>6</sup> Human beings became sinners not merely by imitating Adam’s transgression, but “they were constituted sinners by him and his act of disobedience.”<sup>7</sup> As already noted, the analysis of the human situation in 1:18–32 describes the historic outworking of Adam’s sin and its consequences, showing how “death spread to all people, because all sinned” (5:12).

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ardel B. Caneday, “Already Reigning in Life through One Man: Recovery of Adam’s Abandoned Dominion (Romans 5:12–21),” in *Studies in the Pauline Epistles: Essays in Honor of Douglass J. Moo*, ed. Matthew S. Harmon and Jay E. Smith (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 27–43.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Chris A. Vlachos, “The Catalytic Operation of the Law and Moral Transformation in Romans 6–7,” in Harmon and Smith, eds., *Studies in the Pauline Epistles*, 44–56.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 1996), 319. Cf. James D. G. Dunn, “Adam and Christ,” in *Reading Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, ed. Jerry L. Sumney, SBL Resources for Biblical Study 73 (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 125–38.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 421 (commenting on 5:19). Cf. Charles E. B. Cranfield, *Introduction and Commentary on Romans I–VIII*, vol. 1 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 277–79.

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An allusion to Gen 3:17–19 is implicit in Paul’s consideration of “the sufferings of this present time” (8:18–25). A futility about the created order makes it a suitable environment for those who have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:23; cf. Eccl 1–12). The creation was “subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it” (8:20). It is now in “the bondage to decay,” which makes it captive to corruption and death (8:21). Indeed, “the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now” (8:22). This personification of a suffering creation picks up the notion of God’s subjecting it to futility “in hope” (8:20; cf. Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20). Echoing the prophetic expectation of a new creation (e.g., Isa 11:6–9; 65:17, 25; 66:22; Ezek 34:25–31), Paul claims that the creation itself will be set free “from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children” (8:21). This explains his previous claim that “the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God’s sons to be revealed” (8:19). Creation shares in the consequences of human sin, but it will be transformed when believers are resurrected from the dead (8:23; see §1.6).

A climactic expression of Paul’s creation theology occurs in a summary statement at the end of the hymn of praise in 11:33–36. God is the source of all that exists, the sustainer of all things, and the goal of everything. His redemptive plan embraces people from every nation (11:25–32), and he will bring every aspect of our disordered world into conformity with his own will and purpose. The gospel promises will be fulfilled because God as Creator has a plan for humanity that cannot ultimately be frustrated by human sin (8:28–39; 16:25–27).

### §1.2 God’s Promises to Abraham and His Offspring

God’s creative power is specifically linked to redemption in Paul’s treatment of Abraham: he believed in “the God who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist” (4:17). The apostle explains how each of the foundational promises made by God to Abraham in Gen 12:1–3, and confirmed in subsequent revelations, is fulfilled in Christ.<sup>8</sup> In the process he focuses

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<sup>8</sup> Paul R. Williamson (*Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 77–91) examines the relationship between the programmatic agenda of Gen 12:1–3 and the covenants of Gen 15 and 17. Williamson (186–92) discusses the covenant theology in Romans briefly.

on Abraham's faith, which was "credited to him for righteousness" (4:1–3, 18–22; cf. Gen 15:6), and which functions as a model for faith in the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus (4:23–25).

The relationship between Abraham's faith and Christian faith is first indicated by insisting that Abraham was not justified by works but by believing "on him who declares the ungodly to be righteous" (4:5). This language links Abraham with the portrait of humanity in Rom 1:18–3:20 in need of God's forgiveness and release from the consequences of sin (see also 3:22–24, 28–30). A citation from Ps 32:1–2 suggests that the essential blessing God gave to Abraham was to "cover" his sins and credit him with "righteousness apart from works" (4:6–8; cf. Gen 12:2; 15:6).

Paul stresses the wider implications of this blessing when he observes that Abraham was declared righteous by faith *before* he received the covenant sign of circumcision. This made him the father of Gentiles who believe but are not circumcised as well as the father of Jews, who "follow in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had while he was still uncircumcised" (4:9–12). Paul alludes to the blessing of Gen 12:3 ("and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you") when he talks about Gentiles and Jews being similarly justified by faith. This is articulated in Rom 4:16–18 with reference to Abraham's God-given role as "father of many nations" (Gen 17:5). As Creator, God is concerned to bless the whole human race, but he chooses to do this by first blessing Abraham and his physical offspring. Ultimately, salvation through faith in Christ is available for Abraham's spiritual offspring—those in Israel and those among the nations—bringing deliverance from God's judgment and new life (4:22–25; cf. 10:9–13; Gal 3:6–14).

Paul takes the promise to Abraham about the land that God would show him (Gen 12:1) to mean that his offspring would inherit "the world" (4:13). This is in line with Jewish thinking, which came to identify the inheritance of God's people with "the world to come."<sup>9</sup> Paul argues that believing Jews and Gentiles may glorify God together for the Messianic salvation that unites them and gives them the hope of sharing together in God's new creation (3:29–30; 4:9–17; 11:25–32; 15:8–13).

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Sir 44:21; Jub. 19:21; Philo, *Mos.* 1.155; Pss. Sol. 12:6; Josephus, *Ant.* 32:3; Sib. Or. 3:768–69; 4 Ezra 6:59; 7:9; 2 Bar. 14:13; 44:13; 51:3.

Paul's final focus is on the promise that the patriarch would have numerous offspring (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:4–5).<sup>10</sup> When Abraham and Sarah were too old to conceive a child, God began to fulfill his promise by enabling the birth of Isaac (4:17b–21; cf. Gen 21:1–7). This exercise of God's power anticipated the raising of Jesus from death, making it possible for believers from every nation to be justified and receive new life through him (4:22–25; cf. 6:4–11; 7:4–6; 8:10–11; 10:9–13). As already noted, Abraham's spiritual offspring are Jews and Gentiles who manifest the same faith in God for acceptance and eschatological blessing in Christ.

The climactic expression of this teaching is in Rom 15:8–13. There Paul insists that “Christ became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises to the fathers, *and* so that Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy” (15:8–9). This claim is supported by citations from each section of the biblical canon: one from the Law (Deut 32:43 in 15:10), two from the Psalms (Ps 18:49 in 15:9; Ps 117:1 in 15:11), and one from the Prophets (Isa 11:10 in 15:12). For Paul this is a consistent biblical theme, which must be articulated and lived out by believers in ways that demonstrate its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### §1.3 Israel and God's Electing Grace

“The covenants” and “the ancestors” (the patriarchs) are mentioned in 9:4–5 among the foundational gifts of God to Israel.<sup>11</sup> But Paul questions whether God's word has failed (9:6) because so many Israelites have stumbled in unbelief over “the stumbling stone” of the Messiah (9:32; cf. Isa 8:14; 28:16). He responds by outlining the biblical evidence for a process of divine election taking place among the offspring of Abraham. Ultimately, he intends to show that “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (9:6; cf.

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<sup>10</sup> With a restatement of the promises previously given and a ritual confirming the relationship established with Abraham, Gen 15:18 declares that, “on that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram.” Paul uses the word “covenant” to describe God's commitment to Abraham in Gal 3:16–18 but not in Romans.

<sup>11</sup> “The covenants” will be the various expressions of God's commitment to Israel given throughout her history (e.g., Gen 15:18; 17:1–14; Exod 19:5; 24:7–8; 34:27; Deut 29:1; 2 Sam 23:5; Jer 31:31–24). Hellenistic and Rabbinic Jewish texts similarly refer to covenants in the plural (e.g., Wis 18:22; Sir 44:12, 18; 2 Macc 8:15; 4 Ezra 3:22; Str-B 3:262). Cf. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 94–181.

9:27–29, 31–33). Biblical history indicates that God has narrowed “the apparent boundaries of election by choosing only some Jews to be saved.”<sup>12</sup>

The first example of divine choice is Isaac, rather than Ishmael, as the inheritor of the blessings promised to Abraham (9:7–9; cf. Gen 21:1–13). Israel’s election is then portrayed with reference to the extraordinary choice of Jacob over Esau (9:10–13; cf. Gen 25:19–34). God’s sovereign grace is revealed in the promise about the older serving the younger, which was given before they were born and before they had a chance to do good or evil (cf. Gen 25:27–34; 27:1–40). The pattern of unconditional election illustrated in the call of Abraham continues with his offspring. God’s choice of Israel as a nation is confirmed with the retrospective declaration “I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau” (Mal 1:2–3).

A series of citations covering the period of the exodus highlight God’s intention to display his power and make his “name” or character known in all the earth (9:14–18; cf. Exod 9:16). Israel’s rescue from Egypt was designed to disclose God’s character to the nations and so bless them in line with his promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3). God showed mercy and compassion to his people by powerfully delivering them from Pharaoh’s control (cf. Exod 33:19). Until the moment of release, God hardened Pharaoh’s heart against him so that he might multiply his wonders in the land of Egypt (cf. Exod 11:9–10). As with Jacob and Esau (Rom 9:11–12), God’s choice of Israel over Pharaoh did not depend on “human will or effort but on God who shows mercy” (9:16). Yet in both cases God’s choice was reflected or demonstrated in subsequent human behavior. Moses as God’s agent encouraged Israel to “stand firm and see the LORD’s salvation” (Exod 14:13) so that “when Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and believed in him and in his servant Moses” (14:31). God’s promise and its fulfillment enabled the obedience of faith.

In response to his teaching about God’s hardening whom he wills, Paul has an imaginary opponent ask, “Why then does [God] still find fault? For who can resist his will?” (9:19) Drawing on familiar biblical imagery, Paul warns against any arrogant challenge to God’s justice and asserts that a potter has the right over his clay

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<sup>12</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 569.

“to make from the same lump one piece of pottery for honor and another for dishonor” (9:20–21; cf. Isa 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer 18:1–11). “God’s right to choose is grounded in his role as Creator. What is molded has no right to challenge him who does the molding.”<sup>13</sup> Paul then moves from the exodus situation to the gospel era, using linked citations from the prophetic literature to explain the relationship between Israel and God in the intervening period (9:22–29).

Picking up some of the language of the preceding verses, Paul begins to apply his argument to the situation of Jews and Gentiles faced with the gospel of Christ. His first question is, “And what if God, wanting to display his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath prepared for destruction?” (9:22). His second question is, “And what if he did this to make known the riches of his glory on objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory—on us, the ones he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?” (9:23–24).

Paul uses Scripture to highlight both Israel’s historic failure to serve God and God’s response. Hosea predicted the Assyrian invasion and exile of the northern tribes but also anticipated a comprehensive restoration of God’s covenant people (Hos 2:23; 1:10 in 9:25–26). This combination of texts illustrates that God’s call “can completely transform what had appeared to be a clear-cut case of divine rejection.”<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Isaiah predicted that only a remnant would be saved from enemy attack and invasion (9:27–29; cf. Isa 10:22–23; 28:22; 1:9). Many in Israel were “objects of wrath prepared for destruction,” while some were “objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory” (Rom 9:22–23).

Paul turns to the eschatological application of this teaching by relating it to the failure of many Israelites to pursue the righteousness that is by faith (9:30–10:4). In effect he accuses unbelieving

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<sup>13</sup> Craig A Evans, “Paul and the Prophets: Prophetic Criticism in the Epistle to the Romans (with Special Reference to Romans 9–11),” in *Romans and the People of God*, ed. Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 124. Theocentrism lies at the heart of Paul’s “prophetic criticism” of Israel.

<sup>14</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38B (Dallas: Word, 1988), 575. Paul sees in these words of Hosea a promise of Israel’s restoration. But Dunn also concludes that, “the privilege of sonship with which Israel had been favored (vv. 4, 8) has been extended to all who respond to God’s call now through the gospel.” See my comments on 9:25.



Israelites of failing to “follow in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had” (4:12). A combination of Isa 28:16 and 8:14 is used to highlight Israel’s stumbling over the Messiah rather than believing in him and not being put to shame at the approaching judgment (9:32–33). Paradoxically, however, “Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained righteousness—namely the righteousness that comes from faith” (9:30; see §2.5). By implication this happened because of their believing response to Israel’s Messiah (cf. 3:27–31; 4:9–12).

Although Paul concedes that “a partial hardening has come upon Israel” (11:25), he insists that this is part of God’s saving plan to bring riches to the Gentiles and reconciliation to the world (11:7–15). Paul’s optimism about “all Israel” being saved and “the fullness of the Gentiles” coming to faith is based on his understanding of the kindness and mercy of God (11:22–32). These expressions refer to the full number of the elect in Israel and the nations. The covenantal basis of this assurance is indicated by the image of “the root” being holy and sanctifying the original branches of “the olive tree,” which signifies the people of God (11:16–21).<sup>15</sup> The divine covenants are also the basis of Paul’s optimism when he claims that Israelites are loved “because of the patriarchs” and concludes that “God’s gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable” (11:28–29).<sup>16</sup>

#### §1.4 Israel and the Law

The word νόμος (“law”) occurs seventy-two times in Romans, mostly with reference to the law of God.<sup>17</sup> Paul lists “the giving of the law” (9:4, ἡ νομοθεσία) as one of the privileges of Israel, referring to what happened when God brought his people to Sinai/Horeb in fulfillment of his covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 2:23–25; 3:6–10, 14–18; 6:2–9). Israel was challenged to listen to God and carefully keep the covenant he was making with them. God’s promise was: “You will be my own possession out of all the

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<sup>15</sup> Israel is portrayed as God’s “olive tree” in Jer 11:16 and Hos 14:6 and as God’s “planting” in later Jewish literature (e.g., 2 Macc 1:29; Jub. 1:16; 1 En. 10:16; 26:1). But the olive tree here is more broadly the people of God, comprising believing Jews and Gentiles.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. William S. Campbell, “Israel,” *DPL* 441–46.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 33–40.

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peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation” (Exod 19:5–6; cf. Deut 5–6). The covenant with Israel was a development of the covenants made with the forefathers, spelling out the kind of nation God intended them to be.<sup>18</sup>

A complex set of moral, social, and cultic obligations established how this people could respond to God’s gracious initiative in choosing and saving them. Israel was singularly blessed by the giving of the law, and the ultimate aim was that all the people on earth would be blessed through Israel’s obedience to this law (cf. Gen 18:18–19; 19:5–6; Isa 2:2–3).<sup>19</sup> The covenantal relationship between God and Israel was confirmed by a sacrificial ceremony in Exod 24:3–8 when Moses read out the commandments and ordinances of the Lord and the people expressed their intention to obey.

Paul has many positive things to say about the law in Romans. It reveals the will of God and enables right decisions about what really matters in life (2:18). It was given for Israel to be “a guide for the blind, a light to those in darkness” (2:19; cf. Isa 42:6–7). Jews could teach and model God’s values to people of other nations, “having the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law” (2:20). But Paul points to the hypocrisy of Jews who preached the law to Gentiles but who dishonored God by breaking it themselves (2:21–23). This behavior caused the blaspheming of God’s name among the nations (2:24; cf. Isa 52:5).

Paul echoes the teaching of passages such as Lev 18:5; Deut 5:32–33; 30:11–20 when he says the commandment was meant “for life” (7:10). Indeed, “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (7:12). But the problem is that sin “was producing death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment, sin might become sinful beyond measure” (7:13). This

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<sup>18</sup> “The giving of the law was not intended to set aside the promise (cf. Gal 3:17); rather, it was the means by which the goal of the promise would be advanced in and through Abraham’s national descendants (Gen 12:2; cf. 18:18–19)” (Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 94).

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 19:5–6 suggests that the whole nation had inherited the responsibility formerly conferred on Abraham, “that of mediating God’s blessing to the nations of the earth” (ibid., 97). Given this role, it was vital that the nation remained distinct from other nations. Indeed, retention of the land depended on maintaining their distinctiveness (cf. Exod 23:20–33; Lev 18:24–30; Deut 29:16–29).

problem is illustrated in many of the biblical narratives, beginning with Exod 32:1–6, and it is picked up in numerous prophetic oracles about Israel’s failure to obey God (e.g., Isa 1:1–23; Jer 7:1–34; Hos 12–13).

An important function of the law was to reveal human sin and make the whole world subject to God’s judgment (3:19–20; cf. 7:7c–d).<sup>20</sup> The claim that “both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin” (3:9) is supported by a catena of biblical texts from Ecclesiastes, Psalms, and Isaiah (3:10–18). Paul concludes this sequence (3:19) using ὁ νόμος with reference to the three sections of the Hebrew canon (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings).<sup>21</sup> But he mostly employs this noun narrowly. So “where there is no law, there is no transgression” (4:15b) means that “sin is not charged to a person’s account” when there is no possibility of breaking an explicit command of God (5:13b). Paul goes a step further in 7:9–11, arguing that, “when the commandment came, sin sprang to life again and I died. The commandment that was meant for life resulted in death for me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.” This unpacks his previous claim that “the law came along to multiply the trespass” (5:20a).

Various features of the fall narrative in Gen 3:1–7 are echoed in Rom 7:7–11. But Paul also seems to allude to Israel’s rebellion in Exod 32:1–6, when the people turned to idolatry and immorality immediately after receiving the covenant law at Sinai. The law turned sin into transgression, increased the trespass, and produced wrath (cf. Exod 32:7–29).<sup>22</sup> The serpent used God’s good law in Eden to bring death into the world, and sin used the law given at

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<sup>20</sup> Schreiner (*The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 91) argues that “for Paul, God’s transcendent purpose in giving the law was to increase sin, for the multiplication of transgressions would demonstrate that no one could be righteous through obeying the law.”

<sup>21</sup> Compare the use of νόμος with reference to Scripture other than the Pentateuch in John 10:34; 15:25; 1 Cor 14:21. This reflects wider Jewish usage of the term (cf. Str-B 3:159, 463).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 428–31. N. T. Wright (“The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, 13 vols. [Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004], 10:563) similarly contends that “what happened on Sinai recapitulated what had happened in Eden.” He notes the link between covetousness and the sin of Adam in Jewish literature (*b. Sanh.* 38b; 102a; Exod. Rab. 21:1; 30:7; 32:1, 7, 11). Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 379.

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Sinai to bring condemnation and death to the covenant people. This composite biblical picture is expressed in the first-person singular not just for rhetorical vividness but because of Paul's "deep sense of personal involvement, his consciousness that in drawing out the general truth he is disclosing the truth about himself."<sup>23</sup>

Paul's extraordinary conclusion is that sin "was producing death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment, sin might become sinful beyond measure" (7:13). Sin's sinfulness was enhanced by its use of God's law. But the broader argument of Romans suggests that this was part of a wider divine purpose. "God gave the law (to Israel) precisely to bring sin to a point of maximum concentration so that right there (Israel) 'where sin increased, grace might abound' (5:20b), for the benefit of the entire world, in the person of Israel's Messiah (cf. 8:3–4)."<sup>24</sup>

As Paul defends the goodness of the law of God in 7:7–25, he warns about the impossibility of bearing fruit for God by attempting to keep the written code. This is because of the captivating power of sin and the flesh. The apostle's approach highlights the need for the new way of the Spirit announced in 7:4–6 and expounded in 8:1–14. God's Spirit sets believers free from "the law of sin and death" by convincing them about freedom from condemnation through Christ's atoning sacrifice (8:1–3; cf. 5:5–8; 7:4–5).<sup>25</sup>

The gift of the Spirit also makes it possible for "the law's requirement" to be fulfilled in those who "do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (8:4; cf. 7:6; 13:8–10). This promise echoes Jeremiah's prediction that God would place his law within his people and write it "on their hearts" (Jer 31:33), enabling them to know his will and be moved to do it. Such renewal would flow from the definitive forgiveness of their sins (31:34). In a parallel

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<sup>23</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 1.344. Cranfield (1.342) thinks Paul is speaking "in a generalizing way without intending a specific reference to any particular individual or clearly defined group," but his comment about the significance of the first person singular is applicable to the Adam-Israel view.

<sup>24</sup> Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, SP (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 221. This salvation-historical perspective fits with Paul's argument in 9:30–11:24 and Gal 3:19–26. Cf. n. 19 above.

<sup>25</sup> Although some have argued otherwise, the word νόμος ("law") is most naturally understood figuratively in 8:2 ("the law of the Spirit of life," "the law of sin and death"), as in 7:21 ("this law"); 7:23 ("a different law," "the law of my mind," "the law of sin"); 7:25 ("the law of sin"). Cf. 3:27 ("[the law] of works," "a law of faith").

passage, Ezekiel promised that God would cleanse and renew his people, giving them a new heart and placing his Spirit within them to enable them to keep his law (Ezek 36:25–27).<sup>26</sup>

There are also allusions to new covenant expectations in 2:14–15, 26–29. Preparing for his denunciation of the disobedient Jew in 2:17–24, Paul makes clear that “the hearers of the law are not righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified” (2:13).<sup>27</sup> As a challenge to those who are not genuinely doers of the law, he points to Gentile Christians who “do not by nature (φύσει) have the law” but who “do what the law demands” (2:14).<sup>28</sup> These people “show that the work of the law is written on their hearts,” and “their consciences confirm this” (2:15). Later in Romans Paul negatively uses the plural expression “the works of the law” (3:20, 28; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10), but the singular expression “the work of the law” (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου) has a positive meaning in 2:15. It signifies “the essential unity of the law’s requirements,”<sup>29</sup> which God writes on the hearts of his new covenant people.

In 2:25–29 Paul asserts that a true Jew will have a circumcised heart. 2:26–27 echoes 2:14–15 with the claim that Gentiles who are physically uncircumcised, yet fulfill the law’s demands, expose the

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. David G. Peterson, *Transformed by God: New Covenant Life and Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), 29–43, 136–55; Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 145–78; Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT 31 (Nottingham: Apollos; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013), 158–222.

<sup>27</sup> Although this appears to contradict Paul’s later insistence that no one will be justified by “works of the law” (3:20), he is arguing in 2:13 “with imagined Jews on their own ground, exploiting the tension he sees between the claim to privileged status and divine impartiality” (Francis Watson, “The Law in Romans,” in Sumney, ed., *Reading Paul’s Letter*, 97).

<sup>28</sup> Since φύσει is more likely to modify the verb that immediately precedes it, rather than the verb that follows it, the meaning is “they do not have the law *by virtue of their birth*.”

<sup>29</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:158. Simon J. Gathercole (“A Law unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2:14–15 Revisited,” *JSNT* 85 [2002]: 41–43) addresses objections to the view that 2:15 proclaims the fulfillment of Jer 31:33. Others who argue that the passage is about Gentile Christians include Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:155–59; N. T. Wright, “The Law in Romans 2”, in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn, WUNT 89 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 131–50; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 213–17; Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 130–40.

failure of those who have “the letter of the law and circumcision” but are lawbreakers.<sup>30</sup> But then Paul claims that “a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter” (2:29). This recalls the command of Deut 10:16 (“circumcise your hearts”; cf. Lev 26:41) and the promise in Deut 30:6 (“The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants”). Israel’s historic failure to respond to God’s demand is picked up by Jeremiah (4:4; 9:26), who announces God’s intention to transform the hearts of his people by the provision of a new covenant (Jer 31:33; cf. 24:7; 32:40). Ezekiel 36:26–27 clarifies that this will be accomplished when God puts his Spirit within his people, causing them to follow his statutes and carefully observe his ordinances.

### §1.5 Israel’s Failure and God’s Judgment

When Paul links God’s promises to Abraham and the salvation made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus, he makes plain that “the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith” (4:13). Recalling his previous argument about faith being credited to Abraham before he was circumcised (4:9–12), Paul asserts, “If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise nullified” (4:14). It was always God’s intention that salvation for Jews and Gentiles would depend on faith in God and his promises, not on obedience to his commands.

This focus on “the righteousness that comes by faith” reflects what Gen 15:6 says about Abraham’s relationship with God. It is another way of speaking about divine justification, which Paul has asserted is not “by the works of the law” (3:20, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου), but “by faith apart from the works of the law” (3:28, πίστει . . . χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου; cf. Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10). “The works of the law” have been understood narrowly by some scholars to refer to boundary

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<sup>30</sup> In view of Gen 17:12–14, Paul’s fellow Jews would have denied that a Gentile’s “uncircumcision” could be “counted as circumcision.” But he explains in 3:21–4:25 that Gentiles can be justified by faith together with Jews who trust in Jesus, and thus be reckoned as one of Abraham’s true descendants. The outcome is a life of faithful obedience to the will of God, directed and empowered by his Spirit (e.g., 7:4–6; 8:1–5).

markers, such as Sabbath keeping, circumcision, and food laws, which clearly distinguished Jews from Gentiles.<sup>31</sup> But Paul's condemnation of his fellow Israelites does not simply focus on their failure to observe these requirements.

The benefit of circumcision without obedience to the law's other requirements is certainly challenged (2:25–29). More broadly, however, Paul exposes the false confidence of Jews who know the will of God from the law and believe they are in a position to teach others but dishonor God by breaking the law comprehensively (2:17–24; cf. 3:9–18). “The works of the law” are simply “things done in obedience to the law.”<sup>32</sup> The term “works” is apparently used as a substitute for “works of the law” in 4:2, 6; 9:11–12, 32; 11:6. Justification in God's sight cannot be based on “the works of the law” because “the knowledge of sin comes through the law” and the law makes everyone “subject to God's judgment” (3:19–20; cf. 4:15; 5:13; 7:13).

In 9:30–31 Paul resumes his teaching about the righteousness that comes from faith and is the outcome of God's justifying work in Christ (3:21–4:25). Righteousness by faith has been “obtained” by Gentiles, who did not pursue it. But Israel as a people pursued the law for righteousness, as if it were by works. This caused them to stumble over the Messiah and reject the gospel proclaiming the righteousness that is through faith in him (9:32–33). Disregarding “the righteousness of God” and attempting to establish their own righteousness, “they have not submitted to God's righteousness” (10:3), “for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:4). Now that the Messiah has come, the law has completed its task of revealing God's righteousness to everyone who believes.<sup>33</sup> The law itself showed that righteousness could only be by

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, lxiii–lxxii, 158–59; Wright, “Romans,” 459–61. Simon J. Gathercole (*Where Is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1–5* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001]: 218–22, 248–49) critiques this argument, as does Moo, *Romans*, 206–17; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 338; Byrne, *Romans*, 120–21; Schreiner, *Romans*, 169–73.

<sup>32</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 209. Watson (“The Law in Romans,” 93) similarly argues that “works of the law” includes “those practices that together constitute the distinctive Jewish way of life.”

<sup>33</sup> Robert Badenas (*Christ the End of the Law: Romans 10:4 in Pauline Perspective*, JSNTSup 10 [Sheffield: JSOT, 1985], 118) argues that “Christ embodies that righteousness which the law promised.” Moo (*Romans*, 641) concludes that Christ is the

# EXPOSITION

## **I. Paul’s Desire to Minister to the Romans (1:1–17)**

### **A. Introduction and Greeting (1:1–7)**

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—<sup>2</sup>which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures—<sup>3</sup>concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was a descendant of David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup>and was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead. <sup>5</sup>Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles, <sup>6</sup>including you who are also called by Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup>To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### *Context*

These opening verses introduce key aspects of the message that will be developed in the body of the letter and expose something of Paul’s motivation for gospel ministry. The apostle first raises the subject of his calling and the Christ-centered nature of the message he proclaims (vv. 1–7). In the thanksgiving and prayer report that follows (vv. 8–15), he relates how his desire to visit the Romans and minister to them is a specific outworking of his calling. In a theme statement about the gospel (vv. 16–17), he reveals why he is convinced about its universal relevance and significance.



*Structure*

Paul introduces himself as “a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God” (v. 1) before outlining the message he has been commissioned to proclaim (vv. 2–4). The gospel is first described as the message “which (God) promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures—concerning his Son” (vv. 2–3a). The Son, who is the focus of the gospel, is then described in two confessional statements (vv. 3b–4) before his name and titles are revealed. Paul returns to the subject of his own calling in v. 5, when he indicates that through the risen Lord Jesus he received grace and apostleship “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles.” The Roman Christians are identified as those “who are also called by Jesus Christ” (v. 6). They are formally addressed as those who are “loved by God, called as saints” and are greeted with a wish-prayer for God’s grace and peace (v. 7).

Outline:

1. Paul’s authority as an apostle of Christ (v. 1)
2. The Christ-centered character of Paul’s gospel (vv. 2–4)
3. Paul’s commission and its implications (vv. 5–7)

**1:1.** Greek letters typically began with a one-sentence identification of sender and recipients, and a greeting (A to B “greetings,” as in Acts 15:23; 23:26; Jas 1:1). Paul expands this formula in Romans to describe his divine calling and the gospel he preached. This was apparently necessary because he had not previously visited Rome and was personally known to only some of the believers (16:3–16). Perhaps he knew that his authority was questioned by some (cf. 1:9–10 comment). Three phrases in apposition to “Paul” identify the author with respect to “his master, his office, and his purpose.”<sup>1</sup>

All Christians are meant to be “slaves” of Christ, which is the literal meaning of the term here (cf. BDAG, δούλος), and Paul may be simply identifying himself as a faithful disciple, completely at the disposal of his master, “Christ Jesus” (cf. 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 1:10;

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 40. Paul normally includes others in his opening greetings (e.g., 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1–2; Gal 1:1–2) but not here, even though Timothy was with him (16:21). Perhaps the reason for this was to highlight his distinctive role as apostle to the Gentiles and so his authority to address the Romans.

Phil 1:1; Titus 1:1).<sup>2</sup> However, in association with the other terms in this verse, it is more likely that Paul uses *δοῦλος* to identify himself as a special agent of God’s purpose. In particular, he may be linking his vocation to that of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40–55 (esp. 49:1–7, where *δοῦλος* is used three times in the LXX). As “a servant of Christ Jesus,” Paul’s ministry is “an extension or participation in the ministry of Christ to Israel, and through Israel to the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Paul’s second self-designation indicates that he is literally “a called apostle” (*κλητὸς ἀπόστολος*). All Christians are “called” by God to belong to Jesus Christ and to serve him (1:6–7; 8:28), but the verbal adjective in 1:1 is linked to Paul’s special role as an apostle of Christ (1:5–6; cf. Gal 1:1, 15). His Christian conversion coincided with his calling to be Christ’s apostle to the nations (11:13; cf. Acts 9:1–16; 22:6–16; 26:12–18). Paul sometimes uses the term “apostle” generally to mean “commissioned missionary” or “messenger” (16:7 comment; cf. Phil 2:25; 2 Cor 8:23). However, the context here makes clear that he regarded himself as “one among that unique group appointed by Christ himself to have the salvation-historical role as the ‘foundation’ of the church (Eph 2:10)”<sup>4</sup> (see §2.7).

Paul indicates the purpose of his calling by the final expression in the verse, “set apart for the gospel of God.” In the LXX the verb *ἀφορίζειν* is used with reference to God’s separation of Israel from the nations as his holy people (Lev 20:26) and for various forms of

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<sup>2</sup> The word order suggests that Jesus is identified from the beginning of the letter by his *title* as the promised Messiah. Some manuscripts read Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“Jesus Christ”) and others Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (“Christ Jesus”). The weight of witnesses supporting each reading is evenly balanced, but the latter is more commonly the pattern in the later Pauline letters and is more likely to have been what Paul wrote here. Cf. Robert K. Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 95.

<sup>3</sup> Lionel J. Windsor, *Paul and the Vocation of Israel: How Paul’s Jewish Identity Informs His Apostolic Ministry, with Special Reference to Romans*, BZNW 205 (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2014), 103. Windsor points to Paul’s use of Isa 52:5 in 2:24; Isa 52:7 in 10:15; Isa 53:1 in 10:16; and Isa 52:15 in 15:21 to show how his vocation is related to that of Israel and the Servant of the Lord. Moses, Joshua, the prophets, and David are called servants of the Lord in Josh 14:7; 24:29; 2 Kgs 17:23; Ps 89:3.

<sup>4</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 41. Jewett (*Romans*, 101) argues that the sending convention of the OT provides the most likely source of the NT concept of apostle (e.g., Isa 6:8). An extensive discussion of the concept of apostleship in Paul’s writings is provided by Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 64–68, 666–74.

consecration to God and his service (Exod 13:12; Num 8:11; 15:20). Acts 13:2 records the “setting apart” of Saul and Barnabas by the leaders of the church in Antioch for their mission to the nations. Here the setting apart of Paul “for the gospel of God” (εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ) refers to his Damascus-road commissioning by the risen Lord Jesus (cf. Acts 9:15).<sup>5</sup> It is clear from 1:2–4 that the gospel is essentially a message about the fulfilment of God’s promises in Jesus Christ (see §2.1). However, in 1:9 Paul uses the expression ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ in a dynamic way to refer to the *activity* of “telling the good news about his Son.” So it is possible to understand the expression “set apart for the gospel of God” broadly to mean “a dedication that involves both his own belief in, and obedience to, that message as well as his apostolic proclamation of it.”<sup>6</sup> The genitive θεοῦ most likely indicates the origin of the gospel: it is *from* God, having been promised by him in the Holy Scriptures.<sup>7</sup>

**1:2.** Before he expands on the implications of his calling (vv. 5–6), Paul makes some important claims about the gospel he has been commissioned to preach (vv. 2–4). A relative clause first defines the gospel as the fulfilment of what God “promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures” (compare 3:21; 16:25–26; 1 Cor 15:3–4).<sup>8</sup> The OT foreshadowed and articulated the gospel as God’s prophets revealed his character and will (cf. 1:17; 4:3, 6–8, 9, 16–17, 22; 9:25–26; 10:6–8, 11–13, 11:26–27; 15:9–12). God was the source of the revelation, the prophets were “the human medium of initial delivery,” and the Scriptures are “its

<sup>5</sup> Both “separation” (ἀφορίζειν) and “calling” (καλεῖν) are mentioned in Gal 1:15, where Paul says God set him apart from his mother’s womb and then called him by his grace. This language particularly recalls Isa 49:1.

<sup>6</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 43. Cf. Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 673. Note that εἰς ὑπακοήν πίστεως (1:5) is rendered in a dynamic way by CSB (“to bring about the obedience of faith”).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner (*Romans*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998], 37) contends that θεοῦ should be understood both as a genitive of source (“the gospel from God”) and as an objective genitive (“the gospel about God”). However, apart from the awkwardness of this reading, 1:3–4 indicates that the gospel is specifically about God’s Son. Paul’s term “the gospel of God” is used to distinguish it from “all other ‘gospels,’ in particular those of Roman emperors” (Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 40).

<sup>8</sup> The verb προεπαγγέλλομαι ([lit.] “promised beforehand”) is also used in 2 Cor 9:5. The expression “the Holy Scriptures” is only found here in Paul’s writings, but the simplified plural form “the Scriptures” occurs in Rom 15:4; 16:26; 1 Cor 15:3–4.

medium of preservation and universal dissemination.”<sup>9</sup> A major concern in the defensive sections of Romans is the interpretation of Scripture in the light of its fulfilment in Christ. But Paul’s aim is not simply to argue against Jewish objections or alternative interpretations. Gentile readers need to understand that God’s message to them is none other than the good news of the fulfilment of his promises to *Israel* (cf. Mark 1:14–15). The gospel for the nations cannot be severed from its OT roots (see §2.2).

**1:3–4.** The focus of the gospel is what God proclaimed in advance “concerning his Son.” Two important claims about the Son are made, leading to the climactic declaration that he is “Jesus Christ our Lord.” Given the structure and content of these verses, many commentators argue that the apostle quotes or adapts a confessional formula known to the Romans, as a way of underlining his agreement with them in these essential matters. However, there can be no certainty about the original form of this confession or about the significance of any modifications to it by Paul.<sup>10</sup> A literal rendering of the Greek text exhibits this pattern:

concerning his Son  
 who was a descendant of David  
*according to the flesh*  
 who was appointed Son of God in power  
*according to the Spirit of holiness*  
 by resurrection from the dead  
 Jesus Christ our Lord

“Concerning his Son” (περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ) is the primary phrase, and the two participial clauses that follow must be understood in the light of this. These express two antitheses: “was”—“appointed”

<sup>9</sup> Robert M. Calhoun, *Paul’s Definition of the Gospel in Romans I*, WUNT 2.316 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 90.

<sup>10</sup> Jewett (*Romans*, 103–8) proposes different levels of redaction, culminating in Paul’s insertion of certain lines. However, Calhoun (*Paul’s Definition*, 92–123) argues that none of Jewett’s observations *necessarily* point to Paul’s appropriation of a traditional formula. N. T. Wright (“The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, 13 vols. [Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004]: 416–17) observes that “the reason why Paul quoted things, if he did, was that they expressed exactly what he intended to say at the time.”

and “according to the flesh”—“according to the Spirit of holiness.”<sup>11</sup> God’s Son is first described here as “a descendant of David according to the flesh,” the sequence suggesting the incarnation of the preexistent Son (cf. 8:3 comment).<sup>12</sup> The participle *γενομένου* (CSB “was”) can be rendered “born,” although that is not the usual meaning of the verb (cf. Gal 4:4; Phil 2:7; BDAG, *γίνομαι*). Following the primary phrase, however, this clause could imply that at a particular point in time the Son of God “became” a descendant of David. God’s promise to King David that he would establish the throne of his descendant forever (2 Sam 7:12–16) became the basis of messianic expectation in the OT (e.g., Isa 9:6–7; 11:1–10; Jer 23:5–6; Ezek 34:23–24; Zech 9:9–10; 12:7–13:1) and in later Jewish writings (e.g., Pss. Sol. 17:21; 18:5; 4QFlor 1:1–19; 1 En. 48:10; 52:4). The fulfilment of that hope in Jesus was foundational to the gospel Paul preached (cf. 9:5; 15:7–12; 2 Tim 2:8; §1.6). The qualifying phrase “according to the flesh” (*κατὰ σάρκα*) could be rendered “so far as his human nature is concerned” or “as to his earthly life” (compare 9:5).<sup>13</sup> This phrase implies that the title Son of David is “a valid description of him so far as it is applicable, but the reach of its applicability is not coterminous with the fullness of his person (cf. Mark 12:35–37).”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Calhoun (*Paul’s Definition*, 123) observes that “the accent falls primarily upon (Christ’s) birth and appointment on the one hand, and his flesh and spirit on the other: these two pairs represent the points at which God’s pre-proclamation and promise in the scriptures intersect with comprehensive fulfillments in the Son.”

<sup>12</sup> Moo (*Romans*, 46) rightly argues that several key texts in Paul’s writings presume the preexistence of the Son. Wright (“Romans,” 416) unnecessarily restricts the meaning of “his Son” to the messianic dimensions of the title. Yet he acknowledges that in Gal 4:1–7 Paul had already moved beyond the Jewish tradition of Israel/kingship to make the point that the Son is “one sent into the world not only as a messenger but also as the personal expression of God’s love and purpose.” Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 38–39.

<sup>13</sup> Moo (*Romans*, 47) notes that Paul’s more neutral use of the term “flesh” (*σάρξ*) points to “human existence, with emphasis on the transitory, weak, frail nature of that existence” (e.g., 4:1; 9:3, 5, 8; Gal 2:20). Paul’s more negative or ethical use of the term emerges in passages such as 7:5; 8:8; 13:14 (cf. Gal 5:13–18). Cf. Calhoun, *Paul’s Definition*, 136.

<sup>14</sup> Charles E. B. Cranfield, *Introduction and Commentary on Romans I–VIII*, vol. 1 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: Clark, 1975), 1.60. Cranfield also makes the point that the expression

The next clause characterizes the Son of God by reference to another important event: “[who] was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead.” The natural meaning of the participle ὀρισθέντος is “defined” or “appointed” (BDAG, ὀρίζω). Some English versions translate “declared” (NRSV, ESV), even though there are no first-century parallels to this usage.<sup>15</sup> Such a reading avoids any suggestion that the human Jesus *became* the divine Son at the resurrection. However, the nature of Christ’s appointment or installation is clarified when the expression “in power” (ἐν δυνάμει) is read as qualifying “Son of God,” rather than the preceding verb, so that the sense is “Son-of-God-in-power” (CSB, “the powerful Son of God”). The transition from v. 3 to v. 4 is not “from a human messiah to a divine Son of God (adoptionism), but from the Son as Messiah to the Son as both Messiah *and* powerful, reigning Lord.”<sup>16</sup>

The expression ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν may be understood instrumentally (“by the resurrection of the dead”), or as a time reference (“from [the time of] his resurrection from the dead”). Either way, the resurrection of the human Jesus is presented as the event that was “the beginning of his exalted life.”<sup>17</sup> Some commentators take “according to the spirit of holiness” in parallel with “according to the flesh” to refer to Christ’s divine nature in contrast with his humanity. However, the former most likely refers to the Holy Spirit, indicating a trinitarian view of God (see §2.3). The Holy Spirit is not described in this way elsewhere in the NT, though “the term is clearly Semitic in character, modelled on the Hebraic form (not the

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does not limit Christ’s kinship with David to his earthly, historical life. Cf. Ben Witherington III, “Christ,” *DPL* 98.

<sup>15</sup> In its seven other NT occurrences, this verb means “determine, appoint, fix” (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 10:42; 11:29; 17:26, 31; Heb 4:7). Kruse (*Romans*, 45n31) argues that the background to Paul’s statement is the promise to David in 2 Sam 7:5–16 and the divine decree in Ps 2:7. Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1.61–64.

<sup>16</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 49. Moo rightly argues that the need to demarcate the second occurrence of “Son of God” in v. 4 from the first occurrence in v. 3 strongly favors reading the second as “Son-of-God-in-power.”

<sup>17</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:62. CSB “the resurrection of the dead” implies that the general resurrection began with the resurrection of Jesus. Cf. 1 Cor 15:20–22; Wright, “Romans,” 419.

LXX) of Ps 51:11 and Isa 63:10–11.”<sup>18</sup> The sense could be that the establishment of Jesus as Son-of-God-in-power was by the operation of God’s Spirit or that his resurrection was by means of the Spirit. Alternatively, the sense is that the gift of the Spirit is the manifestation of his power as the exalted Christ and so “the guarantee of his having been appointed Son of God in might.”<sup>19</sup>

Like the preceding clauses, “Jesus Christ our Lord” stands in apposition to “his Son” in v. 3 and provides a further description of the one who is the content of the gospel. Jesus’s messiahship is affirmed by the title “Christ,” while the designation “our Lord” expresses both his “cosmic majesty and his status as master of the believer.”<sup>20</sup> Various combinations of these titles appear with the name Jesus at critical points throughout Romans (1:4, 7; 4:24; 5:1, 11, 21; 6:23; 7:25; 8:39; 13:14; 14:14; 15:6, 30; 16:18, 20), mostly indicating a climax or turning point in the argument. Paul’s gospel outline in 1:3–4 is Jewish in character, but its applicability to a Gentile audience becomes clear as the letter proceeds, climaxing in the challenge of 15:7–13.

**1:5.** Returning to the subject of his divine calling (v. 1), Paul claims to have received “grace and apostleship” through the mediation of the risen Lord Jesus (“through him”). The expression *χάριν καὶ ἀποστολήν* could be read as a hendiadys, with the second term defining the particular application of the first term (“the grace of apostleship”).<sup>21</sup> On the road to Damascus, the grace of God was manifested in bringing the great persecutor of Christians to faith and

<sup>18</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 15. Less likely is the view of Calhoun (*Paul’s Definition*, 136) that “the spirit of holiness” refers to “the part of (Christ) that continues to exist in his exalted state, the main ingredient of his resurrected body.”

<sup>19</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:64. In Acts 2:32–36, resurrection, ascension, and pouring out the Spirit are linked. Brendan Byrne (*Romans*, SP [Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996], 39) says that at his resurrection Jesus entered into “the new age marked by the Spirit (‘the Spirit of holiness’).” Cf. Wright, “Romans,” 418–19; Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 482–84.

<sup>20</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 50. Kruse (*Romans*, 47) points out that in the city of Rome, where Caesar claimed to be lord, this Christian confession would have been a bold acknowledgment of Jesus as a greater power with heavenly authority.

<sup>21</sup> Moo (*Romans*, 51) compares the use of *χάρις* with reference to gifts and ministry in 12:3; 15:15 (cf. 1 Cor 3:10; 15:10; Eph 4:7, 10). See comment at 3:24 about the grace of God in salvation.

giving him a distinct ministry to fulfil (cf. Acts 9:1–19; Gal 1:15–16). The authorial plural “we have received” is best understood as a way of speaking about this unique experience.<sup>22</sup> The purpose of Paul’s calling is outlined in the three expressions that follow.

First, his *essential task* was “to bring about the obedience of faith” (εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως [lit. “for the obedience of faith”]; cf. 16:26). This pregnant expression has been understood in a variety of ways. Most commonly, the genitive πίστεως (“of faith”) is either taken to refer to the source of obedience (“the obedience that comes from faith”) or it is taken as a genitive of definition (“the obedience that consists in faith”).<sup>23</sup> Both approaches are supported by parallels elsewhere in Paul’s writings, but the critical question is how to interpret the phrase in this particular context. Linked with Paul’s claim to be an apostle set apart to proclaim the gospel of God, “the obedience of faith” means “obedience to the gospel’s call to believe in God’s Son, that is, the obedience that consists in faith.”<sup>24</sup> However, Paul later asserts that a genuine faith in Christ will lead to a life of obedience (6:15–23), then he spells out what that involves in practical, everyday terms (12:1–15:13). Romans concludes with another allusion to Paul’s role in God’s plan to “advance the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles” (16:26). As well as engaging in primary evangelism (15:18–21), he expounds the gospel to Christians in the light of what the Scriptures reveal (15:14–17). So neither “the obedience that consists in faith” nor “the obedience that comes from faith” may be sufficient to convey the meaning of Paul’s deliberately ambiguous expression (CSB maintains the ambiguity by translating

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<sup>22</sup> Dunn (*Romans 1–8*, 16) and Jewett (*Romans*, 109) suggest that Paul could have included others in this category, but this flies in the face of his distinctive appeal to the Romans about his God-given role in 1:1–15 and 15:15–32, his argument in Gal 1:1–2:10, and Luke’s various representations of Paul’s calling in Acts.

<sup>23</sup> Cranfield (*Romans*, 1:66) lists seven alternative renderings of the expression and concludes that it means “the faith which consists in obedience.” Glenn N. Davies (*Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study of Romans 1–4*, JSNTSup 39 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990], 28–30) argues for “an obedience motivated by and dependent upon faith.”

<sup>24</sup> Kruse, *Romans*, 51. Paul immediately goes on to give thanks for the fact that the *faith* of the Roman Christians is being reported “in all the world” (1:8), but in 16:19 he says, “The report of your *obedience* has reached everyone.” Paul’s gospel preaching is designed to bring about the obedience of Israel and the nations, according to 10:16; 15:18.



it literally). Both meanings must be held together, suggesting the translation “faith’s obedience” or “believing obedience.”<sup>25</sup>

Second, Paul’s *sphere of ministry* is identified by the expression “among all the Gentiles” (ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν), which is found again in 16:26. The word “all” is significant here and suggests that the sociopolitical rendering “nations” rather than “Gentiles” might be better.<sup>26</sup> The apostle had a significant role in bringing the blessing promised to Abraham to “all the peoples on earth” (cf. Gen 12:3; 17:4–6; 22:17–18; Rom 4:13–25; Gal 3:6–29). Paul did this by preaching the gospel to Gentiles everywhere but also to Jews who were dispersed among the nations, calling them to acknowledge their Messiah and enjoy the benefits of the new covenant inaugurated by the death of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:1–18) (see §2.7).

Third, the *ultimate aim* of this international ministry is revealed by the expression “for the sake of his name.” Paul’s commission was to represent the Lord Jesus and make his character and will known among the nations. He viewed himself as the personal envoy of the risen Christ.

**1:6.** As a bridge to the formal address and greeting in v. 7, Paul uses the emphatic expression “including you who are also” (ἐν οἷς ἔστε καὶ ὑμεῖς). This identifies the readers as being “among the nations” and therefore falling within the sphere of his apostolic ministry. They are marked out from the nations as those who are “called by Jesus Christ” (κλητοὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, cf. 8:30; 9:24). This refers to “the powerful and irresistible reaching out of God in grace to bring people into his kingdom.”<sup>27</sup> Paul may not have played a direct part in God’s calling of the Roman believers to faith in Christ, but

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Don B. Garlington, “The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans Part 1: The Meaning of *hypakoē pisteōs* (Rom 1:5; 16:26),” *WTJ* 52 (1990): 224. Several recent commentators argue similarly for a “both/and” understanding of Paul’s expression: e.g., Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 17; Moo, *Romans*, 51–53; Schreiner, *Romans*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> The noun ἔθνη is normally translated “Gentiles” when a religious distinction between Israel and other people is implied by the context. But the term can be rendered “nations” and include Israel, especially when modified by “all” (as in 1:5; 16:27).

<sup>27</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 54. God’s call is another way of talking about his choice of individuals to belong to Christ and experience the benefits of his saving work (1 Cor 1:26–31). The call comes through the preaching of the gospel by human agents in the power of the Spirit (1 Thess 1:4–5; 2 Thess 2:13–14). Contrast the special use of “called” in Rom 1:1 with reference to Paul’s apostolic vocation.

he wants to visit them and impart “some spiritual gift” to strengthen them (v. 11). Put another way, he wants to have a fruitful ministry among them “just as . . . among the rest of the Gentiles” (v. 13). This letter is a first expression of that ministry (15:15–16) and a preparation for his projected visit (15:23–32). Even if their number included a number of Jewish believers (cf. 16:3–16), it would be reasonable for Paul to regard these Christians as falling within his sphere of responsibility as “an apostle to the Gentiles” (11:13).<sup>28</sup>

**1:7.** Three complementary expressions in the dative case constitute the formal epistolary address: “to all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints.” “All” is in an emphatic position: their leaders are not singled out, and they are not described as a church. This may have been because a number of house groups in Rome did not meet as one assembly and the leaders were dispersed among them (cf. 16:3–16; §2.5).<sup>29</sup> God’s love for them (5:5–8) and his calling of them to be “saints” (κλητοῖς ἁγίοις) set them apart from the other citizens of Rome. God’s love is impartial and is experienced by all who believe the gospel about his Son.

They are “saints” because they are “called by Jesus Christ” (v. 6). Israel was called to be a “holy nation” (Exod 19:6 LXX, ἔθνος ἅγιον), meaning that those whom God rescued from Egypt were “set apart” to belong to God as his own special possession, to reflect his character and will to the nations. This holy status is now the privilege and responsibility of Jews and Gentiles who have responded to the gospel about God’s Son and yielded their allegiance to him (Rom 10:9–13; 11:11–32). Paul regularly describes Christians as “saints” or “holy ones” (ἅγιοι), indicating that they are now the sanctified community, God’s new covenant people, set apart to be faithful and obedient in every aspect of their lives (e.g., 8:27; 12:13; 15:25–26, 31; 16:2, 15). In common parlance the word “saint” is wrongly used to identify especially holy people, thus obscuring a

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:68. See more fully the assessment of Roman Christianity by Jewett, *Romans*, 59–74.

<sup>29</sup> Dunn (*Romans 1–8*, 19) follows those who suggest that there may have been factions or at least some tension between different groups of Christians in Rome. See my Introduction I.A. However, Moo (*Romans* 54) does not think much should be made of Paul’s failure to address himself to the “church” in Rome since he does not consistently use the word in his letter openings (cf. Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1). See also Schreiner, *Romans*, 37.

precious NT way of identifying *all* true believers. The designation “in Rome” is missing from v. 7 (and “to Rome” from v. 15) in a few ancient manuscripts, but the earliest and best texts include a specific address to Christians in Rome here.<sup>30</sup>

The concluding formula in v. 7b is exactly the same as in 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil 1:2; Phlm 3 (abbreviated in Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2). A wish-prayer (χάρις ὑμῶν, “grace to you”), instead of the ordinary Greek greeting (χαίρειν, “greetings”; cf. Acts 15:23; 23:26; Jas 1:1), refers to the grace of God that is mentioned numerous times in Romans. “Peace” (εἰρήνη, translating שָׁלוֹם) was the ordinary greeting of the Semitic world (e.g., Gen 43:23; Judg 19:20; 1 Sam 25:6), presumably here identifying the outcome of Christ’s saving work as “peace with God” (Rom 5:1).<sup>31</sup>

Paul seems to be using these terms here, as he does elsewhere in Romans (as well as in all of his other letters), to epitomize in compressed fashion something of the fullness of the Christian proclamation: that through the “grace” of God our Father, as expressed in the work of Christ (e.g., Rom 5:15–21), there has been brought about “peace” with God, as effected through the work of Christ (e.g., Rom 5:1–11).<sup>32</sup>

“God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” are together the source of these blessings, showing again Paul’s high Christology. Believers already enjoy “grace and peace,” but the apostle’s wish-prayer effectively asks for his readers to keep experiencing the benefits (cf. 15:5; thirteen comments).

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<sup>30</sup> Bruce M. Metzger (*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [New York: American Bible Society, 1994], 446) considers that these omissions could be interpreted “either as the result of an accident in transcription, or, more probably, as a deliberate excision, made in order to show that the letter is of general, not local, application.” The travel details in 15:23–32 confirm that the letter was originally directed to the Christians in Rome but shorter versions were later sent to other churches.

<sup>31</sup> Cranfield (*Romans*, 1.71–72) discusses more fully the background to Paul’s usage here and its meaning.

<sup>32</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 381. Longenecker (204–25) discusses epistolary conventions in the ancient world and how they apply to this letter.

*Bridge*

Paul claims to be a personal envoy of Jesus Christ, with a divine commission to evangelize the nations and apply the gospel to every situation he encounters in the churches (cf. 16:25–27; Eph 3:1–12). The opening challenge of this letter is for the Romans to acknowledge his authority in writing to them as he does. Given the universal significance of Paul’s divine calling (1:5–6), Christians in every age and place are faced with the same challenge. We either acknowledge or deny Paul’s God-given authority by the way we respond to his teaching and apply it in our own context. Foundationally, Paul’s gospel focuses on the fulfillment of God’s promises in the person of his Son, the victorious Messiah, who calls people everywhere to acknowledge him with “the obedience of faith,” and to experience the grace and peace he has to offer. To what extent does our presentation of the gospel convey these biblical perspectives? Do we proclaim a God-centered gospel, or are we mostly concerned about responding to human needs and aspirations? What place does the fulfillment of OT expectations have in our understanding of the gospel today? Have we so modified the message to suit our culture that we obscure or lose the foundational truths Paul addresses in this letter? Are we gripped by the privileges and responsibilities associated with being the new covenant people of God in a world where many are indifferent to the gospel and others determined to resist its message?

**B. Thanksgiving, Prayer, and Thematic Introduction (1:8–17)**

<sup>8</sup>First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because the news of your faith is being reported in all the world. <sup>9</sup>God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in telling the good news about his Son—that I constantly mention you, <sup>10</sup>always asking in my prayers that if it is somehow in God’s will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup>For I want very much to see you, so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, <sup>12</sup>that is, to be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.

<sup>13</sup>Now I don’t want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I often planned to come to you (but was prevented until now) in order that I might have a fruitful ministry among you, just as I