



REFLECTIONS FROM THE BOOK OF ROMANS: The Gospel Himalayas

SERGIO R. TANGARI

REFLECTIONS FROM THE BOOK OF ROMANS

The Gospel Himalayas

My goal in writing reflections from the book of Romans are the following: First, *to encourage you* the reader that if you will pay attention to the words on the page and listen carefully you will mine a lot of truth for life without the need of a commentary or any secondary source. That is, “take up and read” to enrich your soul Christian.

Second, I write *to give you a model* of how observations can be done in scripture that do not read into the text something foreign to the author’s intent. This will help you experience the joy of discovery and increase your confidence in your ability to comprehend God’s word.

Third, by doing the above my hope is that *you will be able to hear God’s voice* all the more clearly because it is the word of God that is forever settled in heaven, and not our subjective impressions however valid they may be. That is, we have a more sure word of prophecy according to Peter—meaning the inscripturated word of God—as opposed to a glorious experience we may claim to have (2 Peter 1:16-21). Too often we Christians have bizarre ideas of what “God” is supposedly speaking to us and when it contradicts the Bible, be assured we are not hearing his voice.

ROMANS 1:1-7 “PAUL’S INTRODUCTION ESTABLISHES HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY AND CHRIST AS THE PREEMINENT MESSAGE” Part 1

Paul begins this letter by immediately identifying himself as Christ’s “*bond-servant*” (V.1), owned by the Master and thus not free-lancing with the message about to be revealed. This means he takes his orders from Christ Jesus, the promised Messiah, the one of whom the Law, the Prophets and the Writings spoke. He is “*called as an apostle*” (V.1b) which means that God had a special specific plan for Paul—to be an apostle—to be a messenger bearing the king’s name heralding the king’s message through the king’s decree.

Paul is “*set-apart for the Gospel of God*” which is the message of God’s story, God’s good news, not about Paul’s testimony, nor his manner of life but of the Creator’s interaction with His creation. That is, the Gospel of God is God-centered ultimately and makes (rightly so) much of God above and beyond the creature. I say this because too often what passes for Christian ministry and gospel preaching is anything but those things because God’s word is ultimately neglected and self-serving egos are ultimately stroked.

Paul continues and says that this gospel of God is that, “*which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures.*” (V.2). Here, Paul is affirming that this gospel does not only originate with God but was previously *promised* by His spokesmen in the written word. In essence, this Gospel of God is *fulfilled Scripture*. What God said He would do, He did in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Moreover, this means that this message is not new but old and has now come to fruition in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

This Gospel of God was, “*concerning His Son who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh*” (V.3). That is, this Davidic king from the tribe of Judah, the line from

which Messiah must come, is the gospel—He is God! Speaking of Jesus, “*who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness Jesus Christ our Lord*”. (V.4) Here, the vanquishing of death is proof of Christ’s claims to Messiahship, Sonship, and Lordship!

As in Acts, so now in Romans the emphasis is put on what God has done through His Son who is the fulfillment of what Moses and the prophets previously had written. This is center stage, this is the gospel word fulfilled revealed in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It’s this Christ who gave Paul grace and apostleship for a purpose: “*to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His names sake*” (V.5). He’s at the very least saying that his message has the *goal* of a faith that’s genuine, true, and real because it is obedient.

Obedient faith is true faith. Obedient faith is trust in action, it’s what new birth produces, it’s what separates the free from the enslaved, it’s what authenticates if one is or is not a kingdom of God person, it’s what separates the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the tares, the lost from the found, and the light from the darkness. All of this is grounded on what God has revealed in Scripture—the Old Testament Hebrew text and the New Testament Greek text (i.e., the Scriptures).

This gospel then, if it’s to be authentic must be sourced in God, reveal God, and thus produce the life of God in those who claim to know God.

ROMANS 1:6-7 “PAUL’S INTRODUCTION: *Spirit Fuel*” Part 2

As previously noted (Vv.1-5), the authentic gospel is sourced in God, reveals God and produces the life of God in believers. Paul continues his introduction to the Romans reminding them that they are specifically called by Jesus Christ—the word (V.6). These who are called are also beloved by God and their description is that of a “saint”. These are the holy ones. Thus the called are called as saints, not sinners (V.7).

Why the mention? Because those who have received this faith are to reflect the Holy One (God) who has rescued them and thus are to be holy as “I AM” is holy. This is the message Israel received—God was choosing (i.e., calling) a people for Himself that would reflect His glory among the nations. This is fulfilled in the new covenant or brought to its consummation where Jew and Gentile alike form one people of God through the Spirit’s activity (Eph.2:11-22). God makes a people for His own possession who previously were under His wrath (Rom.1: 18-20).

Paul continues in verse 7 with this tonic: “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*”. Note that the source of grace and peace is God the Father—no longer are we His enemies terrified by His mention, but as Father we are now his children—through his Son—the I AM, who is the Messiah.

What an introduction packed with Biblical theology, fulfillment of Scripture which includes Gentiles as part of Israel’s common wealth. I’m in Christ and thus don’t need to fear what men may do to me because God the Creator has had mercy on me through his Son. Praise His name!

(SDG)

ROMANS 1:8-17 “PAUL’S INTRODUCTION: *His Personal Tenor*” Part 3

One thing I enjoy in Paul’s letters is how personal he can tend to be. He’s marked by many qualities one of which is his thankfulness to God:

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

Note that the thankfulness is through the mediation of the Son, Paul’s high priest and ours through whom we have God’s attention and ear. Next, Paul is thankful for believers. These were precious to him and yet he never met them. Nevertheless his love for them was genuinely sincere and heartfelt. His gratitude had a reason. He was grateful for their faith being “proclaimed” throughout the whole world”. That is, the gospel of Christ came to them and their words and deeds matched their lives. The reason for writing this letter (which many Romans were already demonstrating) was for the obedience of faith.

The term *faith* in the Bible is very specific and has nothing to do with wishful thinking or believing in something that’s not real or impossible (even if many try to impose that definition on us). Instead, faith is “trust”, “belief”, or “confidence” in that which is true. But trust in God comes as a result of the gospel being preached, heard, understood and loved—obeyed! That is, when it comes to biblical faith it’s a disposition of trust the creature demonstrates in the words and deeds the Creator has revealed. Paul continues and reveals his love for these saints by unceasingly praying for them so that he may impart to them some spiritual gift so they’ll be established:

⁹ For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰ always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established....”

Paul here clarifies that mutual encouragement may take place between he and the Roman saints (V.12). In Paul’s mind they need each other, the differences which come through the church to strengthen God’s people. Too often instead of appreciating our differences in the Body of Christ, our different gift mixes are deplored evidenced in our rejection of them. Not Paul. He explains that often he wanted to come to them but was detained from meeting his goal of making disciples (V.13)

Paul gets even more transparent by admitting that he had to preach, *“¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.”* This was a joyful disposition, *“¹⁵ So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome,”* which reveals his passion and single-mindedness. He gives the reason for his eagerness and its pride—in a good sense (I think), in the gospel of God;

“¹⁶I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.””

He’s not ashamed (but proud) of the gospel because God’s righteousness and power for salvation is made available to those who believe in the gospel, for believers. This gospel produces disciples which is the means for righteousness and living by faith. Up until this point, Paul has made it his mission and message clear that the gospel of Christ is what produces a faith that’s obedient indeed. Thus it is the means to Pauls’ desires of mutual encouragement and this gospel alone has the power to save believers.

This gospel is the gospel of God; it’s the gospel of His Son and instead of being ashamed of the Father and the Son, Paul is ready to declare them to the Romans. Are we ready to do the same to those around us? LORD, may we have the resolve to preach this message of Christ as Paul your servant demonstrated. (SDG)

ROMANS 1:18-32 “WRATH REVEALED BECAUSE OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS”

Paul reminds us that the gospel is Gods power for salvation to everyone who believes, regardless of status or nationality (V.16) because in it God’s righteousness is revealed from “faith to faith” (V.17). That is, this gospel is sourced in *Gods’* righteousness and believers who walk by faith in this God show His righteousness in their lives. How can anyone be saved apart from this gospel? Note that this gospel produces obedience sourced in *righteousness* and is thus lived out by faith or trust.

Why this view? Because the next section explains and describes the results of a life that’s antithetical to this gospel, this righteousness and this faith:

“¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.”

Note the following: *First, God’s wrath is revealed—unveiled—through the sentence decreed by heavens’ court.* It’s against the unrighteousness of men (mankind) not of animals. This argues for a quality possessed only by humans created in God’s image (i.e., the ability to morally reason). As many already intuitively know, our pets are not the problem, we are.

Second, wrath is revealed because the truth is suppressed. This argues for a state of affairs that’s actually real not illusory, where the creature deliberately resists the Creators demands. This “unrighteousness” which is contra God’s “righteousness” Paul will soon explain. Contextually however, righteousness can be described as the activity of living dependently on God through submitting to His gospel, to His Son and is thus “the obedience of faith”.

Third, evidently rebels possess the knowledge of God because God has made it plain to them. Thus, one can't justifiably say, "not enough evidence", a la Bertrand Russell. In fact, ignorance is impossible to claim before the judge of heaven and earth who sees all. Paul continues and explains why:

"²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Fourth, this knowledge comes through creation. Not only does God place the knowledge of Himself in every one ever born, He provides nature as a secondary means to such knowledge. This sentence goes contra the Darwinian evolutionary noetic structure that denies any immaterial realities and affirms only that physical (i.e., matter) entities exist. Creation reveals God's *invisible attributes*, such as a mind which is required to explain the design detected in this world. It reveals God's artistic acumen through the myriad of creatures, landscapes and starry heavens. Clearly the earth is a masterpiece calling for particular usage and care which requires a delicate balance between humans and all creatures.

Creation also reveals God's "*eternal power and nature*". An accident is not the cause of creation, but an all-wise, all-powerful, all-benevolent Creator is. He provides the necessary conditions for the earth to flourish (e.g., sun, rain, seasons, etc.). The point here is that God's wrath is justly revealed from heaven because the creature knowingly decided to rebel against the LANDLORD of creation by not acknowledging His existence. These choices had horrible results plundering rebels into a state of "abnormality", i.e., contra their intended design:

"²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

When the creature is the measure of all things, humanity ends up trading in gold for glitter, life for death. That's what idolatry produces. The road to idolatry is marked by a *dishonorable and thankless heart*. Idolatry can be defined as, "the act of disproportionately treasuring created things over against the Creator". I can't think of any greater insolence than ignoring the One responsible for our existence. But that's exactly what happened here. Idolatry comes from an ungrateful heart and results in a darkened mind—they *became futile in their thinking....* It's ironic and sobering that those who fancy themselves "enlightened" are too often blinded by their own rebellion. The creature here becomes obtuse not astute revealed through *what* they love.

This foolishness is evident by what was exchanged; *the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man...* The eternal One was replaced by the temporal creature or image of it such that destruction resulted. We have been created and designed to worship God alone for our highest good, but when the reverse occurs (i.e., worship the creation, and thus commit idolatry) we are plunged into the abyss. When people dishonor God they do so at the expense of dishonoring themselves and their loved ones. So God in response to such rebellion does something:

“²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. ²⁵ For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”

God’s response here is to “*give them over*” to what they crave. That’s sobering. Dishonor the giver of your life and what you “crave” He will make sure you indulge in. The craving of course is the *lusts of their hearts to impurity* so that these lusts become the cause of their bodies being dishonored. If God is dishonored (i.e., not being properly related to as Creator and master) then the creature is dishonored by how they use their bodies (v.24b), that is, by not properly relating to each other as image bearers.

God gave them over for a purpose and the reason is that they *exchanged* the truth of God for a lie. Again, this unrighteousness of suppressing the truth arises which makes much of the creature and ignores the Creator. There’s a key sentence here revealing how ludicrous the exchange is to worship the creature rather than the Creator, “*who is blessed forever. Amen*”. Somehow, the lie is believed by the creature (who is temporary) that true happiness can only be found by rebelling against the Creator (who is eternal). Paul says that the opposite is true.

This Creator is blessed, happy, joyful, content, etc., always and forever, not miserable, grumpy, or discontent like the creature too often seems to be. Why the misery? Because the creature when worshipped is not living according to design and thus self-destructs. Lasting joy eludes them because they lack the resources the Creator only possesses.

This dishonor/honor, truth/lie, corruptible/incorruptible dichotomy is demonstration the contrast between *righteousness* and *unrighteousness*. There’s a way things *ought to be* according to Paul, and because of the creatures rebellion, God’s wrath has justly been revealed, as he further explains:

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

²⁸ And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; ³² and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

The wrath of God is manifest by Him giving human beings over to their own lusts, be it; homosexuality, expressed murder, strife, gossip, slander, etc. The point is that because the great *exchange* took place between the creature and their Creator, death rather than life resulted. Why? Because the creature rebelled against the Creator's design of how to live (dependently on Him), God thus expressed His wrath, and continues to do so.

This state of affairs is precisely *why* the gospel is such good news and Paul is so eager to preach it. The gospel must be preached because all men are *without excuse and have rebelled against the righteous Creator God* whose final revelation is with the gospel of His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. (SDG)

ROMANS 2:1-16 “GOD IS JUST IN METING OUT WRATH TO JEW & GENTILE ALIKE”

Chapter one established why Paul was so eager to preach the gospel of God the Son, Jesus of Nazareth—because God's just wrath has been poured out, revealed, toward the creature (humans, and the whole created order) because humanity exchanged God's glory, righteousness and truth for a lie, unrighteousness and perversion. Rebellion is thus justly judged and God unfolds this truth through the behavior in which image bearers choose to revel.

In this section (Vv.1-16) Paul continues to explain why God's wrath is not only just, but as such, is also impartial (both Jew and Greek—all people—are under condemnation), calling everyone to account. He begins by stating:

“Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ² And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.”

First, note that the *“therefore”* references his previous argument in chapter 1:24 and further to verse 18, where *“God's wrath is revealed”*. This wrath, as previously noted, is just because men rebelled knowingly, not in ignorance. That is why the text three times repeats the phrase, *“God gave them over”* (Vv.24, 26, 28). This seems to demonstrate the culpability of the creature and the rightness of the judge's sentence.

Second, those passing judgment are justly condemned because they don't practice what they preach. This is not righteousness but unrighteousness. It's not the obedience of faith but the disobedience of wickedness. And, it seems to be directed at Jews who pride themselves in having the very Law they *break!* How? They break it by not bowing to Jesus—the author and fulfillment of that Law.

Paul here assures the reader that merely hearing the word without doing it *is* unrighteousness and God justly condemns *that* also. These are storing up wrath for themselves on the day God rewards each person according to their deeds (Vv.3-6). Thus, up to this point, rebellion by the creature has brought just wrath from the Creator and a final day of judgment awaits us all. What will this day bring to people?

“⁷to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.”

In other words, those who submit to the gospel of Christ will receive eternal life, but those who reject it will receive their just damnation. How did I come to that conclusion? Only those who are just (1:17) live by faith or trust in the God of creation. This faith produces the fruit of obedience (however *imperfectly*) toward the Son of God which is evidenced in the refusal of the creature to exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for a false god (1:23). These obey the truth unlike the unrighteous who suppress it (1:18, 23).

A word on suppressing the truth: while this marks the non-believers bent, even believers at times fall into this pit of sin. It's not that a believer can't and won't from time to time suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness, it's that now as God's adopted child, their life is not bent toward this, but toward honoring the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent.

Paul explains that the object of our worship determines whether eternal life or wrath await. If the Creator is worshipped, then life eternal results, but if the creature is adored, then eternal condemnation is the end. This day awaits all humanity—Jew and Greek alike and each one will be recompensed accordingly by the impartial God of creation (2:9-11).

He continues his thought on our recompense and affirms that whether or not one has the Law, they will be judged for the light they possess (2:12-15):

“¹⁶ ...on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”

The apostle's gospel is rife with the Day of Judgment. All is not well for the hearer. Much introspection is called for to both Jew and Gentile alike. This reminds us of the obedience of faith (1:5) which is Paul's aim among the Gentiles. It's a life energized by the living God which causes a life to be bent toward him.

God is not partial; judgment awaits us all (Jew and Gentile). Therefore, we should take another look at our lives and see if it comports with Paul's gospel. Here, the lip and life match. If they don't, we should repent and receive God's mercy. (SDG)

ROMANS 2:17-29 "JEWS ARE JUDGED BY THE LAW"

God's impartiality in judgment is seen now even as He deals with the Jews. For even if they're circumcised and have the oracles of God (Vv.17-21) but don't obey its commands to not steal, commit adultery, and thus abhor idols, then they too are judged as lawbreakers who dishonor God. In fact this disobedience is the cause of God's name being blasphemed among the Gentiles (Vv.21-24).

Moreover, true circumcision is not an outward physical reality but an inwardly motivated act to do God's will. That is, if the circumcised man is a lawbreaker, circumcision is of no use:

"²⁵ For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?"

If I properly get Paul's argument, he's saying that both Jew and Gentile alike will be judged according to the light they have. Contrary to what many professing Jews claim today, the Jew derives no benefit from his circumcision and Law if there's disobedience. Jews are justly condemned, for even though they have Scriptures' light, they neglect it and thus demonstrate they are not really God's covenant people. They are "nominal" Jews (i.e., Jewish in name only, not in practice).

This also applies to us who call ourselves Christians but in practice are worse than non-believers. God is serious about obedience to His commands and to think otherwise is to think contrary to the gospel message. For true faith produces obedience, while imperfectly, nevertheless obedience is the fruit.

How does the Gentile judge the Jew in this context? Perhaps by exposing their hypocrisy by obeying God's law. For the Gentile, though not having the LAW does it, which shows that they are a covenant person and judge of the Jew as a result. This is what it seems Paul is saying (E.g., consider Jesus' parable of The Good Samaritan to the Jews). Paul continues and says:

"²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."

Paul is clearly saying here, that outward signs—circumcision—without corresponding obedience to God—shows it's a counterfeit faith, not produced by the Spirit of God. Mere religious observance is meaningless before Heavens' court if the circumcision of the heart hasn't taken place via the Spirit of truth which *is* what produces obedience that honors God. Here, Jewishness seems to equal the letter of the Law which is void of God's life evidenced by the praise of men.

In a nutshell, Paul is saying that everything the Jews are trusting in that does not conform to the revelation of Jesus Christ in Paul's gospel is not from God, the author of the Ten Commandments, but from the creature who suppresses the truth of God in unrighteousness.

The theme of pride here surfaces between Jew and Gentile. Paul is telling the Jew that religious pedigree is worthless if it's not accompanied by obedience to the Law for the real Jew is not just a hearer of the word but also a doer of it. If the *doing* is not evidenced, *deception* has a chokehold on the individual.

Up to this point, the people of the Book of Scripture and of Nature are guilty before God because of their suppressing the truth of God in unrighteousness. Therefore their condemnation is just. So if the Jew disobeys the Law there's no profit for them or the rest of humanity. Knowing this, it's understandable why Paul was not ashamed of the gospel for it alone can rescue rebels from God's wrath. Thus the target group for said news is all mankind. (SDG)

ROMANS 3:1-20: "IS THE ADVANTAGE OF THE JEW NULLIFIED BY UNBELIEF?"

The previous section of Romans clearly declares that all mankind is under God's just wrath, for the light God provided through nature and scripture was obscured by lies, the pinnacle of which is the great exchange of the Creator's glory for the creatures. So Paul begins this section of text with a question:

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

These verses follow Paul's explanation of what true circumcision is—that which the Spirit produces, which the Law of Moses was never intended to do, namely, give the believer a heart of flesh where obeying God is a delight rather than a list of to do's (2:28-29).

The benefit of the Jew unlike the Gentile is that they have been given the "oracles of God". This refers to both spoken and written Scripture for the community of followers. Unlike general revelation (i.e., God's revelation of Himself through nature/creation), particular revelation (i.e., God's revelation of His will through the Bible) explains to us how to have a redemptive relationship with God (i.e., where He's our friend, not our foe). That is, the Bible reveals to us our origins, our sin problem, and God's remedy for it. That's a *supreme* advantage. But both Jew and Gentile are under God's wrath because they suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness.

When the knowledge of God is suppressed (e.g., through a Darwinian paradigm), for the Jew it's a "double-whammy" because they have "Both Books" if you will and are absolutely without excuse. Paul now asks a question that seems to set-up the remainder of his point: mainly that God is true and every man is a liar:

"³ What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, "That You may be justified in Your words, And prevail when You are judged."

Unbelief can't nullify, or do away with God's faithfulness which here I take to mean His revelation in creation and scripture. That is, Jewish advantage is removed when instead of placing their trust in the Creators' word; it's placed in the creatures' word. When this occurs God is shown to be true and man a liar. Only one word can *always* be trusted and that's God's word, not mans'. The reason is because this *word* flows from His *holy character* which is incapable of lies, thus, when God judges, its spot on, never tainted, it's always in accord with His truth and will.

Thus far, the Jewish advantage of possessing the word is nullified when it's discarded and disobeyed (i.e., not trusted). This however does not change God's truthfulness when liars deny His truth. So Paul asks:

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

How does my unrighteousness show God's righteousness? I think we compare them (i.e., my ways vs. God's ways). God reveals the truth of who He is and what He has created; I suppress that truth and replace it with my lie. By doing this, I deny God's design for all of life and make up my own. We live in a culture that's rife with this decease where the creature is the measure of all things and thus "creates" their own reality.

Again, there's the comparison of my unrighteousness with Gods' righteousness, or my wickedness compared to His holiness. He is seen to be true, and I am exposed as a liar. Why then would someone think God to be unjust by pouring out wrath since He "needs" our sins to show how glorious He is? This seems to be what Paul is arguing. In other words, the creature is God's dual opposite (e.g., evil vs. good). But that doesn't work because He's the self-existent Creator and we are contingent, needy creatures. God doesn't need us for *any* "benefits" but we need Him for *every* grace. Paul is stating that the grounds on which God can and does judge is his righteousness.

Thus we are rightly judged as sinners and condemned by God while simultaneously our lie abounded to God's glory (v.7) as has already been declared (Vv.8-18). Paul hates it when the truth of God is twisted and anticipates such acts when he states, "Let us do evil that good may come?" Their condemnation is just" (V.8). Does God *need* our sin to show forth His holiness, or our lie to demonstrate His truth, or our unrighteousness to reveal his righteousness? The answer is no because first, God is ontologically holy, true and righteous. As the self-existent One, He already possesses the properties or attributes mentioned. Secondly, within the Trinitarian Godhead, these attributes are shared and demonstrated between the Father, Son and Spirit. Thus the creature is not needed for these qualities to be expressed by the divine being.

After describing the just wrath of God upon rebellious mankind, Paul declares: "*There is none righteous, not even one.*" (Vv.10-11); "*All have turned aside, together they have become useless*" (vv.12-17); "*there is no fear of God before their eyes*" (V.18). This is a weighty indictment that before the holy, true, righteous God, we are all guilty. Paul is still dealing with the benefit of the Jew which is nullified through the disobedience of the law and continues:

"¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

The Jew is under the law which is the yardstick God uses to justly keep them accountable. The purpose of the law is to shut men's mouths to answer for their misdeeds. And all have sinned, thus all are in trouble. The reason for this is because law keeping can't justify anyone before God. That was never its purpose. Instead, the purpose of the law was and is to give us the knowledge of sin. How? It puts forth Gods' holy requirements for living that we can't accomplish on our own power.

That's a bleak reality. Jew and Gentile are rightly condemned. Both are found to be liars, useless and with no fear of God. And what seems to benefit the Jew is nullified by their lack of trust in the word of truth. Everyone then is guilty before the Holy Creator. (SDG)

ROMANS 3:21-31: "WHICH LAW REMOVES BOASTING: THE LAW OF WORKS OR THE LAW OF FAITH?"

Paul continues his argument about how all are justly under God's wrath Jew and Gentile alike, and that the law was never intended to justify anyone before God. He says:

"But now, apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,..." (V.21)

Here may be the Jews second advantage. Recall Jesus came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel—that was his mission. His apostles were to take his message to the Gentile world. Thus, the oracles of God which were entrusted to the Jew gave witness to God’s righteousness apart from the Law. And yet this Law and Prophets are putting their stamp of approval on God’s righteousness but how?

“...even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe, for there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” (Vv.22-23)

God’s righteousness (i.e., He always does what is just, true, beautiful and holy) is shown through those who put their trust in Jesus Christ’s work on Calvary’s cross. It’s the only rescue for Jew and Gentile alike. Why this righteousness manifested is because all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. What’s the glory of God here? It’s the opposite of what the creature wanted in chapter 1 where the “infamous exchange” took place, the infinite for what is finite, the greater for the lessor, the creator for the creature. It’s all backwards!

Remember, the glory of God is first, His wrath against all unrighteousness (1:18) because He’s righteous; secondly, His glory is the self-disclosure of attributes in creation (1:19-20); third, His glory is revealed in the truth of things designed (1:25, 32). In other words, the glory of God as described above, is the perfections of His being demonstrated through just punishment on obstinate creatures refusing to live in accordance with the Creator’s design. But as Paul further explains, God’s glory is not just manifest in wrath but also in mercy or *justification*:

“²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;”

Note here that the glory of God is magnified by justifying (acquitting) as *a gift* sinners who trust in Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. And this act of redemption (i.e., a term meaning to buy out of the slave market) was a propitiation (i.e., a sacrifice that satisfied God’s wrath) publicly demonstrated not hidden (e.g., Prophets of Baal and Elijah). This was done for a purpose:

“²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

It seems that through Christ’s sacrifice the sins previously committed and unpunished were paid for to demonstrate God’s justice—His righteousness where sin’s penalty had to be paid. Thus God in His forbearance was not unjust in staying David’s execution after his adultery and murder, for Christ at the proper time in history would pay also for his sins.

This was all God's doing, His purpose—rescue apart from works of the law through faith in Christ's work on the cross. And while some may object, it should be remembered that the Creator alone can do whatever He pleases because of His ontological status (i.e., infinite, self-existent, and the source of all life), not the creature specifically because of his ontological status (i.e., finite, needy, dependent on sources outside the self to exist). Now why did God do this? Paul continues and asks:

“²⁷ Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”

Thus, both Jew and Gentile have redemption apart from the law if they trust in Christ alone. Both Jew and Gentile have no reason for boasting because this redemption is a gift. Thus, God is now glorified through bringing to life in Christ those who were once dead in sins and trespasses. Those who were once unrighteous have been *made* righteous, justified by faith by the Just One. No one gets a “free ride”. The payment for sins *must be made* and *can only be made* by God, not us. Paul now concludes:

“²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.”

Here, he's affirming monotheism. That is, the God of scripture who created is also the one God who sent His Son to rescue all who believe in him—Jesus of Nazareth. Now Paul asks:

“³¹ Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.”

I'm not exactly sure what it means to say that “...we establish the Law”. Perhaps it points to God's righteousness as being witnessed to by the Law and Prophets (V.21), and now that faith has come; fulfillment of God's faithfulness has been demonstrated through Christ's redemption. That is, God's faithfulness to do what He promised is seen as His truth shines and the Law's purpose is fulfilled—by pointing us to Christ. That is, the Law is good, but its' purpose was never intended to make the hearer good (righteous), but rather to point them to Christ Jesus who has come in space time history to *make* his followers righteous, pure and holy. (SDG)

ROMANS 4:1- 8“ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH BEFORE THE LAW WAS GIVEN”

Moving along, from Paul's argument (3:21-31) that the establishment of the Law and the Prophets is the fulfillment of their message in Christ. Here, both Jew and Gentile (who are

presently condemned) can be justified by faith as a gift through grace by the redemption Christ alone offers.

Now, Paul continues unfolding the meaning of justification through grace alone apart from the Law by using Abraham as the example. Consider this:

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,”

Here, it seems to be clear that if Abraham were to be justified by the Law (which he wasn't) he still could not boast before God—point? But Abraham was justified by trusting in God. This trust is not like the employee/employer relationship where the two need each other in order to flourish. Instead, Abraham is receiving God's favor because he trusts in God's word of promise which precedes the Law. The fact is that when one works for something, his wage is earned and justly due. But the way to having righteousness credited to our account (as it was to Abraham) comes by faith alone, not by works as David attests:

“⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. ⁸ “BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.”

Paul seems to be clearly establishing that righteousness is not something our souls intrinsically possess, but is a state of affairs credited to us because the believer trusts in God's word of promise. If that is labeled a “work” then it is a “work of faith/trust”, not a “work of Law”. The former receives praise from God (2:29) and the latter gets the applause of man.

ROMANS 4:9-25“ABRAHAM CREDITED AS RIGHTEOUS APART FROM CIRCUMCISION”

The word credit/credited in this chapter is used eleven times (if my count is correct) and along with righteousness seems to be the focal point. Now how often is righteousness used, what is this quality, and how is this righteousness reached? The term righteousness is used eight times and it is the quality of the kingdom where one is in right standing before the judge of heaven that is credited to Abraham because he believes.

Paul now asks about the *time* in which this righteousness was credited to Abraham: before or after circumcision? Moreover, he asks if this blessing of righteousness is exclusively for circumcised Jews or can uncircumcised Gentiles also partake? Righteousness is for both Jew and Gentile alike. And since Abraham was credited this righteousness before his circumcision

(not after) Paul then concludes that righteousness comes from works of faith, rather than works of law:

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

Then of what significance is circumcision? It’s a sign, a seal of the righteousness of faith, not faith itself:

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

Circumcision given after Abraham’s faith was seen as *a seal pointing to that faith* and also *pointing to God’s promise* that Abraham would be the father of many nations (made of Jew and Gentile) who would birth the faith of father Abraham. This promise came before the Law not after it; it came through the “righteousness of faith”. Paul continues:

“¹³ For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;”

The apostle presents an “if...(elliptical) then” clause which accentuates that either righteousness comes through faith or by Law, not both. If, as many Jews argued, law keeping made one righteous, then Abraham could not be their father because this ex-pagan’s faith was credited to him as righteousness *before* any law was given from Sinai. This is a “titanic” declaration that goes contra Jewish understanding of the purpose of the Law. This next verse is puzzling to me:

“¹⁵ for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.”

Is Paul saying that Law produces in us sin and thus results in the meting out of wrath, but when there’s no law there’s no rule to break? Or is Paul saying that the Law never was designed as a means to achieving righteousness, but to show just how deep the pit of sin in us

really goes, and when it comes to being credited as righteous through faith, Law is totally out of the equation? Maybe both, but Paul explicates this:

“¹⁶ For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,”

Righteousness through faith is what was promised, not through Law, so that Abraham who trusted God’s word of making him a father of many nations is the example to both Jew and Gentile alike. The text says that Abraham’s attitude was a God-centered reality where he knew God had the ability to fulfill what He said, even if with man it was impossible:

“¹⁷ (as it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. ¹⁸ In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” ¹⁹ Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; ²⁰ yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹ and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.”

Abraham was an absolute realist. He knew his body and Sarah’s could not produce a child because of their age and body, but he also trusted that God, the Creator, could do what He promised, because He is God!

Abraham’s faith was consistent with his worldview—if God could create heaven and earth and all it contains, then it’s no big deal for Him to give a *barren* woman and *seedless* man a child. That’s the nature of saving faith! It trusts the word of the Creator, not blindly, but logically. Yes, logically! Paul ensues:

“²² Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. ²³ Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, ²⁴ but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.”

Abraham’s actions revealed the genuineness of his faith. Note that this account occurred before Sinai and was *written down* for our sakes. It’s as if attention is being brought to the **Bible** above any other books which contradict it. We have no excuse of being ignorant because it’s **written**.

This promise (of the Abrahamic faith credited as righteousness) was fulfilled in Christ when he was delivered over by the Father to execution because of our transgressions and He raised Jesus from the grave for our justification (V.25). Thus, the righteousness which comes through faith is that which justifies Jew and Gentile alike. It neither comes through the Law nor circumcision because that was not their purpose. Instead, the righteousness which comes through faith alone is based on God's grace alone evidenced in the fulfilled promise of Christ Jesus the Lord.

ROMANS 5:1-5: "JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE PRODUCES A HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"

After arguing for how one is justified by faith alone apart from the works of the Law—which include circumcision—in chapters (3:21-4:25), Paul now shows the kind of life that's produced in a justified soul:

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God."

Justification by faith entails trust in God's word of promise to Abraham concerning the coming seed (Christ Jesus), which would make him a father of many nations. This word of promise is fulfilled in Christ's work of redemption. Thus, the one trusting (faith) God's promise fulfilled in Christ is *legally made right* (justified) before the court of heaven. Several observations can be noted.

First, *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*. This is the ultimate key, not our faith but our Savior. That is, without Christ's high priestly office, we have no hope. The writer of Hebrews accentuates this by saying that:

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb.4:14-16)

That is, we come boldly to the throne of grace through Christ alone. Without Jesus, there is no hope, there's no access to God—*forever*. But for those who have been justified by faith, access is always granted.

Second, because we've been justified by faith, we not only have peace with God, but we also have *our introduction into this grace by faith in which we stand*. That is, grace is our foundation, never Law. Once we were God's enemies (Rom.1:18-20), but now we are His friends.

Third, *we exult in the glory of God*. This is a peculiar phrase. What is it about God's glory that causes us to exult in hope? I think this refers to the gospel itself which Paul is eager to preach. Because of rebellion, wrath has been poured out, because of Christ's obedience, wrath has been satisfied. Because of the lie, the truth is suppressed and God's wrath is revealed. Because of Christ, both Jew and Gentile have access and are justified by faith. God loves to justify rebels which He demonstrated by sending Christ to the cross!

To exult is depicted in the joy and praise fans express in crescendo fashion when their home team scores a goal (soccer or Fútbol). They leap for joy! In a very similar way, believers in Christ joyfully rejoice in the hope of God's glory which is revealed in the gospel. Paul now brings a twist to this exultation:

"³ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Paul reveals a kingdom truth the unregenerate can't grasp: that we as those who have peace with God can leap for joy in our tribulations. Not because of *it*, but because of the fruit tribulation produces in the believer. There's a cluster of fruit, or a string of pearls tribulation seems to produce in those who love God.

First, *tribulation produces perseverance*. No pain no gain is usually a good maxim. The goal of perseverance is to finish well the race set before us. This means that we finish definitely! In this race the course presents perilous scenarios. At times these make us feel like we're about to be swallowed up. But it won't because secondly, *perseverance produces proven character*. That is, our souls demonstrate a Godward resolve that's produced in the grind of the race we will finish. That's because thirdly, *proven character produces hope*. Hope in what? In God's word of promise yet to be fulfilled even as Abraham demonstrated. The reason hope does not disappoint is because we're born-again. God's Spirit indwells the believer.

Unlike what a Law-keeping Jew might think (that justification by faith will embolden people to sin later), true saving faith produces the life of God's kingdom where trust in His word of promise marks the believer (Hope). Thus, the life of one at peace with God issues forth a holiness of life which emulates Christ Jesus. It's a life which continuously finds strength and joy in the God who is there, in the One who rescued us while we were clueless of our doom. (SDG)

ROMANS 5:6-21: "JUSTIFICATION IS ASSURED THROUGH CHRIST—EVEN AS ADAM'S REBELLION WROUGHT DEATH"

Paul seems to want to assure the Roman believers that their justification is certain because God's work of redemption occurred at the right time:

"⁶ For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the

good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”

Hardships might cause believers to doubt God’s goodness toward them (Vv.1-5), even their actual standing with God as judge. But Paul argues that if while we were God’s enemies He showed His love to us through Christ’s death, now, much more as His friends we must be confident that being justified now by Christ’s blood, God’s wrath is not ever again to be on us.

We are a lot of redeemed, reconciled sinners by the Savior (Vv.10-11). Our state because of Adam’s rebellion assuredly resulted in death (Vv.12-14), but the free gift of God is not like the transgression. This is because the transgression resulted in death and wrath, whereas God’s free gift brought life and mercy.

“¹¹ And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. ¹² Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—¹³ for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”

The two Adams acted, the first disobeyed and thus death reigned, the second obeyed and thus life in Christ reigns. The former brought condemnation to all men, the latter wrought justification for many (Vv.15-19)

“¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. ¹⁶ The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷ For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹ For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”

Finally, the Law came to increase transgression, but in this increase, grace all the more abounded the purpose of which is that even as death reigned because of transgression, even so

grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Christ (Vv.20-21). Here Paul brings attention to the power of grace and righteousness over sin and death. He uses the phrase, “much more” to contrast and heighten God’s favor and instill confidence in the work of Christ over against Adam’s rebellion.

Justification can be banked on more than death which came through the creature Adam because God’s grace and gift of righteousness came through God the Son, whose life would be brought to bear on those who love Him, who love God the Father. That’s amazing grace! (SDG)

ROMANS 6: “JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH RESULTS IN SANCTIFICATION BECAUSE BELIEVERS ARE SLAVES TO GOD”

In the last chapter Paul argued that the believers’ justification is truly certain because God acted in Christ before we came to be. The last Adams’ obedience (Christ Jesus) secures our standing before God because it’s the gift of life which is unlike the first Adams’ rebellion which secured our death. But now that grace has come in Christ, Paul asks a question:

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

Certainly Paul encountered religious Jews who argued that if one is justified by faith through grace then people can go on sinning; living the same rebellious life as before their conversion. That is, “since these people are eternally secure in Christ in their salvation, who cares how they live!” But such a position completely misses the point. The reason is because when believers belong to Christ, his death and resurrection are applied to them so that as Christ presently lives a new resurrected life, we too might walk in that life (Vv.3-4). Paul continues:

“⁵ For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin.” (Vv.5-7)

It seems Paul is pointing to our mystical spiritual union with Christ such that in his crucifixion we actually died to sin and in His resurrection we actually have come to eternal life. Spiritual unions in the Bible, among other things, concern sexual intercourse between two people whether married or not. As the Bride of Christ, this union is real not imagined, it’s spiritual not physical.

The “old-self” is the pre-regeneration self that was dead in trespasses and sins (Eph.2:1-4) which has been killed so that we believers would no longer be slaves to sin. Thus, the purpose of Christ’s crucifixion in which believers are identified, was to release them from the

chains of sin. Thus to think that sin increases and thus makes grace more glorious is to totally miss the point (V.1), for the fruit produced by Christ in believers is a *new life*.

Paul resumes with his argument pointing to Christ's victory over the grave which signifies that death is no longer master over Him and He says a profound truth here:

"¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Christ is the example believers are to follow here. They are to *consider* themselves as *dead* to sin, that is, they are to live in the reality that sin is no longer their master, God is, for Christ has vanquished the grave. Here, Paul is exhorting and encouraging believers to live in the reality of *new birth* which brings *new life*. And where new life exists, the "old-self" which was already killed is to be rebelled against. This metaphor points to the reality of what being in Christ produces. Too often we listen to "old tapes" believing lies about ourselves. Make no mistake about it believer: you are no longer a slave to sin. So don't obey its' commands.

Paul is not denying that sin remains and must be battled, but he's exhorting believers not to be enslaved to sin which Christ conquered, instead:

"¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

The righteous can and do sin, but not because they are under its' mastery (Christ fixed that problem), but because the battle(s) remain to be fought. They however must be fought from the truth that as freed men and women from sin our enemy is relentless and thus we must also be unyielding in battle. Moreover, because believers are under grace, not under the Law (which only increased sin, never was it to produce new birth) this means we have a new master—Christ the Lord of Life. Believer, how much more vibrant would our lives and witness be if we constantly lived in light of this truth.

Paul has thus answered the first objection which was based on the faulty premise that grace would produce increasing sin in believers. No! Grace actually produces new birth, new life and a new master which says, "You shall be holy for I am holy". This new life has been secured by Christ's work of redemption and having said that; Paul does not deny that sin has vanished. For when believers sin and repent grace does shine. What Paul wants to accentuate however is that grace does not produce a sinful lifestyle, but one of sanctification. Paul now asks a second question connected to the first one:

“¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!”

Here he continues explaining that whoever is obeyed (sin or righteousness) to that one we are slaves. The former produces death, the latter generates life (V-16). But as believers once obeyed sin and were thus slaves to death, now in Christ after new birth, they have become slaves of righteousness resulting in sanctification (Vv.17-21). One master produces death, the other master produces life. Note that everyone, according to Paul, is serving something other than themselves. He continues:

“²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. ²² But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul is concluding with what brings benefit and what brings destruction. Sin while pleasurable for a time eventually yields death, but grace and new birth yield a life of grace and sanctification toward God which produces life. Sin’s pay-off is death; graces’ pay-off is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is, if the Law (as described by Paul) is in what we trust to be right with God, then our end is death. But if we trust as Abraham did in the free gift of God’s word of promise fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, then life is our end. This smashes human pride on the one hand but on the other hand it calls for believers to walk humbly before our gracious God and the observant world. (SDG)

ROMANS 7:1-13 “TO BE IN CHRIST ONE MUST BE DEAD TO THE LAW”

Paul now continues his argument from chapter 6 where he argued that we are enslaved to the one we obey whether it’s sin which produces death or grace which results in eternal life (6:22-23). Here, he continues strumming the same note and uses the example of a woman bound by law to her husband while he’s alive. Only after he dies is she freed to marry another without being an adulterous (Vv.1-3). Then Paul makes the connection between the believers union with Christ:

“⁴ Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.”

Here's what I gather from this text. First, though the Law was a good husband, it could never produce life in us because of our sinful nature. When Christ died on the cross, the believers in him also died to the Law so that they may be joined to another husband—to Christ who rose from the dead. We have come to be His bride for the purpose of bearing fruit for God (i.e., sanctification).

The metaphor of husband and wife is penetrating. The purpose of the 1st husband was to show us how sinful our sin is. The purpose of the 2nd husband is to free us from death by vanquishing the grave. Both husbands are good (Law and Christ) but only the latter husband can bring us life through His death. Thus, to be in Christ is to be dead to the Law. If one is not dead to the Law, they don't belong to Christ.

This does not argue for antinomianism (being against the Law) nor for Libertarianism (we are free to sin) but for the actuality that new birth produces—new life which issues forth a life of continuous sanctification. Paul buttresses his argument by recalling our state before and after new birth:

“⁵ For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.”

Paul however anticipates an objection and continues:

“⁷ What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “YOU SHALL NOT COVET.” ⁸ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.”

This section is somewhat tricky. Paul begins affirming that the Law is not sin, but rather is a light that exposes sin (e.g., covetousness) and thus clarifies what sin is (covetousness). Secondly, sin is shown to be such when the commandment is given and the object recoils, flinches and resists that light. Third, when this light of the Law exposes sin, it produces more sin in him, not less.

Now the last phrase, “*apart from the Law sin is dead*” is problematic. First, it could mean that when the Law does not expose sin (because somehow the Law is hidden from us) it does not have the opportunity to replicate itself, nor be amplified through the object's motivation. Second, Paul does argue that both Jew and Gentile are all under sin (chapters 1-2) even if the Gentiles did not have the Law. Now if Gentiles did not have the Law, were they then sinless? Clearly not! Third, according to Adam's rebellion, all men were thrown into a sinful state before the Law came. So were they then sinless? Clearly not!

What I think Paul is referring to is (Vv.1-6) where he explains that being dead to the Law is to be in Christ. Thus, believers are no longer enslaved to sin but to Christ because of new birth. Paul continues his thought:

“⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; ¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; ¹¹ for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹² So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”

I’m not clear on how Paul can say that he was “once alive apart from the Law” since the absence of the Law does not eradicate the reality of sin from our first father Adam, it’s just not exposed. Maybe he means that he thought all was well until the Laws’ light showed him otherwise and thus produced in him death? Because of sin’s deceptive nature, perhaps instead of recoiling at the command Paul thought he could actually perform it without the motive tainted by sin (he was after all a devout Jew).

Paul concludes in a strange way lauding the Law and its characteristics of being holy, righteous and good. He knows an objection is warranted to be raised and continues:

“¹³ Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.”

Paul affirms that the cause of death is sin not the Law which is good. The purpose for this is to show that sin *is* and is utterly sinful. Moreover, it’s just not the cause of death by means of the commandment, but it’s also the effect of death. Plainly put, the Law is neither the cause nor the effect of death—*sin is*; which the Law reveals to be *real and deadly*. That is the purpose of the Law.

That’s why people suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness and that’s why God’s just wrath is on sinful rebels. This section is amazingly profound and troublesome. The extent that God went through to show rebels like me that wrath is just because of sin which has been exposed through God’s holy, righteous and good command is amazing. Moreover, the need to embrace Christ alone as husband is clear in light of the Law’s purpose—to expose sin, not to cleanse it away. Only Christ can cleanse from sin.

It’s troublesome because this truth is so backwards in the lives of many religious people who are trusting in their law-keeping. Only death awaits those who trust in that.

LORD, thank you for the light of your word which brings us truth and life. May I never leave this glorious treasure of the gospel, but may I and Your church proclaim it boldly, kindly, and relentlessly! (SDG)

ROMANS 7:14-25 “THE LAW IS GOOD, BUT THE WAR OF SIN IN BELIEVERS STILL RAGES WITHIN”

Paul continues his argument that the Law is good, but sin remains within him still—even though he’s got new life in him. In verses 14-17 he reveals what seems to be a “schizophrenia” within where he desires to do one thing (obey God), but instead Paul does what he hates (disobeys God). He writes: ¹⁴*For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.* Now what can he be referring to by describing the Law as spiritual? In light of the contrast between the flesh, it seems to mean that the Law righteous, holy and good (c.f., Vv.12-13). Paul continues:

¹⁵For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ¹⁶But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.

I think these two verse support my former view that by the Law being spiritual, it is referring to it being good. Now Paul is in a quandary, and seems puzzled in that new birth is to produce new life and actually does. Nevertheless, it seems there’s still remaining vestiges of the former life within that war in Paul and he thus chooses death rather than life. And when he does what he hates, he’s saying Amen to the Law, to God’s holy command, “you shall not covet” by agreeing that it’s a transgression—sin—which results in death. He continues:

¹⁷So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

My answer to Paul on the surface is, “Paul, you’re the guilty party don’t pass the buck”. “Don’t play the victim and don’t act like Flip Wilson who famously said, ‘the Devil made me do it’”. But am I correct? The caption in my Bible under this section writes, “*The Conflict between Two Natures*”. What is meant by nature and do we assign an outside, unbiblical metaphysical meaning here?

First, there’s clearly a conflict with sin that the Law of God exposes because it is holy, righteous and good. Second, now that Paul is born-again, it seems that sin—the battle of obeying God—still remains and is an evidence of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Third, the term “I” he uses eleven times pointing to his identity. Could it be that Paul means “he” the image bearer or the “individuated self”, or the “new man” in Christ, or the “old man” before Christ?

I would answer yes to the first two, most likely to the third option, and no to the last possibility considered. The reason for the first two options seems self-evident, and the reason for the last two options—the former being much more probable than the last option. This is Paul’s *awareness* of sin and the purpose of the Law which is to expose sin, not to remedy it. Here, Paul seems to be pointing to another reality: sin within the believer *still remains*.

He uses the word “sin” as an entity of sorts which causes rebellion to God’s Law to occur. But is it a “nature”? And, under what category does it belong? I understand Paul is not

or seems to not be making this category distinction, nevertheless assigning two natures to the re-born person is obviously one way to understand this passage. He continues the argument:

“¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. ”

This text argues for and gives the reason for why verse 17 is true. When Paul says that “nothing good dwells within his flesh”, he’s not coming from a dualistic view that matter is evil and spirit is good. That was not the point. Instead, it’s that entity, that parasite, in the soul rebelling against God.

Now when he uses the word “good”, to what does that refer? Contextually it must be the Law which is good, righteous and holy. So, somehow Paul is saying that there’s a “tug-a-war” happening in his soul. On the one hand, in his flesh Paul is rebelling against God’s Law, while on the other hand, a desire to submit to God’s will is remains. He thus continues:

“¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. ²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.”

Notice how he equates evil with sin. What is evil? Evil is disobedience to God’s Law, to His way of thinking and living, to His design. These two verses seem to clarify what the “two natures” means. It’s not that Paul has two “I’s” meaning two distinct natures, but rather that as a redeemed man, unrighteousness remains even though he’s righteous before God. He’s an individuated self that now has a battle previously non-existent in him. When he was dead in trespasses and sins to God, all he could was to sin. But now, because of new-birth, he has the option to obey or disobey God. Thus, though Paul is cleansed, he nevertheless is in process of sanctification.

In my view, Paul affirms the following: *“²¹ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.”* Paul here reveals what he’s discovered—namely that evil/sin remains but so also does the good/obedience to God’s Law and ways obtain. Here’s the battle the believer has, that the non-believer does not possess. Now Paul continues here but the way he uses “law” it takes on a different meaning:

“²² For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,²³ but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”

Could the “inner man” and “my mind” be referring to the same thing? It seems that the term “law” refers not to the Law of God but to the principle God has placed in Paul. That is, there’s a side of him that desires to walk in holiness but there’s a side that continuously battles the “law” or “principle” of sin which manifests in his body? I’d say yes.

The law of God which he agrees with (he desires to obey God's commands—walk in holiness) seems to be akin to the law of Paul's mind because it's waging war against the law of sin and death. Moreover, when he obeys the principle of sin—unrighteous disobedience—he becomes imprisoned to what Paul obeys. He argued this in chapter 6 and is being consistent with the metaphor.

Thus, I see here that Paul has not two natures but one. He's a creature bearing the divine image of the male category. He once was dead to God because of the Law, but now in Christ is alive to God because of imputed righteousness. There are however two principles in Paul's soul: one that's evil/sinful, and one that's good/the one being sanctified because it comports to God's Law—in Christ's obedience we have imputed to us the 2nd Adam's obedience, holiness and goodness. Paul concludes not with gloom but hope and joy:

"²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

The sinful state of human beings, our abnormality as Scheaffer once noted, is a deeply lamentable reality that can only be remedied by the Great physician Christ Jesus the risen Lord. Now that this battle has been exposed, Paul is going to comfort believers who may feel awful because of their battle with sin in chapter 8.

While this chapter has been very cerebral, it's also quite visceral for it demands both mind and body to live out the implications of our struggle, Christ's remedy, and practically working them out daily. How much of this chapter I don't understand remains to be mined. (SDG)

ROMANS 8:1-19 "WE'RE NOT CONDEMNED BECAUSE OF CHRIST'S LOVE FOR US"

Paul continues his thought of the two battle fields in which believers wage war: on the one hand there's the flesh/sin/evil that resides causing Paul to not obey God and somehow partake of death. On the other hand there's the spirit/the regenerated self that loves to obey God and partake of life. The struggle is thus real and can be utterly disheartening, which may cause despair in life. But, because Jesus delivered us from the body of death—sin, we are not under condemnation, for to be in Christ, even though sin beckons, guarantees our right standing before God.

Now to be "set free from the law of sin and death" (v.2) can't mean we don't sin because in chapter 7 Paul deals with our struggle with sin. Instead, it seems to point to the fact that this law within "sin" is not our master, Christ is, and as such we are free to obey God, not unrighteousness. That is, the freedom Christ secured for us was never intended for acts of wickedness, but for humble submission to the Father's will.

But wait a minute. If I'm freed from the mastery of sin to obey God and still find myself obeying the law of sin and death, then in some sense am I free also to disobey God's law? And, from where comes this freedom? Paul comments:

"² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."

This principle of life in Christ comes from the Spirit of life who brings resurrection to our dead souls and that's why we are free (i.e., God's power of life is the source for the power to obey God) to obey God. He argues that Christ did what the Law could never do because of human weakness (sin) and thus through his sacrifice condemned sin on the Cross. Death really died (v.3).

Now, this condemnation of sin was done in order that the *"requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."* (v.4) Paul seems to be arguing that only in Christ, because of his work on Calvary, is the Law's fulfillment accomplished in us. Thus, obedience can only occur because one is in the Spirit—belonging to Christ. That's Paul's argument in verses 5-9:

"⁵ For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷ because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him."

Paul now turns his attention on what it means for one to be "in Christ":

"¹⁰ If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness."

I take this to mean that even though sin remains and the body is dead, nevertheless righteousness reigns and is real because "the spirit" the principle of life abides within. Now Paul seems to further explain the effects of the Spirit's life on our mortal bodies and assures us that as Christ was raised from the grave, we too will rise by the power of the indwelling Spirit (v.11). He thus concludes this subordinate thought:

"¹² So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Notice our obligation is not disobedience but rather obedience to God displayed through the mortification of our sinful acts (Jesus does call disciples to take up the cross and follow). If we live according to the former, Paul says the Spirit is not in us. But if in step with the latter, then we are in Christ. Note his theme of calling for an “obedience of faith”.

What I see Paul saying is that to not fight within is a sign that Christ is not our Shepherd and we are thus in peril of damnation. However, if we are fighting sin it’s a sign that we belong to God. He continues in verses 14-17:

“¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”

Here Paul argues that that the evidence of Sonship is being led by the Spirit of God which is submitted to God’s will; to God’s law. This is astounding for in Christ we can now keep the Law because of our new hearts. Before Christ, the Law only produced death. But wait a minute: didn’t we already die to the Law so that we might be in Christ? Isn’t the Law our old husband? Then in what sense do we keep the Law? I think we keep it as secure children, not as indentured slaves. The former are heirs of the Father’s house, the latter have no such privilege because of sin, because of unrighteousness.

Now, the fact of being heirs is evidenced in us who partake of Christ’s sufferings (v.17). To be in Christ requires us to take up our cross and follow Him. Those hardships evidence the veracity of our profession, they never merit our justification—nothing can but God’s mercy.

Paul now shifts from assuring us of our Sonship by the Spirit if in Christ’s sufferings we are partakers to how the whole created order is suffering. But hold on for Paul says something of great worth we need to consider before continuing:

“¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

What’s this glory to be revealed? Besides a new heaven and a new earth and a new resurrected body it has to be beholding Christ behind the veil of sin. It’s this glory I think was exchanged by the creature (Rom.1), which brought our ruin through God’s wrath. What we formerly rejected in the 1st Adam (God Himself), we have embraced in the 2nd Adam and have been restored because of mercy alone—that’s truly awesome!

ROMANS 8:20-39 “COMPARING PRESENT SUFFERINGS WITH FUTURE GLORY IS INCOMPARABLE”

Paul here seems to springboard from (v.18) to the end of the chapter concerning our suffering. As God's children, our suffering entails fighting the remaining sin but that again does not disqualify us as children because the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we indeed are God's children:

"¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

Now, Paul argues that the sufferings we presently experience are not comparable to the glory in the future to be revealed in us: *"¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."* He then goes on to explain the multifaceted aspects of this glory which is first a creation that's set right again (Vv.19-25). Secondly, this glory will be brought about by the Spirit's intercession for us and the creation (Vv.26-30). And finally, no one or thing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Vv.31-39). Several observations are of note.

First, present sufferings are bearable in light of the hope we presently possess. One ploy demonic spirits use to paralyze believers is to veil this future glory with hardships and often what results is despair. Paul is saying to the believer, "Don't despair, because the eternal glory to be revealed is worth the pain you are momentarily suffering". Many people abandon their pursuit of God because of pain and suffering. There's a breaking point where the creature deems God not worthy to be trusted. Yet, true believers are to press through and trust God in hope.

Biblically, the term "hope" is not wishful thinking but rather it's a confident expectation in God's word of promise. Consider what Paul says:

"¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

I take this to mean that when God gave over Adam and Eve for the lesser glory of the creation over against that of the Creator, the result of this sin was the entire damaging of the created order. This brought a slavery to futility (i.e., things were no longer in harmony with their intended design and the Designer) but were and remain at war with Him.

Secondly, God had a plan to rectify the chaos in hope. Even though this war obtains, God gave over to sin, both Adam and Eve in hope. That is, He had a plan to restore the catastrophic results of sin caused by His children's rebellion and is the proof the rest of creation will once again come into order. The chaos will be dealt with as Paul continues:

"²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. ²³ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."

By "groans" I take Paul to be saying that the creation also suffers because of sin and the pain is likened to "child birth". I understand this to mean that the pain will be worth the wait because of the life which awaits us. Now when Paul says, "we await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies", he seems to indicate that that already as children of God, a future word of promise is yet to be fulfilled. Moreover, this includes resurrected bodies not subject to death or corruption or futility as the rest of creation has experienced.

Third, Paul accentuates how this hope will be realized. The apostle now transitions from the previous state of affairs to inform us how all this hope will be realized through the Spirit's intercession which is always in line with God's will:

"²⁶ In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

We have divine help from beginning to end, for the Spirit prays for us because we lack the requisite knowledge on how to properly pray and thus explains God's purpose in salvation for His present and future children (Vv.28-30).

Why can we trust in future glorification? The reason is because Christ's past mortification of death on the cross and resurrection to new life has been won by the Master (Vv.31-36). Paul says that regardless of life's circumstances (and they can sometimes be unbearable), because of Christ's love for us, we are thus super conquerors (Vv.37-39).

Those who are in Christ are no longer under the sentence of death, yet suffering is real and painful. Nevertheless, suffering is momentary and its pain can't compare to the glory that awaits believers and the creation, where we anticipate our resurrected bodies and the creation is set right. Thus, we can bank on God's word of promise of "hope" because forever his word is settled in heaven. Let God be true and every man a liar—that contradicts Him! (SDG)

ROMANS 9: “GOD’S ELECTION IS NOT UNJUST BUT MERCIFUL”

This chapter begins a new thought in Paul’s letter. The first eight chapters dealt with what the gospel is, why it is the only hope for Jew and Gentile alike, and because in Adam all sinned, everyone is justly under God’s wrath and in need of divine mercy for salvation. This salvation, redemption is a work of God that affects our word and deed. And while this salvation is real, residues of rebellion remain in the believer’s heart such that until final glorification, a war is constantly being waged within.

Now, Paul turns his attention to the theme of Israel and her rejection of the gospel of God. **He first reveals his passion and longing to see his kinsmen according to the flesh saved and loving Christ**, because after all it’s through them that this gospel came (Vv.1-5):

“I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,² that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,⁴ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

Second, he points out however that God’s word has not failed concerning their rejection of Christ because the descendants of Israel actually come through Isaac not Abraham. He explains this further in relation to *the flesh vs. the promise* motif. That is, through Isaac’s seed the Messiah would come, never through Ishmael. This word of promise is a major Scriptural theme pointing to God’s faithfulness to execute His word. Jesus said, *“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”* (Mt.5:18) This means that God always keeps His promises. And what He will and will not do is more certain than the heavens above or the earth below—which accentuate God’s constant faithfulness. And as God told Abraham, so it has come to pass that through Sarah, not Hagar, Messiah would come.

Consider Rebekah’s twins Esau and Jacob which again reveal the motif of God’s certain promise which points to His sovereign will ruling over all rather than man’s finite choosing:

“⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: “through Isaac your descendants will be named.”⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.⁹ For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.”¹⁰ And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our

father Isaac; ¹¹ for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, ¹² it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

This passage clearly demonstrates God's choosing or election of what He has decided to do through Jacob and Esau. I noticed here something previously overlooked: could it mean that God *hating* Esau is equivalent to Him serving his younger brother or is that hate based on what Esau treasured which was a bowl of soup over against his birth-rite? This needs further inquiry, but I'm leaning towards the latter option, not the former. Nevertheless, Paul asks a question he anticipated would be raised:

"¹⁴ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!"

Third, often God is accused of being unjust in light of election but the apostle emphatically says that is never the case. Thus he proceeds to recount Pharaoh's hardened heart and concludes that God chooses who will receive mercy and who does not. The reason:

"¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." ¹⁸ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

God had a purpose for Pharaoh's rise to power and that was so that His power and Name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth. This means that the central reason for God's purpose in his dealings with Israel and Egypt are ultimately about God's power and person as Creator and Redeemer. God is utterly God-centered in his dealings and an aspect throughout Scripture that's too often unnoticed or discarded. One reason for this is our human tendencies to make much of ourselves and very little of God:

"¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

I think this is the logical conclusion to ask such a question. I can hear the philosopher (and rightly so), grappling with this issue for at stake is the justice of God. So what does Paul

think? He poses the rhetorical question of the potters right to do whatever he pleases with the clay's purpose. He concludes that the potter has the right to choose the purpose for the clay vessel: either for honorable purposes or dishonorable purposes:

“²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? ²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?”

Fourth, but God is not unjust, for through His wrath justly poured on evil does He demonstrates His righteousness. And all have come under this just condemnation. Recall that Paul hearkens back to Job in principle and that righteous man's utterly silenced before God's inquiry: "Where were you when I...?" The fact is we creatures are out of line to question God's actions as if we had the moral upper hand on the Holy One. This attitude while understandable shows our pride of not trusting in God's word of promise, questioning His goodness and justice within the salvation history framework.

Paul goes on to explain however that vessels of wrath (those not chosen) are necessary in order for vessels of mercy to know God's glory in salvation. Consider the following:

“²² What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. ²⁵ As He says also in Hosea, “I will call those who were not My people, ‘My people,’ And her who was not beloved, ‘beloved.’” ²⁶ “And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, ‘you are not My people,’ There they shall be called sons of the living God.” ²⁷ Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; ²⁸ for the Lord will execute His word on the earth, thoroughly and quickly.” ²⁹ And just as Isaiah foretold, “Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become like Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah.”

That's what Paul seems to be arguing. But then he concludes his thought with another question which goes back to Israel's standing with God compared to the Gentiles—all of which are under condemnation (Chapters 1-3) and in need of redemption through Christ, the last Adam:

“³⁰ What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; ³¹ but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ just as it is written, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.”

Israel misunderstood the purpose of the Law of Moses, turned it into something foreign to God’s purposes and thus perished. That is, law-keeping is impossible because sinful hearts need to be renewed. The Law’s purpose was only to shine the light on our sinful state so that we might look to the 2nd Adam, the Messiah whose purpose was to save us through His own blood and thus renew our dead hearts to God. The Law was never a list of "do's and don'ts" in order to be acceptable before the Holy One.

Fifth, this faith of which Paul speaks is Abraham’s who believed in God’s word of promise evidenced by how he lived. Paul’s purpose for writing Romans 1:5—the obedience of faith—once again arises. This faith is trust in God’s word of future fulfillment that He alone will and can accomplish. Thus, when we talk about salvation through election, it’s never unjust, because all are under God’s just wrath and none possess the remedy for rescue.

The fact is that election is all about God’s mercy demonstrated toward vessels of wrath so that the glory of God may be seen and known by vessels of mercy. This is severely humbling and troubling. It’s humbling because there’s no boasting except in God’s works, never ours. And it’s troubling because of how many do despise this plain truth, thus dishonoring the Creator and Redeemer to their everlasting damnation.
(SDG)

ROMANS 10: “THE WORD OF FAITH IS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION—CONTRA INCLUSIVISM’S CLAIM”

Paul picks up where he left off in the previous chapter referring to Israel and their present standing before God. He prays for Israel’s salvation but knows that their ignorance of the gospel is the reason they’re not yet redeemed. Their zeal for God has blinded them (zeal without knowledge Scripture condemns) to God’s righteousness while trying to establish their own through law-keeping (Vv.1-3):

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. ² For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. ³ For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”

Paul continues to pound the anvil with the hammer of Christ’s work and says that, “Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes, for Moses writes that

the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness” (Vv.4-5). Paul here is quoting Leviticus 18:5 which is the giving of God’s moral commands and says:

“You shall keep my statutes and My judgements, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD”

It seems that the life of the individual is to rely solely on his ability to do the requirements of the law. It seems that Paul is accentuating the motif again between Christ’s righteousness which is given not merited (thus crushing human boasting), its imputed not earned. Recall that the Law’s purpose was never to be a means of “I do and God rewards”, but instead to shine the light on the sin within, never was it to liberate us from its jaws. If one trusts in law-keeping to become righteous before God it will only result in death.

Having said that, a believer must not conclude all is well even if he lives an immoral life. This is a gross misunderstanding of the gospel, for to be in Christ produces the fruit of obedience to God (never without the struggle of Rom.7). Here, the believer has been freed from slavery to sin in order to live for God. And by living for God we are thus freed to live for one another (Rom.5:17-6:23; 8:1-14). By Israel trying to establish their own righteousness apart from Christ, they have rejected God and have been cut off from life indeed.

So the righteousness based on law can’t save, but the righteousness based on faith (i.e., Christ’s work) does save (Vv.6-7):

“⁶ But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: “DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, ‘WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?’ (that is, to bring Christ down), ⁷ or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

I’m however a bit puzzled here about the meaning of verses 6-7. First, verse 6 is a quote from Deuteronomy 30:12 where God is laying out before Israel the blessings and cursing if they choose to obey or disobey. Now much attention in Deuteronomy 30 is given to what God did and will do for Israel: namely restoring them from captivity which we know occurred because of their idolatry. God is said to:

*“...restore you from captivity...have compassion on you...etc”. Deut.30:3-8
“circumcise your heart (v.6) to love the Lord which is to obey the Lord (v.8)*

This word of salvation is not far, seems to be the point or would eventually manifest (which it did in Christ the Logos), but is now here. Still a bit hazy on verses 6-7. Nevertheless, the word is being preached and its content is faith (trust) in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah who conquered the grave and offers the righteousness of God as a gift to all peoples and this word will not disappoint because God always keeps His promises. Let God be true and every man a liar (Vv.8-13):

“⁸ But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”— that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; ¹³ for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

This word of faith however comes in a specific way which if not given dooms sinners with no hope of rescue. Paul now asks four rhetorical questions which *an inclusivist view* of salvation *seems to contradict*. I’m going to point these out in reverse order because the apostle Paul begins with the end and ends with the beginning of the logical order (Vv.14-15):

“¹⁴ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”

First, there’s the bearer of good news whose beauty is too often hidden from those presented with the Gospel (v.15). *Second, there’s the need to send vessels* willing to impart this good news which means they must be supported with finances and prayer. *Third, the sent must be preachers* who proclaim the news of the Kings arrival in a way that’s understandable so that people may have the opportunity to both hear and respond to the message. *Fourth, hearing is essential* for belief to arise, otherwise they will not trust in Christ which is the word of faith that requires preaching. *Fifth, after the message is preached and the preacher is heard, people then have an opportunity* to believe and when belief arises, then one is ready to call on the Name of the LORD and be saved.

Now Paul says that *that* word is preached in both creation (v.18 cf., Ps.19:4) and through the prophets (Isa.53:1; Dt.32:21; Isa.65:1-2). And so in response to Israel’s hard heart, God will stir them to jealousy by revealing to the pagan world Christ’s righteousness of which the apostle has been writing. Thus, Israel has no excuse for their unbelief and God is not unjust having mercy on whomever He wills.

But when the word goes forth and people respond we must understand that God has ordained conversions to happen through the word of Christ—God’s word of promise fulfilled in the Messiah by the lips of a preacher proclaiming it. This is foolishness to the Greeks, and a stumbling block to the Jews, but to the called, Christ is both the wisdom of God and the power of God to us who believe. (SDG)

ROMANS 11:1-12 “THE REMNANT IS ACCORDING TO GOD’S CHOICE, NOT OURS”

In this section of Romans we see here that God reveals how people become His precious possession. Paul writes:

“I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³ “Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.” ⁴ But what is the divine response to him? “I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL.” ⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.”

Paul here basis his view of God not rejecting His people whom He foreknew first by: pointing to himself, his nation, and his tribe. Paul’s life is evidence that Jews were, are and will be saved. They will be loved, not abandoned. Secondly, Paul points to Elijah’s presupposition and uncloaks its’ deceptiveness. The reality is that there’s way more children of God than we can fathom. The main agent in this turn of events is not Elijah or any creature but God. Finally, Paul assures his readers that this remnant like the former one is according to Gods’ gracious choice, implying not the choice of the creature.

Thus, Gods gracious choice is the centerpiece here, not the false notion that God forsakes His people. So thus far according to the previous chapters salvation comes to both Jew and Gentile alike, through embracing the proclaimed word of God. This word is not received by all which is evidenced by Israel’s rejection of it. Lastly, this rescue results from God’s gracious choice, not ours.

I know this is a tough knot to untie or a hard will to swallow, but I can’t exegetically come to any other conclusion that it is God’s gracious choice by means of the preached word embraced, we come into God’s fold made of Jew and Gentile alike. Specifically speaking of Israel, God has never removed His love toward them—which seems to be evidenced through the existence of the remnant contextually. Thus, God has not rejected His people.

Paul continues explaining Israel’s state and says: *“⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.”* Here I take Paul to affirm what he’s previously argued (chapters 5-8) that becoming acceptable (righteous) before God never entailed doing works of the law. Instead, righteousness comes only through grace which is through the 2nd Adam Christ Jesus. Remove God’s gracious choice of rescue from the Messiah, and the result will be death. Paul ensues:

“⁷ What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; ⁸ just as it is written, “GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY.”

⁹ And David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. ¹⁰ "LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."

The text seems to be saying that those who cared about knowing God, did not come to know Him (recall they rejected His word chapter 10), but rather those chosen obtained this knowledge of God which results in salvation. The reason the former (Israel) did not obtain salvation is because God hardened them, and reason the latter did obtain it is because He chose them. This reality is difficult to bear (and we must nevertheless remember that there's no injustice with God), but I can't make sense out of the passage in any other way.

God however is always working out the counsel of His will and Paul is thus going to explain the reason for *why* God hardened Israel:

"¹¹ I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous."

It seems that God's end in Israel's stumbling had the purpose of bringing salvation to the Gentile world and as a result would cause Israel to become jealous: jealous of what? Jealous that now outsiders, foreigners, aliens and those once estranged from Israel's common wealth are now partakers of it. That wealth, that treasure is nothing less than being part of God's redeemed family. There's nothing more precious here than to be God's child, God's friend. Paul continues:

"¹² Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be"

Paul seems to be transitioning into a deeper thought concerning Israel and Gentile believers, the goal of which is going from degree of glory to the next level of glory. I think Paul is arguing that if Israel's sin is the means through which the riches of heaven have come to earth (i.e., salvation to non-Jews), then Israel's salvation after their own transgression will be ever more glorious (11:25-27). The drama of redemption truly is the greatest story ever told. (SDG)

ROMANS 11:13-36 "THE GENTILES ARE TO WALK IN HUMILITY BEFORE THE JEWS LEST THEY TOO BE CUT OFF"

Paul goes from explaining the Jewish hardening of heart to warning the Gentile Christians he's been called to reach to walk humbly before the Jews and God:

"¹³ But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the

dead? ¹⁶ If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too."

Here, the apostle seems to continue explaining the hardness of Israel's heart with the goal to achieve Gentile salvation. He now glory's in his ministry to the Gentiles wanting to magnify or placard its' preciousness so that some Jews may be stirred by jealousy and come to salvation in Christ. The reason Paul thinks in this manner is because if their *rejection* (the Jews) or *stupor* lead to gentile salvation, which is glorious, then their *acceptance* (i.e., reconciliation to God) is gloriously being raised from the dead (metaphor for salvation).

That's my understanding but now verse 16 is a bit. The metaphor of bread and trees that follow seems to explain that the fruit or result of good bread is *holy dough*, and the reason that branches are holy is because the root also is. Paul seems to be telling his Gentile converts that they owe their relationship to Christ in large measure to what God did in and through Israel. He continues this argument:

"¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you."

It seems that the apostle is arguing for the respect that is rightly due to Jews because of God's choice to use them as a light to the nations through which Messiah would arrive. Moreover, Paul here also appears to be accentuating that salvation is of the Jews (e.g., Jesus and the woman at the well) and as such a proper appreciation for them should in their lives.

Unfortunately, church history is riddled and loaded with Jews being mistreated by the Christian (Gentile) Church and much of it is based on the arrogance Paul here denounces. This arrogance as is often the case is based on ignorance, not knowledge. Why this attitude towards Jews? Human nature is such that often when one is privileged and another is not, the fortunate person brags and "rubs into another's nose" that fact. Ill feelings often arise and alienation between people takes place. But such an attitude has no place in the lives of God's redeemed people. Undoubtedly Gentiles must have been made to feel inferior to Jews who kept kosher food laws and celebrated the festivals.

Now Gentiles (and Paul knows it) are in a similar place being in Christ to think of themselves as better than their Jewish counterparts who are apparently "not chosen" which utterly misses Paul's point. He continues and says:

"¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either."

Unbelief, broken off, faith and conceited are terms that refer to what Paul has already explained in Romans. It's because of *unbelief* that both Jew and Gentile alike are under God's just wrath. *Broken off* seems to metaphorically refer to those relying on law keeping to attain righteousness. *Faith* contrarily is trusting in Christ's righteousness alone to secure our peace before God. *Conceited* are those who boast in anything other than in Christ's cross.

Paul is warning the Gentile believers to consider Israel's past (the good and the bad) and walk humbly before God for if they don't, God will deal with them as he did with the Jews. Contextually it seems that arrogance and conceit mark the Gentile believer (a bad sign) and may indeed prove they are not in fact part of the remnant (chosen by God) even as so many Jews proved not to be.

The reason I say this and don't believe it's talking about one losing their salvation is in light of God's kindness and choice—which is utterly up to Him, never to us. Paul continues:

“²² Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.”

There's no letting up in Paul, we demonstrate with our living whether or not we trust God in Christ. To continue in His kindness I take to mean that we trust in Christ's work alone to secure our salvation, while unbelief is to rely on law-keeping to secure salvation—it's the means to attain a righteousness that's acceptable before God. Yet, recall that the purpose of the Law was to utterly show how sinful sin is by shining its' light on it. The Law can never make anyone righteous before God because that's not its' design. Only Christ can make the unrighteous righteous.

I want to briefly mention the *idea of bread* and the *root* from this chapter. According to Jesus, the things written in the Old Testament were in one way or another pointing to Him. We know first that the manna God fed Israel in the wilderness was from heaven. Jesus said that he was the true bread which comes down from heaven, “I am the bread of life”. In this chapter I can see Paul playing off this Hebraic motif of bread and holiness, both of which bring life, both of which point to the resurrected Christ.

Another popular Old Testament motif is that of the “root”. The root sustains the “Tree of life” in the Garden of Eden, and the root is also used to speak of the coming Messiah's Davidic lineage originating from the “root of Jesse”. The idea of root is tied to that which brings “life” originating from the Holy One Israel. The Holy One sent Messiah to rescue dead sinners from wrath. Both lump and root are holy for they come from the Holy One and this holiness is required to see the LORD according to the Hebrews account. What's the fruit of this holiness? Not pride, arrogance, or conceit (which is Paul's warning to the Gentile believer) but humility and gratitude for God's kindness. Paul proceeds:

“²⁴ For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? ²⁵ For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶ and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.” ²⁷ “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.” ²⁸ From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; ²⁹ for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

I want to work backwards here with Paul’s argument to see if I can get at his point. First, I take “*gifts*” and “*calling*” of God here to mean those God has sovereignly chosen to rescue in accordance to His promise to Abraham that he would *be* the father faith for a multitude (that’s a lot of souls). God has kept His word to Abraham through Christ’s redemptive work.

Second, the sad reality in Paul’s day was that *Jews who rejected Christ as Messiah were enemies of the gospel*, but why for “your sake”? Perhaps to make it clear to the Gentiles the kindness and severity of God, moreover to highlight God’s mercy toward them which should and does work holiness, humility and gratitude in the recipient of said favor, not pride, conceit or arrogance in the soul.

Third, *Paul wants the Gentiles to see this in light of Israel’s partial hardening of heart*. That is, this partial hardening has a purpose in God’s salvific design which is to bring into the fold every Gentile whom God has chosen from eternity past. The point seems to be so that Gentiles don’t think themselves more “special” than Israel and thus fall into conceit and pride. God has allotted a time to everything under heaven—this includes the time of Israel’s rescue for his names sake. I want to note here when the text says, “all Israel will be saved” contextually means those whom God has chosen, the remnant.

Fourth, *Paul argues from the lesser to the greater*. The lesser here is the “wild olive branch” is the Gentile grafted into the greater “cultivated tree” which is Israel. The point here is that if Gentiles can be rescued while being strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, the fathers and the covenant, *how much more* does the same mercy obtain for the Jews? Paul continues emphasizing God’s mercy:

“³⁰ For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. ³² For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.”

Paul here hearkens back to Romans 1:18-20 where all are justly condemned for the purpose of showing His mercy to all. The “all” again contextually I take to mean *the called, the chosen, the elect* both Jew and Gentile alike, not every human being that’s ever lived (which is universalism: a view of salvation fraught with contradictions). And the jealousy motif earlier in verse (14) is connected to a means God uses in order to save both Jew and Gentile. This motif of jealousy is clear in the book of Acts where Paul after repeatedly being rejected by the Jews with his message determines only to minister to the Gentiles.

Paul buttons off this long argument with a doxology. Overwhelmed with God’s knowledge, power and wisdom, he declares what Job came to understand when confronted by the living God Himself:

“³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? ³⁵ Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? ³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

God’s election, choice and mercy are grounded in His being which the creature can barely begin to figure out, only perhaps to scratch the surface. Because of this Paul can only declare the utter greatness of God comparable to nothing created, and as such, His ways supersede our abilities to understand. What God has however revealed, and made known to us, is that this Gospel is the fulfillment of what Isaiah 40:11 said: *“Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.”*

Paul has argued for and laid out the Gospel indicatives (facts) that in Christ alone both Jew and Gentile alike are rescued from God’s just wrath through the righteousness of Jesus which is imputed to the believer (it’s an alien righteousness which is from God and never ourselves). Now while this rescue is real it is nevertheless accompanied by a battle with sin which remains. And lest anyone think they are something when they are nothing, Paul finishes accentuating God’s mercy with the emphasis on His being and attributes of knowledge and wisdom perhaps to aid the reader from pride and conceit.

The remainder of Romans will now focus on the Gospel imperatives (commands) which is the obedience of faith Paul mentioned in (1:5-6).

ROMANS 12:1-2 “GOD’S MERCIES GROUNDS HOLY LIVING & HOLY THINKING”

In this chapter Paul makes an inference to the previous chapter specifically (“therefore”) and I think generally to the entirety of the book going back to Romans 1:1 where God chose Paul to be an apostle of the Gospel of Christ. Paul starts with:

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of

worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Many years ago I practiced praying these texts over myself and others. They were and still are “go-to-prayers” for power to walk with God. Paul now makes a break in this letter that can be missed but hurts the readers understanding when it occurs.

In his letters, Paul has a habit of going from the *indicative* to the *imperative* which means that he explains the revelation of the gospel first (indicative=facts) and secondly he gives the implications of the gospel (imperative=command) where believers are to live in accordance to that message.

A quick recap of Romans up to this point will be helpful. Chapter 1&2 shows Paul being eager to preach the Gospel of Christ (God’s Son) because both Jew and Gentile are under God’s just wrath (1:1-2:29). In chapter’s 3&4 Paul argues that the true Jew is not the one circumcised in the flesh but the one who has Abraham’s faith. In chapter 5 the two Adam’s are compared where the 1st one brought death resulting from his rebellion, and the 2nd Adam (Christ) through his obedience and death brought life.

Then in chapter 6 we see that believers are dead to sin but alive to God because of Christ’s resurrection, yet in chapter 7 Paul considers the battle of sin within believers still fight, a battle that Christ alone can/does help us win. In chapter 8 Paul then assures believers that in spite of this battle with sin, God’s condemnation passes over them—working in them to be more like Christ.

Finally, in chapters 9-11 Paul argues for the election of both Jew and Gentile alike (9), that this salvation and election is accomplished through the preached word of God (10), and finally that God has not rejected Israel, but has a plan for them to also be rescued (11). The bow around these three chapters is the grandeur of God’s being which includes His wisdom and knowledge which are unsearchable. The proper response to all of this is doxology—praise, worship and adoration.

It’s these gospel truths to which Paul is inferring when he now commands believers to live a certain way. Here’s a powerful lesson in the proper use of authority to bless people rather than manipulating and controlling them for selfish means. Paul grounds his “urging” or “appeal” on God’s mercies to vessels of mercy, which formerly were objects of wrath, to live and to think in a certain way.

Both living and thinking are to be impacted by Christ’s Gospel already revealed in this letter. This mystery revealed must now be evidenced in how believers relate to each other and to the observant world (both enemies and the state.) Unlike Monists who deny the reality of the physical realm by denying real distinctions and claiming they are mere illusion, or those who claim that the body is bad and the spirit is good (thus what one does in the body is inconsequential), the Gospel of Christ says no! God says that, “My people are to be holy as I Am holy”:

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”

The sacrifices offered on the altar in the Old Testament, for example, were dead so they could not feel any pain of being burnt. But here “somewhat like the Master” on Calvary’s cross, his followers are expected to in one degree or another suffer. Minimally, when we are tempted to misuse our bodies (as in chapter 1:18-32 with illicit sexual acts) and we don’t succumb to it, we truly suffer hardship because of our love for God. This is evidenced not only through a chaste life, but also by denying homosexual tendencies overall.

But our bodies also are involved with other degrading passions such as gossip with the tongue, murder with our hands, etc. Our bodies house our soul and while they are decaying these bodies will one day be resurrected to immortality. For Paul, the body is the tool believers are to use to honor God, but it’s just not our bodies, it’s also our minds which engage this worship:

“² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Here, Paul not only affirms our bodies but also our minds (i.e., not the *brain* which is physical, but the *mind* which is an immaterial substance) as the means to worship God. These two are gifts from God and should be used in accordance to their design. An atheistic worldview denies any such notion of immateriality or spirit, this is called *physicalism*. But according to God’s revelation such a view is an example of “suppressing the truth of God in unrighteousness”. The point here is that our *thinking* in light of the gospel must be disciplined so that foreign ideas to it are not adopted and thus dishonor God. Instead, our thought life is to align with God’s thoughts as revealed in this letter of Romans.

One thing is certain in light of election (Chapters 9-11) all human pride is crushed, boasting before God is eliminated because only sovereign grace can rescue anyone from God’s wrath. This means that any “works of the Law” righteousness people rely on in order to be acceptable before God will utterly disappoint because that foundation of “sand” can’t save from Holy wrath, but actually assures it on the participant.

Note that to prove or to know God’s good, acceptable, and perfect will our thinking *must change*, it must be *transformed* from the way this present evil age thinks. The application here is massive. The point is that our bodies and minds, what makes us image bearers, are included in the true worship of God (see Mt.22:34-40). Thus, how we think and how we live demonstrates our understanding of reality in light of the gospel of Christ. LORD, have mercy on us! (SDG)

ROMANS 12:3-9 “TRUE LOVE IS TO MOVE OUR ACTIONS, NOT HYPOCRISY”

Acceptable worship before God comes from holy living and holy thinking. Both the thought life and the life lived affect one another. David in Psalm 51 after having repented for his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba said:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You.”

David understood that he would be able to impart God’s truth to sinners only *after* he was cleansed from sin, only after he was walking in holiness. This aspect of the life of the mind and the heart is too easily dismissed by many and what results is a *disjointed* spirituality where the cognitive dissonance within paralyzes and distorts our living which does not glorify God. Nevertheless, according to the Gospel and God’s activity believers are commanded now to live a certain way. Paul’s command in (vv.1-2) gives the reason for why the following imperatives can be obeyed:

“³ For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”

Paul again is addressing the thought life and demonstrates its’ power: that it can be used either for self- exaltation (haughtiness) or as a means to honor God through sound judgment (sobriety). This phrase “*not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think*” seems to refer back to Paul’s warning to the Gentiles regarding their view of the Jews in chapter 11. It could also mean that the gospel message *should* contour and color our thought patterns as we relate to one another in Christ’s body for our position in this body is by *grace alone*.

Another observation here is that God chooses the measure of faith bestowed. Again this is a gift for the body of Christ, not self-promotion. This gift has the goal of serving and strengthening the people of God, not self-exaltation. *Sound judgment* here thus seems to indicate an awareness of the gifts God has given each one of us without apology and without a superiority or inferiority complex. The reason is because these come to us through God’s tender mercies and grace which cause our souls to rejoice in Him!

Paul continues and explains his command in verse 3:

“⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;⁷ if service, in his serving; or

he who teaches, in his teaching;⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

I think it's important to note that Paul commands the church in his apostolic role with the *grace* God had given to him (12:3) and now we are to exercise whatever gift God has given to us with the *same grace* God gave to Paul. All of these gifts have certain functions the other lacks and needs to optimally perform (e.g., analogy of the body of Christ is relevant here). *Sound judgment* (v.3) here regulates their use beginning with the attitude that one gift is not more important than the other. And from that, each gift is to function according to its capacity. We have much to learn here in the body of Christ.

Too often people tend to pit one gift against another considering it “superior” to the next. For example, consider the debate raging within Christendom for the last two millennia regarding “faith and reason/heart and head”. A lot of this issue is deeply misunderstood and thus not properly explicated because people don't do a good job of coming to terms. Nevertheless, some view that what certainly matters to God is our faith/heart (and it certainly does), rather than our reason/head (which is a false dichotomy).

Plainly stated, “Theology” is for the scholar, but for most of us we just need “to love Jesus” and not worry about *deep thought*. The first eleven chapters of Romans obliterates that position for this letter was written to the Church, not to the scholarly elite, the purpose of which “*through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,*” (Rom.1:5).

How can we obey what is not understood or how can we understand this gospel without thinking deeply? We can't! The fact remains that part of loving God with the entire being includes the use of our minds and Paul is bringing that application to the fore of his argument.

What about the Martha types? These are the ones in the body of Christ that do much of the “grunt work”, underappreciated and overlooked, except when the toilets are plugged or the dishes need to be cleaned, or the food needs to be cooked and then served. I think the point is clear: each gift has its proper function and need according to the need of the moment.

Paul continues this thought with a command to love in a certain way:

⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.”

How can love truly be love, if hypocrisy is attached to it? Perhaps Paul means that when love is demonstrated it does abhor what is evil and clings to what is good. Implied here is that love (if real) flows from the base of truth rather than merely from the whim of feeling or emotion. Perhaps, un-hypocritical love deals with the following verses that allow love to perform or express itself not just in word but also in our actions. Consider the following verses:

¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the

Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ²⁰ "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Notice here that the call of the Christian is to a life of humble obedience to Christ which is revealed in how others are treated. These constitute the Great Commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. Perhaps that's what Paul means about un-hypocritical love. At the end of the day, this kind of love looks to the infinite God for the reward rather than to finite human beings for accolades. It's definitely the love Christ manifested to us when he walked among us.

Perhaps, Paul is also referring back to the use of God's gifts which are to be exercised humbly knowing that they come from God for His purposes and ends not ours. That truth should curb our sinful inclinations for self-exaltation rather than the edification of another. (SDG)

ROMANS 12:9-21 "LOVE LIVES BY TRUTH AND TRUSTS IN GOD'S RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE"

In this section of Romans Paul gives many commands or imperatives that he grounds first with "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good" (v.9). The command to love necessarily implies we are to resist, actually hate, what is evil or abhor its opposite. It seems here that hypocritical love is evil when believers treat each other not in accord to God's mercy they have already received.

John the apostle commands the church to love not only in words but also with actions (so does James), and Paul now is following suit. Thus, I take hypocritical love to be masked by gracious words, not backed by actions. Paul says that is evil and sadly many of us are not aware that we are transgressing. So Paul now is going to describe what love looks like...and it is costly for it demands my time, treasure and talents to be used for the good of another.

(v.10) "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love"; I take this to be a familial reference since we believers relate to each other as "adopted children" by God, a special relationship obtains and is to reflect in our interaction. *Devotion* is a powerful word, the opposite of indifference. It means that my brother or sisters joy in God is my goal for them and will contour how I pursue their good, not hypocritically, but sincerely.

"Give preference to one another"; is a call to serve one another since we've received this amazing mercy from Christ. Jesus said, *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for the other"*, Paul here is simply re-iterating what Jesus previously commanded. And now attached to this command to love and give preference to one another is a string of participles modifying or nuancing what love looks like.

(v.11) *"not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord"*; this triad is a call to the relentless pursuit of seeking the others good by fighting sloth that so easily captivates our work, as we ultimately look to the Lord for our reward, not our brother or sisters as we serve them. This reality should compel us to pray for God to show us how to minister to each person that crosses our path, not least believers.

(v.12) *"rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer"*; I take this to mean that our kingdom work is to be characterized by a joyful disposition because our focus is the kingdom of God and its purposes. This purposeful kingdom work however is accompanied by hardships that often beat down the soul. Regardless, what is to buttress said work is prayer, intercession by those devoted to Christ and his people.

(v.13) *"contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality."* Here is where our treasure is shared with those in need and where our homes are the Bastian of where such acts manifest (e.g., at the dinner table, sofa, or patio) for God's glory. This is where we invite others to see how we live from a closer view. These verses seem to focus on the redeemed community, but the following verses can apply to believers and non-believers alike.

(v.14) *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."* This reminds me of Mathew 5:9-12 where the peacemaker as a kingdom subject is blessed and thus when persecution arises for the sake of the name of Christ, rejoicing is to be the response. The reason is because unlike the rotting "lotto" ticket, an imperishable reward awaits in heaven.

I'm also reminded of Isiah's vision of God in (Isa.6) where in the presence of the Ancient of Days he confesses; *"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."* The holiness of God stripped the prophet of any possible pretense and his confession revealed the indwelling sin that the mouth reveals. Jesus said that, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" and Isiah's confession exposed his heart and that of his societies.

Today, we are no different. Gross conduct and lewd language is lauded and encouraged as a form of self-expression, it's a form of art to many. "F-bombs" are common place today. It's as if they were discipled by "Tony Montana". Why should this command be obeyed? Because it demonstrates the reality of the mercy and grace believers have received, the reward that awaits for them in heaven, and a wake-up call to persecutors that there's a heavenly reality of which they too can be partakers.

(v.15) *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."* We tend to neglect both of these commands. When someone is rejoicing it's usually because an immediate good has come to them (e.g., promotion, marriage, children born, a home purchase) and if we are not finding our happiness in God, it becomes difficult to sincerely be happy for another. What a waste of energy. Why this attitude? Many reasons I suppose but one seems to be core:

we forget God has not overlooked us but is uniquely working out His purposes in and through our lives.

Moreover, we don't like to be sad in the 21st century so why go and weep with someone down in the dumps? It's a sign we love them and that Christ whom we serve, came down from heaven to embrace suffering and remedy it, rather than avoid it and leave things as they've been. It's a way of imitating Christ when he wept for his friend Lazarus and their family. It reveals that we like Christ, are not "fair-weathered friends" but are ready to endure life's hardships with them.

(v.16) *"Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation."* Paul here is calling believers to walk humbly with each other, refusing to look down at each other because of social status, but rather associate with those unlike ourselves. Too often, the rich and the poor think they have nothing in common, but in Christ we have adoption as sons in common.

Moreover, it's been the tale of history that the rich are "better than" those less fortunate, but not ontologically, for we all share in the image of God, both male and female. But not just that, as believers we share a common inheritance which Christ purchased for us through his bloody sacrifice on the cross.

(v.17) *"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men."* On the one hand, the first part of this command seems quite clear: two wrongs don't make a right. Again, we are never to mistreat even those who commit misdeeds toward us.

Now when Paul says to, "Respect what is right in the sight of all men", does he mean that we are to value what is good, not what is evil, and by our lives show it? Or, does he mean that we are to somehow value a relativistic view of truth and morals which the culture holds to be dear? I affirm the former and deny the latter contextually, since the objective realities of the Gospel are true regardless of culture or historical chronology.

Having said that, Paul may however be saying that when we are mistreated because of our Gospel stance (I see no other reason here) that by "respect" we leave people to their own persuasions and let matters rest because in verse 18 he says, *"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."*

Paul continues on this vein and says:

(v.19) *"Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord."*

(vvs.20-21) ²⁰ *"BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."* ²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

It seems that Paul wants to stay the tendencies for personal retribution by believers by reminding them that God is much better at meting out justice than they are; that He is better at repaying people for their evil deeds than we ever can be. Again, this deals with personal revenge and retributive acts not the meting out of justice by the state as the following chapter

considers. May You Lord teach Your people to walk in the depths of this kind of love. A love that is grounded in the truth of Your existence and trusts in your divine justice. (SDG)

ROMANS 13:1-2 “RULERS, SUBJECTS, & GOD’S PROVIDENCE”

In this chapter Paul seems to be continuing his message to believers of their need to walk in love with believers and toward outsiders. Now he addresses the issue of government rulers and how believers are to relate to them for loves sake. Paul begins:

“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”

Paul grounds the duty of believers specifically in how they relate to authorities on God’s existence and seemingly on His wise decree. The fact that any ruler exists is not a Darwinian phenomenon, but a reality grounded in the God who is there and who is not silent—the governing authorities being proof positive of that.

Since God exists, and all authority ultimately is grounded in Him, Paul seems to be saying that God gives authority to rule to whomever He wishes, according to the wise counsel of His will and according to His good pleasure which fuels all His deeds. One might rightly object “not all rulers are created equal or worthy to be morally followed”. The polytheistic Roman rulers were not particularly empathetic to believers, but often ruthlessly mistreated Christians for their faith. Paul knew this well when penning this letter and I can’t see him being any clearer. Let’s wind back the clock of history for a moment.

In redemptive history, we observe God implicitly or explicitly raising-up rulers and monarchs in order to accomplish His purposes. These purposes are often hidden to us until after the fact. Pharaoh, Saul, David, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Cesar, and more were never ultimate, God always was and is and ever will be (See the Book of Daniel). That is, in the hidden wisdom of God He exalts a ruler for a time and purpose known only to God, so that His over-arching redemptive plan for humanity and the entire created order may come to fruition.

In this mix are a whole lot of human tragedy, pain and suffering (i.e., Problem of Evil) which call into question both God’s existence, power, wisdom and goodness. And yet none of these realities mute God’s voice through Paul.

Since this letter is written to believers, I take “every person” to mean that specifically believers are to heed the command and because of God’s mercy and grace that has been poured out on them through Christ, this submission to authorities is a means to demonstrate the love previously mentioned. Moreover, it’s a way to placard that the Creator is alive and well in the affairs of men. Paul continues with:

“² Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”

He understands very well that many rulers are evil and the inclination to revolt against them is real and understandable...if God did not exist and He was not ultimately in charge. But what is meant by “resist”? The word that follows it is probably a good definition of it: “opposed”. That is, to resist is to oppose, to be against the ruler and hate Gods ordinance.

Somehow Paul is saying that even if a ruler is evil, God is ultimate, not chance, luck, or human desire. And thus, instead of revolting or being against the ruler, the believer is to submit understanding that God is ultimately ruling through the ruler. Some may object, but this is what seems logical to me according to the text. The command given to “not resist” comes with a warning of God’s condemnation on the transgressor.

What is this condemnation? We already know that believers are no longer under God’s condemnation because they have been justified by faith once for all according to chapter 8. Could it be that those who resist are walking according to the flesh (for all sin is that) and not according to the Spirit? Perhaps, and if that’s the case does it show that the one in rebellion is actually not regenerate, maybe?

The core of what I see being taught is not to have unquestioned loyalty and submission to a monarch by a believer (the following verses seem to argue against such a view) rather we are to understand that all authority comes from God who will hold to account every ruler for their actions whether good or evil and knowing this is what stays the believer from revolt. (SDG)

ROMANS 13:3-14 “WHAT ARE BELIEVERS CALLED TO DEMONSTRATE?”

In verses 1-2 Paul commands believers to submit to the governing authorities, not because they are ultimate but because God who is ultimate has placed them in said positions according to His all-wise counsel and purposes.

In the following verses Paul further explains this command of why we are to submit, who these in authority actually are, and as a result the way we are to live our lives in light of the consummation. Paul starts by explaining the reason believers are to submit to rulers tying it to verse 1:

“³ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; ⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.”

Paul here implores believers to do the good (C.f., Rom.12:1-2) so that they need not fear rulers. A great remedy for not fearing man, and especially those who are in authority, is to walk in God’s precepts. Paul calls rulers, “a minister of God for your good” and they are “a minister

of God, an avenger who brings wrath” on evil doers. Thus rulers bring a “double-edged sword” ordained by God to keep order and peace through fear of lethal force. He continues and says:

“⁵ Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.”

Paul here appeals to wrath (we should fear) and to conscience (I take to mean: we should care about our witness) for why we are to be law-abiding citizens. But is there ever a time when rebellion is warranted? What do we do if a ruler calls what is good, evil, or conversely calls what is evil, good? Throughout Christian history believers have differed on this issue. We have Old Testament examples lauded by the Hebrews writer who actually disobeyed those in authority:

“²³ By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict...³¹ By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”

The king’s edict was disobeyed; Rahab lied to save these spies (she turned on her leaders). How about Daniel’s three friends who defied the king’s command to bow before the golden statue? How about the apostles in the book of Acts who disobeyed the ruler’s command to stop preaching in the name of Jesus? What of Corrie Ten Boom who hid Jews and lied about it, in order to save Jews from Nazi sure destruction? How about the "Machine Gun Preacher" fighting off ruthless murderers in Africa in order to rescue and save orphans?

Some things are clearer than others granted, but all of us will give an account to God of how we lived in our time with the light given to us. Nevertheless, what makes Paul’s command so weighty is that he will be eventually executed by the Roman Emperor of his day. He continues in verses 6-10 calling believers to walk in love and thus fulfill the law:

“⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. ⁷ Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

⁸ Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For this, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

To love God and neighbor is what stirs the heart to obey Christ's great commission to disciple the nations—nations which along with their rulers are even hostile to the message. We are being commanded to do what Christ did—go to those who hate you and love them through sacrifice. That's powerful! Paul not only considers this present time, but also appeals to the consummation as a motivator, or carrot of how we are to live and why:

“¹¹ Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. ¹² The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”

Here the apostle calls all believers to vigilance during their journey on earth. He calls for strategies to be put in place so that our sinful inclinations don't get the opportunity to manifest. Opportunities to sin that numb the senses so that we don't have to think about life's perils under rulers like: carousing and drunkenness, sexual promiscuity and sensuality, strife and jealousy.

It's because of God's mercies that Paul is calling believers to show this sin-riddled, broken and confused world the way of real love which comes from the Master alone. It's a call to be and do exactly the opposite of what the world commands. It's a call to love which will often require our lives in the process. God, may Your people submit to the grace and power of the gospel that alone can propel us to action of this sort.
(SDG)

ROMANS 14: “HOW CAN BELIEVERS LIVE IN COMMUNITY WHEN OUR DIFFERENCES ARE SO DEAR TO US?”

For Paul, God's mercies in the Gospel, is the source of transformation that propels how we live personally and corporately. Be it before believers, the non-believing world or ruling authorities, the one thread holding righteous action together is our submission to the God of creation, the impetus of which is love for Him and our neighbor.

After addressing the delicate matter of submitting to rulers and what that entails contextually because God is ultimate and they are not, Paul ends chapter 13 with: *“¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”* Immediately Paul follows this command that referred back to what was previously said to what now follows in chapter 14:

“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.”

Paul seems to be addressing Jewish and Gentile relations and how to live within that milieu when disagreements arise as to what is or is not an essential to the Gospel, and how we are to live. It seems clear that Paul leaves room for some kind of relativism for issues known as *adiaphora* from the Greek ἀδιάφορα "indifferent things"¹, things of which believers have disputed historically and have tended to make them “deal-breakers” concerning the faith. This means that believers have broken fellowship over issues not central to the faith.

Now what does Paul mean in verse 1 by: *“Now accept... but not for the purpose of passing judgment”*?

The NIV reads, *“Accept the one... without quarreling over disputable matters”*, whereas The ESV says, *“As for the one... welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.”* Still another rendering² says: *“Receive the one...not (entering into) the judging of reasoned views”*, while still another³ source reads, *“Welcome, but not for the purpose of getting into quarrels about opinions”*.

From these renditions of the text, Paul seems to be admonishing believers to accept one another even as God has accepted them (v.3) by not trying to “fix” the others views (i.e., their doctrine) about issues that are dear to them but still not central to the Gospel. Rather than (i.e., a Gentile) having as a goal, the correction of his brother (i.e., a Jew’s) dietary views, Paul admonishes fellowship. Instead of having a superiority complex toward those that don’t understand certain freedoms Christ purchased for them, Paul commands tender understanding rooted in love. Consider the text:

“² One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. ³ The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”

According to Paul the weak are those who can only eat vegetables because of their conscience, not because God in the Gospel demands it. What the Gospel does demand however is walking in love with our neighbor, especially other believers. This issue has to do with foods that are clean or unclean which Jesus declared to be clean (See Mk.7:1-13), for food never makes one clean or polluted before God, sin does, thus the need for the Gospel

¹ <https://www.google.com/?ion=1&espv=2#q=adiaphora%20definition> (Accessed 6/23/2016)

² D.A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, pg. 684

³ Reinecker, pg.379

(Rom.1:18-32). Note that both the weak and the strong are challenged by love's demand for acceptance for God has accepted them.

This text among other things does not say that we are never to judge the actions of another to see whether or not they are sinful and thus contra to the Gospel (See: Mt.7; Rom.12), but rather it is pointing out that God accepts His people because of His Son while they still have issues they get wrongly. Nevertheless, because they are not essential to the Gospel, a sort of relativism is permitted by the all-wise God and believers need to learn to walk wisely in such circumstances. Paul develops the same argument:

⁵ One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; ⁸ for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰ But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." ¹² So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. ¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

The following is clear; first, because we are the Lord's (weak and strong), our motives in how we live are to be God-centered—we are to live in light of His Lordship (vv.5-9); second, the issues at hand are foods and days (non-essentials to the Gospel) not blatant sin which is contradictory living under Christ's Lordship (e.g., Rom.1:20-30: homosexual activity, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossips, slander, haters of God, etc.); third, believers are never to separate because of non-essential issues (v.10); fourth, we are reminded that salvation is only found in Christ the Lord (vv.11-12; Phil.2:9-11) who not only rescued believers but will also be their judge. Thus, because Christ has rescued and accepted every believer (servant), every believer is to do likewise for judgement awaits us all (God will judge His children's works). Lastly, an attitude of protection is to depict our interaction within the Christian community. That is, we should be deeply concerned that our lives and freedoms (we can rightly enjoy in Christ) are not an occasion for hurting another believers' walk with God. In light of the aforesaid, Paul says:

¹⁴ I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵ For if because of

food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. ²⁰ Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. ²² The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

To remove a stumbling block entails not partaking in what the weaker brother rejects (i.e., eating meat or worshipping on a specific day) and doing so is acceptable before God (v.18). So God accepts both weak and strong in that which is not essential to the Gospel, believers are to be accepting of one another (both weak and strong), and if the strong are not considerate of their weaker brother, that is unacceptable to God.

Paul's concern here is the edification of the church rather than its destruction and warns against a cavalier attitude in these matters. Walking in love with one another means that non-essential issues like *diet and Days observed*, are never to be the reason why we break fellowship. Rather, we are called to live for the good of another through the Gospel realities so that Christ may be honored and the nations may be reached with such glorious news.

Are movies, drinking alcohol, dancing, music, home-schooling, political preference (Republican, Democrat, Independent, etc.) or a host of other things non-essential to the Gospel? Yes, and yet our views concerning such matters often leads to unrighteousness that does not edify the church. Are there gray areas in life? Absolutely; so may we as lovers of God and neighbor ask for divine wisdom in these matters in order to live a life that's honoring to God, the Church and the watching World, for our lives are not our own, Christ has purchased us through His blood and is why he exhorts believers in Romans 12:1-2:

"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

(SDG)

ROMANS 15: “THE WEAK AND STRONG OUGHT TO LIVE FOR THE EDIFICATION OF THE OTHER”

Paul continues his thought from the previous chapter regarding the strong and the weak who are both accepted by God and therefore are to accept one another on issues not central to the Gospel (e.g., eating meat vs. vegetables) specifically addressed to the Jewish and Gentile believer. We obey this command in obedience to (Rom.12:1-2) where our living holy is made possible by God’s mercies toward us. Thus Paul commands:

“Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. ² Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. ³ For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME.”

So then, Paul exhorts the strong to live for the good of their weaker brother and not just live for themselves which he grounds on the example of what Christ previously accomplished. Here, the apostle quotes Psalm 69:7-9 which reads:

“Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; dishonor has covered my face. ⁸ I have become estranged from my brothers and an alien to my mother’s sons. ⁹ For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.”

The context of this psalm depicts in large measure Christ, the Son of God, the Most High, bearing the insults of friends and neighbors, relatives and siblings because of who he was and what he said. This suffering he endured for God’s sake, so in the same way we are to emulate Jesus if we truly are the strong. We ought to live in an understanding way with our weaker brothers who unjustly judge us and simultaneously think they are more acceptable before God than we. We are to do this for God’s sake so that we may build up the body of Christ.

This depicts what it means for us to pick-up the cross, deny ourselves and follow Christ. This is real suffering (Mt.5:10-12) and part of kingdom living. To spur us on in the command he says:

“⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Paul is reminding the reader here to consider the word of God and its content and to understand that its purpose is to edify us through hardship so that hope may arise. Hope is a Scriptural word denoting a confident expectation of what God has spoken will come to pass. He is the God who is present to meet our every need which includes the turmoil experienced by

the soul when we are unjustly treated. Christ knows this well by personal experience and will shepherd us safely through the storm. Paul continues:

“⁵ Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. ⁸ For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers,”

Instead of discord, Paul exhorts the reader to “grow-up” already and be of the same mind (i.e., I take to mean on things that are not essential to the gospel, don’t divide but rather build up one another, accept each other because God has accepted both weak and strong). The purpose here is God’s glory. Paul continues his point in verse 9-13:

“⁹ and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, “THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME.” ¹⁰ Again he says, “REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE.” ¹¹ And again, “PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM.” ¹² Again Isaiah says, “THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE.” ¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Paul now will switch his focus from giving commands to appealing to his apostolic authority as the means of grace through which God enabled him to preach this gospel which demands the abovementioned directives for the edification of the church:

“¹⁴ And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. ¹⁵ But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

Paul now backs his apostolic authority by appealing to the Gentile fruit produced through the word preached evidenced in their obedience of faith (i.e., in word and deed, they talked and the talk and walked the walk) because of the power of the Holy Spirit in the gospel proclamation. This proclamation left no stone unturned:

“¹⁷ Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. ¹⁸ For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, ¹⁹ in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man’s foundation; ²¹ but as it is written, “THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND.”

Paul rounds off this section of biography with a plea for intercessory prayer that struggles on his behalf so that the enemies of the gospel may not subvert his service in Jerusalem and so that he may arrive in Rome in order to be refreshed and filled with joy by the saints there:

“²² For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you;²³ but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you ²⁴ whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while—²⁵ but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷ Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. ²⁸ Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. ³⁰ Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,³¹ that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints;³² so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. ³³ Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”

Paul cared for not only the spiritual needs of the saints but also for their daily sustenance evidenced in his ministerial fruit from Macedonia and Achaia. These Gentile believers emulated their example who was Paul, the former enemy of the gospel and now it’s greatest proponent. Amazing!
(SDG)

ROMANS 16: “THE GOSPEL OF GOD BEARS THE FRUIT OF OBEDIENCE FOR HIS NAMES SAKE”

Paul in this chapter rounds off his Gospel opus by first acknowledging the Gentile and Jewish fruit borne by the power of the holy resurrected Lord (vv.1-16, 21-24), secondly by warning converts to turn away from those preaching a contrary Gospel to his (vv.17-20), and lastly by offering an amazing benediction (vv.25-27).

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; ² that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. ³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; ⁵ also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epænetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. ¹² Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.”

“²¹ Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. ²² I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. ²³ Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. ²⁴ [The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.]”

Paul begins by acknowledging the fruit the Gospel bore through mentioning the names of both Jewish and Gentile men and women, some prominent others common, but all participants in one way or another with their gifts and talents in the Gospel work (i.e., the obedience of faith). These were committed to Paul through being committed to Christ.

What is apparent to me is that real, named people in space time history demonstrated in differing capacities the genuineness of their profession by how they lived. This life was fueled by a love for God which sometimes led to peril and other times brought about pleasure.

But regardless, this was a faith demonstrated through words and deeds and was worthy to be praised and mentioned.

This Gospel touches real people who Paul called, “fellow workers”, “fellow prisoners”, “who risked their own necks”, “in the Lord”, “my first convert in Asia”, “a choice man in the Lord”, etc. What an honor to be named in this list, to be mentioned in this letter. Often in Scripture when people’s names are mentioned we see accentuated their dark side, their shameful acts. But here what’s being accentuated is Gospel fruit...please don’t miss this friend. In a day with twisted, anemic, impotent views of what it means to be a Christian, this text accentuates that to be a real believer Gospel fruit must be evident or one is not real, period!

Moreover, this Gospel which produces fruit in space time history issues from the God who is there, the God of the Gospel who while justly wrathful is nevertheless benevolently merciful to those who through the preached Gospel are called, chosen and elect (Rom.9-11).

“¹⁷ Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. ¹⁸ For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. ¹⁹ For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. ”

Secondly, **Paul urges believers to guard the truth of the Gospel** and the church through guarding the Gospel they received. This requires knowing it, loving it, being convinced of its veracity, being vigilant for false gospels which would try to subvert the real Gospel delivered to them through the prophets and the apostles. They are to do this command by turning away from false teachings.

In other places Paul is seen arguing forcefully against those who teach a contrary Gospel (e.g., Acts, Galatians) but here he commands the Roman church to turn away, not even engage them in debate. Is he contradicting himself? In order for a contradiction to be in order, there would have to be a text that commands to *always turn away and never debate* concerning the message but there isn’t. Instead, there’s a time and place for everything as evidenced in the life of Christ, Peter, Paul, etc. There’s a time to engage false teaching (Acts 17, 1 Pet.3:15, Jude 3) and there’s a time to refrain (Mt.10:14; Mk.6:11; Lk.9:5). Paul is not just confident that the Roman church will obey him, but he wants to assure them that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet”.

“²⁵ Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, ²⁶ but now is manifested, and by the

Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.”

Lastly, **Paul offers a benediction** which in my estimation is up there with texts like (Num.6; Heb.13; 1 Tim.1, etc,) and offers a prayer on behalf of the Roman believers that God *establish them* evidenced by their being led to live an obedient faith. Paul’s Gospel delivered through preaching Christ Jesus which is the revelation of the mystery previously hidden but now revealed through the prophetic Scriptures which are sourced in the eternal self-existent God, has now been made known to all the nations (not just to Israel) for the purpose of bringing eternal glory to the only wise God, revealed to us through the incarnation of Jesus Christ the Son, the 2nd person of the triune God.

What Paul is accentuating is that God has spoken through this gospel whose authenticity is sourced in God, reveals God, and thus produces the life of God in those who claim to know God. To Him, Be the glory forever. Amen!

(SDG)