**Romans Commentary**

**Romans Chapter 1**

Rom 1:1

**“servant.”** The Greek is *doulos* (#1401 δοῦλος), and it means “servant” or “slave.” *Doulos* is a word that has been misunderstood by Christians. Many Christians compare *doulos* to the “bondservant” of the Old Testament (cf. Exod. 21:5, 6), but the two are totally different. The Old Testament commanded that slaves who were fellow Israelites be released every seven years (Deut. 15:12). If a slave did not want to be freed, he became a bondslave, a slave serving willingly. This was unique to Israel, and the rest of the world treated slaves differently. In all countries but Israel, a slave was a slave for life unless freed by the master.

In the Greek language, *doulos* was the standard word for “slave,” but it was also used of servants, whereas technically, the position of “servant” was also described by some other Greek words. When it comes to slaves, many of them suffered miserably and had no recourse for humane treatment. However, many slaves were loved by their owners and treated so well that they were more like servants than what we think of as slaves. Also, there were many slaves, particularly in the realm of public works, who had authority over non-slaves. For example, it is estimated that an emperor of Rome might have some 20,000 slaves,[[1]](#footnote-11102) and his slaves oversaw much of the daily running of the empire, especially public works projects such as buildings and sewers. These slaves bossed around the workers, many of whom would have been free citizens—some even of rank in the Empire (who complained about it bitterly).

When it comes to the “servants,” the Roman Empire was full of “servants” who were technically “freemen,” but who were in debt and were treated like slaves, and in fact many “servants” were treated like slaves, and that blurs the distinction between “servant” and “slave.” Given the social situation in the Greco-Roman Empire, it is easy to see how the word *doulos* was used to refer to both slaves and servants. However, this makes it very hard to translate in the New Testament. Each use of *doulos* has to be examined individually to see if “slave” or “servant” is a better fit, and sometimes there is not enough context to make a good decision. Whether a person was a servant or a slave is very important to us today, because in our culture, there is a huge difference between the two positions. However, that was not a big problem when the Greek NT was written, because as was stated above, when the word *doulos* was used, the people had a more instinctive grip on the situation of the one being called a *doulos,* and the technicalities of the position were not nearly as important.

Also, when the word “servant” is used in the Old Testament, it can refer to anything from a slave, to a “servant” as we understand the word, someone who was paid and could come and go, to a person who was simply a menial servant (e.g., 2 Kings 5:2).

**“called.”** The Greek is *klētos* (#2822 κλητός), an adjective, not a verb. In the Gospels, “called” referred to an invitation, such as when a man called people to a banquet. In the Epistles, the word *klētos* has a different meaning. In the Epistles, “called,” or “the called,” refers to those who have accepted the invitation. This makes it awkward to translate accurately for the beginning student. Translating it just “called” leaves a steep learning curve for the beginning reader, while translating it as “one who has accepted the call” seems far too lengthy and awkward. Romans 1:1 is saying that Paul is “one who accepted God’s call and is an apostle.”

In that light, Romans 1:7 does not mean, “To all who are loved by God in Rome, invited to be holy ones”; it means, “To all who are loved by God in Rome who have accepted God’s call and are now holy ones.” Similarly, Romans 8:28 does not mean, “Now we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, *even* to those who are invited, in accordance with *his* purpose.” It means, “Now we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, *even* to those who have accepted God’s call, in accordance with *his* purpose.

Every human is “called,” invited, to salvation (as the word is used in the Gospels), but not every person accepts the call. In the Epistles, everyone who is “called” has accepted the call and is saved. Every Christian has accepted the call, and every Christian has a ministry, a service, in the Body of Christ. God sets the members in the Body as it pleases Him (1 Cor. 12:18), and each member has a different job to do (Rom. 12:4-6). Paul accepted God’s call and was placed in the Body as an apostle; thus, he is “a called apostle.”

Although some translations say, “called to be an apostle,” that is not quite correct. It is not as if God called Paul “to be” an apostle. God called Paul to be saved, but the way “called” is used in the Epistles, the word *klētos* is saying that Paul accepted God’s call and was appointed as an apostle. Similarly, saying Paul was “called as an apostle” is not quite correct either; that could mean he was an apostle when he was called. Although Paul certainly had the potential to be an apostle when he was invited to be saved, he did not have the ministry of an apostle until the Lord had sent him.

[For more on “called,” see commentary on Rom. 8:28.]

**“appointed.”** This is from the Greek word *aphorizō* (#873 ἀφορίζω), which has two basic meanings: (1) “to remove one party from other parties so as to discourage or eliminate contact, *separate*, *take away*” and (2) “to select one person out of a group for a purpose, *set apart*, *appoint.*”[[2]](#footnote-20698) The meaning in this context is (2); definition (1) obviously does not apply—Paul was certainly not *separated* away from other parties and discouraged from making contact when he was set apart for the Gospel. For this reason, the REV has avoided the translation “separated” (cf. KJV, ASV), and chosen “appointed” to communicate the meaning of the Greek word. Paul was *appointed*; he was selected for a purpose, namely, to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations (Rom. 1:5).

**“good news.”** The Greek word is *euangelion* (#2098 εὐαγγέλιον, pronounced eu-an-'ge-lee-on; the double g is pronounced as an “ng”), from the prefix “eu,” which means “good” (and is used in such words as “euphemism: good speech; eulogy: “a good word;” and euthanasia: “a good death”), and from *angelos* (#32 ἄγγελος), which means “message,” and from which we get “angel,” or messenger. It is the good message, or more colloquially, the Good News.

Many versions have “the Gospel of God.” The phrase “Gospel (or Good News) of God” occurs 8 times in the NT. As “the Good News of God,” care must be taken to read the context to determine what the “Good News” is, which Good News is being referred to in the context. In Mark 1:14, it is clear that “the Gospel of the Kingdom” is the “Good News” being referred to. The other 7 uses of the phrase “Good News of God” appear in the writings to the Christian Church. In this case in Romans, the Good News is a general statement about Jesus Christ. There is no definite article in the Greek text, so it is not “THE good news of God” but rather “a good message from God,” which He promised before through His prophets...concerning His Son Jesus Christ. This does not refer to the Good News of the Grace of God, because that was not promised beforehand, but was a secret hidden in God (Eph. 3:2-10). There are cases, such as in 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 8-9, where the Good News of God that Paul is referring to is the message he taught and preached, which was the Good News about the Grace of God (“the Good News of the Grace of God;” Acts 20:24).

Something that the Christian reader must be alerted to is that in writing to the Romans, Paul is very concerned that the people of Rome shift the allegiance of their heart from the emperor to Jesus Christ. To do that, Paul is very direct in making a contrast between what the Romans thought at the time and what was the truth from God. The challenge to Roman culture comes up a lot in the opening chapter of Romans, but it is hidden from most Christians because of our lack of knowledge of Roman customs and vocabulary.

Here in Romans 1:1, *euangelion* was a word that was often used to refer to the emperor and his mission. In the Roman world, the *euangelion*, the “good news,” was that the emperor was lord and had brought peace to the world, and the people were now to be obedient to him and Rome. Right from the very opening of Romans, Paul is going to say that he is a servant of a “Good News,” and it is concerning Jesus Christ, the “Son of God” (which was also a title of the emperor), who was declared to be the Son of God by being raised from the dead—something no emperor had done. So right from the very first verse of Romans, Paul sets forth the difference between the kingdom of Rome and the Kingdom of God, and the Christian allegiance is to be to the Kingdom of God and Christ the King.

Rom 1:3

**“born from the seed of David.”** This is an important addition to Romans, because it helps establish the legitimacy of Christ being Lord. The Romans were very sensitive to what was ancient and what was not, and if two things were being compared, the older thing was usually given primacy or more respect. Rome itself claimed to be very ancient, and traced the founding of Rome to 753 BC. In contrast, Jesus Christ, born recently, was a complete newcomer and not worthy of respect. But wait! Paul points out that Jesus Christ is a direct descendant of King David, the first Judean king of Israel, who reigned almost 1,000 BC, considerably older than Rome itself. Thus, in a kind of “old age one-upmanship,” Jesus Christ has more legitimacy than Rome itself. The phrase “of the seed” is idiomatic, and means “from a descendant” of David.

**“according to the flesh.”** In the sense that it is used here, the flesh declared, if you will, or revealed, that Jesus was the Son of David. Both his mother, Mary, and his adopted father, Joseph, were from the line of David (Matt. 1 and Luke 3, respectively). There is a parallel between Rom. 1:3-4 in that the flesh revealed that he was the Son of David, and God revealed that he was the Messiah, something He declared when He raised him from among the dead.

Rom 1:4

**“who was appointed.”** The Greek word translated as “appointed” is *horisthentos* (#3724 ὁρισθέντος), and there is a debate about what it means here in Romans 1:4. The meaning found in lexicons and in the other verses in the Bible is “to appoint, fix, set, or determine.” However, that can seem strange in this context because the verse can be read as if Jesus was not actually the Son of God until his resurrection from the dead, which is not the case. Jesus was the Son of God from his conception. The concern about misunderstanding the meaning of “appointed” seems to be why some English versions use “declare” or something similar even though the verb *horisthentos* does not mean to “declare” something that already exists; there are Greek words that mean that, but they are not used here. In the context of Romans 1:4, the verb *horisthentos* is being used to describe a new position or boundary, which is what happened when Jesus was raised from the dead, and so “appointed” is the proper translation here, even though it can be difficult to understand at first glance.

Acts 17:31 is helpful in the understanding of Romans 1:4. Acts 17:31 says, “He [God] will judge the inhabited world righteously by the man he has APPOINTED, having given proof to all people by raising him from among the dead.” So, God appointed Jesus to be the judge, and he proved this appointment by raising Jesus from the dead.

It also greatly helps us understand Romans 1:4 when we realize that the verse is not saying that Jesus was appointed the “Son of God” by his resurrection, because, as we know from the scope of Scripture, he was foretold to be the Son of God long before his birth and he became the actual “Son of God” at his conception. Here in Romans 1:4, the phrase “Son of God with power” should be connected as one descriptor of Jesus. He was appointed as the “Son-of-God-with-power” by his resurrection because he was human with human weaknesses until he died, but when he was raised from the dead he had a new body, new position, and new authority, and was now “the-Son-of-God-with-power,” and he proved this new appointment “by his resurrection.”

Romans 1:4 teaches that there is a new sense in which Jesus is the exalted Son of God after his resurrection and given new power and dominion. Jesus’ statement that “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18) was fulfilled upon his resurrection. Acts 13:33 is also helpful in understanding Romans 1:4. Paul was teaching a group of Jews and Gentiles in Antioch in Pisidia, and he spoke about Jesus and said “that God has fulfilled these *promises* to us…by raising up Jesus, just as it is written in the second psalm, You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” This statement by Paul can be confusing, just as Romans 1:4 can be confusing, because Paul quotes Psalm 2:7, and uses it to say that Jesus became the Son of God when he was raised from the dead. But of course, Paul knew Jesus was actually the Son of God from his conception. So what was Paul teaching? He was teaching the same thing as Romans 1:4, that Jesus became the Son of God in a new and demonstrable way when he was raised from the dead. Furthermore, the people in Paul’s audience understood exactly what he meant because they understood the context of Psalm 2:6-12, which is not about the birth of Jesus, but is about when he actually came into power, which was at his resurrection. In Psalm 2:6 God says, “I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain,” which did not happen at Jesus’ birth. Furthermore, in Psalm 2:8 God speaks of Jesus ruling the nations, and indeed, the entire earth, and that it was his resurrection and being given new power and authority that enabled him to do that.

So, Romans 1:4 teaches that Jesus was appointed to a new position and given new power, and this was proved by his resurrection from the dead.

**“according to the Spirit of Holiness.”** This phrase occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It parallels the phrase in Romans 1:3, that Jesus was born “according to the flesh.” It is so problematic that a large number of interpretations have been offered, including that it refers to “the Holy Spirit” and also “spirit” referring to a kind of personal divine spirit in Jesus after he was raised from the dead (that to us seems unlikely, because even if it were true, it would not have made sense to Paul’s audience at the beginning of Romans).

It could be that God, the “Spirit of Holiness,” declared Jesus to be the Son of God by raising him, or it could be that the verse is somehow referring to Christ being raised by the power of holy spirit. It seems more likely that the “Spirit of Holiness” is God. In any case, Jesus was appointed to be the Son of God with power when he was raised. God had placed in His Word some references to the death and resurrection of His Son (Ps. 16:10, Acts 2:31; Ps. 2:7, Acts 13:33; Isa. 53:11-12).

Throughout the ages there have been false messiahs. How are we to know who is the real Messiah? There were a number of ways, but certainly one of them was that God had said in his Word that He would raise the Messiah from the dead. So when Jesus got up from the dead, he was, by that fact, appointed to be the Son of God.

As for the commentators who believe that the spirit of holiness is Christ’s new spiritual body or spiritual nature, R. C. H. Lenski does a good job of discussing that and showing that it really does not fit in this instance.[[3]](#footnote-17607) On one hand, the phrase “the Spirit of holiness” would not be something that most people assume to be Jesus’ new body, while on the other hand, the unusual word for “holiness” here, *hagiōsunē* (#42 ἁγιωσύνη), occurs 4 times in the Septuagint, all of them referring to an attribute of God. By referring to God as the Spirit of Holiness there is an emphasis on His unique holiness, which is then juxtaposed with the unique power he has invested in His Son.

It is helpful to know at least one reason why God would put this verse in the introduction to Romans. In the Greco-Roman culture at the time Romans was written, and predating Paul’s time by many years, a standard designation for a Roman emperor was “son of god.” Beyond that, many were considered to become deified when they died. Paul challenges the Roman culture here—a bold point since he was writing to the people of Rome itself—and makes the point that Jesus Christ was the true Son of God, and he was declared and appointed to be the Son of God with power when he was raised from the dead, clearly something that no Roman emperor had done. Any Greco-Roman person reading the book of Romans would immediately see the point Paul was making about the contrast between the emperor and Jesus Christ.

**“the***-***Son-of-God-with-power.”** The resurrection from the dead declared Jesus Christ to be “the Son of God with power.” The phrase “with power” (*en dunamis*) modifies the phrase “Son of God” (*huios theos*) and not the verb “declared” (*horizō*), something we can tell because of its function in Paul’s denotation of Christ’s identity. First, Paul designates in Rom. 1:3 that according to the flesh, Christ came “from the seed of David” (i.e., he was a descendant of David). Then, in Rom. 1:4, Paul says that according to the Spirit of Holiness, Christ was declared to be “the Son of God with power.” Jesus had been the Son of God since his conception, and even demonstrated a powerful ministry in his life on earth. However, when God raised Jesus from the dead, he became the powerful, risen Son. And thus, the phrase “with power” could be conflated to add clarity, and be translated as “the Son of God invested with power.” The HCSB takes the phrase “with power” and makes it more clearly adjectival, reading, “declared to be the powerful Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.”

**“Jesus Christ our Lord.”** Paul makes it clear that Jesus Christ is “our Lord,” which could have been seen as very inflammatory language in Rome in Paul’s day. The word “lord,” *kurios*, was used of the Roman emperor, and to the Roman people, he was “our Lord.” Paul here is drawing a line in the sand and forcing the people to choose sides. They cannot have two lords. Is it Caesar, or is it Christ? Paul affirms that for the Christian, Jesus Christ is “our Lord.”

Rom 1:5

**“through whom.”** The translation “through” is from the Greek preposition *dia* (#1223 διά, pronounced dee-'ah). This emphasizes the role of Jesus as the mediator between God and mankind. We have to remember how natural it was for people in Paul’s time to see Jesus as the mediator between God and mankind, and that to get to God, a person had to go through Jesus. In the biblical world, it was customary that people did not get to see an important person without going through some kind of mediator. So, for example, when some Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they went to Phillip, one of the apostles (John 12:21). The centurion who wanted his servant healed sent a delegation of Jews to Jesus, rather than come himself (Luke 7:3-5). R. C. H. Lenski writes: “Back of these acts concerning Jesus was God…. *Dia* is exactly right, for by making Jesus the medium it leaves the connection with God as the ultimate agent.”[[4]](#footnote-26279)

**“we.”** This is a literary plural, also known as the plural of majesty. Paul means only himself.[[5]](#footnote-20070) This is the same kind of use of the plural as we see in Ezra 4:18, when opponents of Jerusalem wrote to the king of Persia.

**“to bring about obedience *that is* based on trust.”** The Greek text literally reads “for obedience of faith.” This genitive “of faith” is most likely a genitive of production. Paul is speaking of the obedience *produced by* faith. Lenski, who calls this a subjective genitive, explains the phrase as “faith *renders* obedience,”[[6]](#footnote-20990) and Hendriksen says, “Such obedience is based on faith and springs from faith.”[[7]](#footnote-15128) There are other possibilities for the meaning of the genitive, such as attributive genitive: “faithful obedience, or obedience *marked by* faith;” appositional genitive: “obedience, *which is* faith;” epexegetical genitive: “obedience, *which consists in* faith;” and objective genitive: “obedience *to the* faith.” Furthermore, some scholars advocate a combined meaning of subjective and objective meanings because Paul’s purpose for proclaiming the gospel message to the nations was “for obedience *to the* faith,” and “for obedience *that comes from* faith.”[[8]](#footnote-14220)

**“for the sake of his name.”** Lenski has shown that this phrase refers to the whole verse, including the receiving of the grace of apostleship and the great commission.[[9]](#footnote-11531) The phrase refers to more than the bringing of obedience that is done for his name’s sake.

Rom 1:6

**“called ones that belong to Jesus Christ.”** The Greek literally reads, “called of Jesus Christ.” The genitive “of Jesus Christ” can be understood in different ways, but the most likely is a genitive of possession, i.e., “to belong to” Jesus Christ (this is similar to the “sword of the Spirit” in Eph. 6:17, where “of the Spirit” means in part “the sword belonging to the Spirit.” See commentary on Eph. 6:17). Although some versions read “called by Jesus Christ,” it is much more likely that we are called by God to belong to Jesus Christ. The New Testament often says our calling is by God (cf. Rom. 8:30; 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:9). We are called by God, and when we accept the calling and get born again, we are not our own but are bought with a price. For more on “called,” see commentary on Romans 1:1.

Rom 1:7

**“called to be holy ones*.*”** This phrase has been understood many different ways, which can be seen by reading different versions. This is in part due to the fact that there are three adjectives in a short phrase, and in Greek an adjective can be used in many ways, including a predicate nominative when a verb is not actually present but supplied, which is where we get the common reading, “called *to be* holy ones.” In this verse “loved,” “called,” and “holy” are all dative masculine plural adjectives modifying the same subject: “All” [who are in Rome]. The rendering “called *to be* saints” (ESV, KJV) takes the Greek adjective “called” (*klētos*, #2822 κλητός) as if it were a verb, and then takes the Greek adjective *hagios* (#40 ἅγιος) and translates it as a predicate nominative modifying “called.” This is a parallel construction with v. 1 where Paul is “called *to be* an apostle” (κλητὸς ἀπόστολος). The meaning is not that Paul was “called” to try and become an “apostle,” but that he was “called” by God as an “apostle.” His “calling” by God was for him “to be” an apostle. However, this is not the only way to read the Greek. One could also see all the adjectives in the verse functioning attributively to modify “all those in Rome” (πᾶσιν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ῥώμῃ).[[10]](#footnote-24611) Lenski says that “called” is used as an adjective modifying “holy,” which is using “holy” as a noun (holy ones), not an adjective, so he notes the phrase is saying “saints because called.”[[11]](#footnote-25694)

There is no question that God has called us to live a holy life, and Christians are commanded to “be holy” (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). Thus, there are undertones of the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre) in this verse, with God both telling us what we are and also how we should live.

[For more on “called,” see commentary on Rom. 1:1 and 8:28; see Word Study: “Amphibologia”]

**“holy ones.”** For more on why the Christian is called a “holy one,” see commentary on Philippians 1:1.

**“Grace to you.”** The seven Pauline Church Epistles begin and end with Grace. They begin with grace (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; and 2 Thess. 1:2) and they also end with grace (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 6:24; Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:18; 1 Thess. 5:28; and 2 Thess. 3:18).

Rom 1:9

**“my spirit.”** This phrase has been interpreted many different ways. In the Bible, the word “spirit” can refer to a large number of different things. These include: God (the “Spirit” in John 3:8); Jesus, who is referred to as “the Spirit” after his resurrection (2 Cor. 3:17); the gift of God known as holy spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:15; 10:44; 19:2); angels, who are “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14); demons (Matt. 8:16; Luke 9:39); “breath” or “life,” as when the girl’s *pneuma*, breath or life, returned when Jesus raised her from the dead (Luke 8:55); wind (John 3:8); and attitude or thoughts, as when Christ said, “The spirit [attitude] is willing, but the body is weak” (Matt. 26:41b).

In this case, the fact that Paul refers to this as “my spirit” makes it clear that this verse is referring to the gift of God that he received when he was born again. Many commentators think that the use of “in my spirit” is roughly equivalent to “with my whole heart.” However, that is because Trinitarian commentators are not used to thinking in terms of “spirit” as a reference to the gift of holy spirit that a person receives when he is born again. They are used to thinking that “spirit” refers to “the Holy Spirit,” the third person of the Trinity. However, that cannot be the case in this verse because Paul speaks of “my spirit,” in the sense of his personal ownership. While personal ownership certainly does not apply to God in any way, it is true of the gift of holy spirit that God gives when a Christian gets born again. The gift of holy spirit that a Christian receives when he is born again is very much “his” spirit. Paul does more than just serve God with his whole heart, something he makes clear through the entire Epistle, he serves God “in” his spirit, i.e., in connection with, and in relation to, his spirit (cf. commentary on Eph. 1:3; “in,”). To really serve God, the Christian must not only serve God with his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, in the flesh, but he must walk by the spirit of God and thus by revelation and divine guidance. That is what Paul is emphasizing here.

[For an understanding of “the gift of holy spirit” in contrast to God, “the Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and see also Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to Be Like Christ*.]

Rom 1:10

**“succeed.”** The Greek verb is *euodoō* (#2137 εὐοδόω), which is a compound word from the noun *hodos*, “road,” and the prefix *eu*, “good.” Often translated “to prosper,” this word literally means to “have a good road,” i.e., have an easy, successful path ahead of you. Although it can apply to financial prosperity (1 Cor. 16:2), it is not restricted to such; the term is much broader than that. It is used in Romans 1:10 in the context of things working out well, so the apostle Paul could visit the Romans. See commentary on 3 John 1:2, “doing well...well with your soul.”

Rom 1:12

**“In other words.”** The Greek pronoun *touto*, like most pronouns, has a wide range of meanings, depending on the context. As BDAG points out, in this case it naturally means, “that is,” or “that means.” It seems very unclear to translate *touto* as “that is,” because it makes what Paul is saying in this verse equal to what he said in Rom. 1:11. Here in Rom. 1:12, Paul is explaining and expanding what he had said in the previous verses, which the phrase “in other words,” captures very well. Other versions that use the phrase “in other words” include *The New Testament in the Language of the People* by Charles Williams and *God’s New Covenant* by Heinz Cassirer.

Rom 1:13

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word translated “brothers and sisters” is *adelphoi*, the plural of “brother,” *adelphos* (#80 ἀδελφός). The word “brothers” was often used generally, both in secular Greek and biblical Greek, for “brothers and sisters.”[[12]](#footnote-25170)

[For more information, see Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

Rom 1:14

**“non-Greeks.”** The Greek word is *barbaros* (#915 βάρβαρος). To the Greeks, any foreigner who did not speak Greek sounded as though all he could say was “bar, bar, bar,” so a non-Greek was referred to as a *barbaros*. From this word, we get the English “barbarian,” which most translations employ in this verse. But the English word barbarian is perhaps too harsh; for it carries either the connotation of evil, harsh people or that of warriors wearing animal skins and bearing large swords. Neither is intended by the apostle Paul. Rather the sense of the word as he uses it refers simply to people the Romans considered foreigners, both in the language aspect (non-Greek speakers) and culture aspect (non-Hellenists). By using the phrase “Greeks and non-Greeks” the apostle means, essentially, *everyone*.

But what does Paul mean by saying he has an obligation to the Greeks and non-Greeks, to the wise and the foolish? The word “obligation” conveys the idea that Paul was responsible for bringing the message of salvation to the unsaved no matter their background or social standing. When God called him as an apostle and helped him gain the knowledge and experience that he had, in God’s eyes (and Paul’s), this placed a duty on him to fulfill his ministry. The *TDNT* says, “In Rom. 1:14-15 Paul is describing the universality of his apostolic commitment (cf. Rom. 1:5); he is to preach to barbarians as well as Hellenes… [he] describes the whole non-Jewish world by the formula.”[[13]](#footnote-13013)

**“foolish.”** The Greek word means “senseless, unthinking,” and refers to someone not using their mental faculties (cf. Gal. 3:1), but in English we pair “wise” with “foolish” and mean unthinking, doing something stupid.

Rom 1:15

**“So, as for me,”** Paul had an obligation to both the Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 1:14), meaning that he had been helped by them, and so now, for Paul to do his part in helping others, he was eager to proclaim the good news to people that he had not seen in person before—the people in Rome.

Rom 1:18

**“is being revealed.”** The Greek verb is *apokaluptō* (#601 ἀποκαλύπτω) and it means to be revealed, disclosed, or brought to light. The noun form of the word, *apokalupsis* (#602 ἀποκάλυψις), is translated “revelation,” and is the name of the last book of the Bible, Revelation, which reveals the End Times and Jesus Christ. Romans 1:17 and 1:18 use the same word, *apokaluptō*, in the same form: present tense, active voice. Thus, it means, “is being revealed,” i.e., it is being revealed at this present time, and the phrase “is being revealed” is clearer in English than just “is revealed.” Verse 17 refers to God’s righteousness that is currently being revealed, and verse 18 refers to God’s wrath that is being revealed.

Although it is certainly true that God’s wrath will be revealed in a very clear and powerful way in the future, and completely so on the Day of Judgment, His wrath is also being revealed now, in different ways. For example, He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). There are people who openly defy God, and God does stand against those people in certain ways to protect and bless His people. A good example of this is Acts 13:10 when Elymas the sorcerer was stricken with blindness. However, there are much more subtle ways God’s wrath is revealed, from simply not helping people and giving them over to the often terrible consequences of their evil acts (cf. Rom. 1:24), to either not intervening or not being able to protect them from direct attacks of the Adversary. That is one reason that evil people get worse and worse in their behavior (cf. 2 Tim. 2:16; 3:13). What makes all this hard for us to fully understand is that although some evil people obviously seem to have terrible things happen to them, other evil people seem to do quite well. We do not see all the invisible workings of God, and so often what we do see seems confusing.

**“suppress.”** The Greek word is *katechō* (#2722 κατέχω), and it means to hold back, hinder, prevent, restrain, suppress. In the war between truth and error, the Devil is constantly working to suppress, hinder, or stop if possible, the work of God. He often succeeds. Sadly, sometimes it is because of too little effort on the part of God’s people. For example, we are told to pray without ceasing, and one of the things we are to pray for is that “the word of the Lord may continue to run *swiftly* and be glorified” (2 Thess. 3:1). If Christians do not pray for the spread of the Gospel, it will not spread as efficaciously as it could have. In many cases, however, the Devil marshals his demons and those people who oppose God, and directly hinders God’s purposes. For example, Paul wanted to go to Thessalonica and support the believers there, “but Satan prevented us” (1 Thess. 2:18). This verse is very solid evidence that not everything that happens is the will of God, for surely it is not ever God’s will that truth be hindered. Scholars who think that “God is in control” or that everything that happens is God’s will take the word “hinder” in a conative sense, the sense of “trying to prevent.” In general, they argue that God’s truth always prevails, so all man can do is “try” to suppress it. While it is true that God’s truth cannot ever be completely stopped because God Himself is behind it, it is also true that Satan’s forces and evil people can indeed actually hinder, and sometimes, in some situations for a period of time, stop God’s truth.

It is often the case that the people who hinder God’s truth are in positions of authority in government. They pass laws forbidding prayer in public schools, or demanding evolution be taught in school while forbidding the teaching of creation, or forbidding evangelism. Such things are good reasons for godly people to seek positions of earthly authority. God wants righteousness to prevail on earth (1 Tim. 2:2), and He is in favor of supporting earthly governments (Rom. 13; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13, 14), but it does not seem logical that He would expect righteous laws to be enacted and enforced by unbelievers. The things of God are foolishness to those who are unsaved (1 Cor. 2:14). One of the ministries God calls people to is leadership and administration (Rom. 12:8), and not all of the people with those ministries are called to serve in the Church. Some should lead in the government. Then they will be in a good position to enact and enforce laws that support truth and do not hinder it.

One thing that Romans 1:18 makes clear is that God is not “in control” of everything that happens and that His will is not always done. If everything that happens is God’s will, then by definition there is no such thing as hindering the truth. Anything we would think of as hindering would actually be part of God’s plan. However, there is no reason to think this verse is not clear and literal. There are people who “hinder” the truth, and that is precisely because not everything that happens is God’s will. It is the responsibility of people who believe God to stop people who do not. Although there is a measure of God’s wrath that is coming from heaven now, as this verse says, it is not enough to stop evil. If evil people are going to be stopped from hindering the truth, it is the godly people who must stop them and guide society such that the truth can be freely proclaimed.

In the spiritual battle for the minds and lives of people, lies and confusion are some of the Devil’s main weapons. Anyone who has studied history or theology knows there are at least two sides to every story and two interpretations to every verse. In part, this comes from ignorance—often we do not know the truth, and although we are honestly trying to attain it, we have differences of opinion. However, when it comes to the confusion that exists in Christianity, we dare not dismiss the fact that life is a spiritual battle and the Devil uses his people to introduce confusion into theology and Christianity in general. In the Old Testament, the false prophets confused people about the truth that the true prophets were speaking. A good example is Jeremiah versus the false prophet Hananiah (Jer. 28). Jeremiah was saying the Judeans would be captive to Babylon for 70 years (Jer. 25:11). Hananiah said two years (Jer. 28:3). Another example of evil people causing confusion and suppressing the truth occurred just after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The soldiers told the truth about the resurrection of Jesus to the religious leaders, but they were so blinded by their hate for Jesus and their love of power and position that they denied it and perverted it for their own goals. They bribed the guards to say the disciples came and stole the body of Christ (Matt. 28:11-15). There is not much argument about what happened to Jesus’ body today, but there was in the early years of the Church, and many Jews denied the resurrection because they believed what they had heard about Jesus’ body. Matthew 28:15 says that many Jews still believed the invented story at the time Matthew was written, which was likely written in the 50s to early 60s AD, 20 to 30 years after Jesus died. Today, many things confuse people about Christianity, and it is the responsibility of each one of us to study the written Word of God and find the truth God is revealing through it. Modern “orthodox” Christianity is a blend of many things. There is some truth, such as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, some beliefs are the result of pagan practices that have survived in Christianity. One example of this is the supposed date of Christ’s birth on December 25. Another example is the belief that when a person dies, their “soul” lives on after the body dies.[[14]](#footnote-23602) Some of the Jews believed that during the time of Christ, but had gotten it from the Greeks after Alexander the Great conquered Israel (332 BC), and later when many Greeks were being converted to Christianity, they too brought the belief of an immortal soul into Christianity.

There are some beliefs in some denominations of Christianity that came much later than the early Christians. For example, the belief of some denominations that Christian ministers should not marry was inculcated into the Christian Faith in the fourth century AD, but the motivation behind the celibacy was a pagan dualism that separated flesh from spirit in a non-biblical way. We must also keep in mind that denominations differ about the truth of something based on their own perspective. For example, a group that does not allow women in ministry might say that the Cult of Isis, which was prevalent in the Roman Empire, introduced women to ministry, but the Church Fathers caught the error and dismissed them. In contrast to that, we would say that the early Church obeyed the revelation of God and brought women into ministry, but the Church Fathers stifled the work of God, a stifling that is still in large part occurring today.

Truth is still being suppressed in many ways today, and each Christian has the personal responsibility to discover the truth and then live it. Doing nothing for the Lord because “No one can seem to agree about it” is falling right into the Devil’s trap and why he caused the confusion in the first place, while saying, “I believe this because my pastor does” is not valid now any more than it would have been to say, “I do not believe that Jesus is the Christ because my synagogue leaders say he is not.”

Rom 1:19

**“visible to them.”** The phrase occurs twice in the verse. The Greek uses the preposition *en* (#1722 ἐν), “in,” which can be treated as a dative “to,” or it can mean “plain *within* them” (cf. NASB), or “plain among them” (cf. HCSB). The clearest English is “plain to them,” but the *en* can also refer pluralistically to the group of those who reject God and suppress the truth because through the collective knowledge of mankind, much of what can be known about God is very evident. The knowledge of God is plain to them and plain among them.

Rom 1:20

**“his invisible attributes…are clearly seen.”** At first glance, this is an oxymoron, and it is designed to grab our attention, but it is explained by the fact that his invisible attributes are seen by looking at what He has made.

**“divine nature.”** The Greek word is *theiotēs* (#2305 θειότης, pronounced thay-'ah-tais), and it means “the quality or characteristic(s) pert. to deity, *divinity,* divine *nature, divineness.*”[[15]](#footnote-16239) It only occurs here in the Greek NT and is a rare word. Our only secular documentation occurs after the fourth century. As BDAG says, it pertains to the quality or characteristics pertaining to God, so when we see what God has made, we learn about His character. Of course, this is to be taken in the scope of the whole Bible, because there are certainly things about creation that are due to the Devil and the Fall, not to God.

The KJV translates the word *theiotēs* as “Godhead,” but no modern version does. It must be remembered that in 1611 the Greek manuscripts that allow us to properly understand the word had not been discovered. “Godhead” is an inaccurate translation. Besides the fact that God is not a Trinity, there is nothing in nature that points to any such thing. Nothing in nature is three separate things and one thing at the same time, especially not anything that could have been known as such thousands of years before Christ.

**“through what *he has* made.”** This includes all the things God has made. Psalm 19:1 tells us the heavens declare the glory (which in the Greek also connotes power) of God. Nature and the world around us declare the power and “divine nature” of God. Since the power and divine nature of God could easily be seen “from the creation of the world,” no one needed a microscope or telescope to see it. Even looking at mankind itself shows God’s power. Humans are definitely “remarkably and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14 HCSB). Despite the fact that God’s power and divine nature can be seen with the naked eye in the world around us, in the last couple of decades, our advanced science is revealing quite conclusively that the complex nature of life could not have originated by chance and via a purely “mechanistic” model.[[16]](#footnote-12636) Thus, at every level, God’s power and handiwork are being demonstrated.

**“so they are without excuse.”** One of the mental faculties of mankind is the basic ability to discern good from bad and truth from error. God made this clear in Genesis 3:22, when God said, “The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” When we combine that with God’s promise that if we seek we will find, we realize that God will lead anyone who really wants to know the truth into a basic knowledge of it. The great scientists of the past, including Copernicus, Kepler, Linnaeus, Cuvier, Agassiz, Boyle, Newton, Kelvin, Faraday, Rutherford, etc., all recognized that the design they saw in the world around them was the work of a Higher Power, and Johannes Kepler said that scientists have the job of “thinking God’s thoughts after Him.” Despite their best efforts, scientists cannot explain how life came from non-life, and how “chance” and mutations produced the life in the world around us.

Rom 1:21

**“lacked understanding.”** See Word Study: “Fool.”

Rom 1:23

**“corruptible humans and birds and four-footed animals and reptiles.”** All these things are “corruptible,” and all of them were worshiped by various idol worshipers in the Greco-Roman world.

Rom 1:24

**“gave them over.”** The Greek word is *paradidōmi* (#3860 παραδίδωμι) and it literally means “to hand, turn, or give over.” *Paradidōmi* can suggest an active action such as when Judas “handed over” and betrayed Jesus to the Jewish authorities (e.g., Matt. 27:3, “Then Judas, the one betraying him, having seen that he was condemned, regretted what he had done”); but it can also indicate the act of abandoning and “turning over” to the consequences of one’s own action (e.g., Acts 7:42, “But God turned away from them and handed them over to worship the host of heaven” NRSV). This second more passive connotation implies the result of an action by a party being “handed or turned over.” When Israel turned away from God and decided to worship created things like a golden calf, stars, and other idols, God, in turn, “gave them” over to worship the sun, moon, and stars in the sky instead of Him.

In Romans 1:24, 26, and 1:28 Paul explains three things that God “gave over” the Gentiles to in consequence of their rejection of Him as God and Creator. Here in verse 24, God “gave over” the Gentiles to “ the lusts of their hearts” to do impure and dishonoring things with their bodies. In Romans 1:26, God “gave over” the Gentiles to “dishonorable passions” to pervert the natural use of their bodies that God had designed. In Romans 1:28, God “gave over” the Gentiles to “a worthless mind” to pursue things that are not fitting and proper to do. Paul then lists a number of wicked and evil acts that accompany those who have rejected God and found Him not worthy to be retained in their knowledge and recognized and honored as the Creator.

**“impurity.”** The Greek word translated “impurity” is *akatharsia* (#167 ἀκαθαρσία), and it refers to being “unclean” before God. *Akatharsia* is “a state of moral corruption; immorality, vileness, especially of sexual sins;”[[17]](#footnote-31558) “in a moral sense, the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living; used of impure motives in 1 Thess. 2:3.”[[18]](#footnote-18626) The dominant use of *akatharsia* in the New Testament includes sexual sin.

[For more information on *akatharsia*, see commentary on Gal. 5:19.]

Rom 1:26

**“females.”** The Greek word is not “women” (*gunē,* #1135 γυνή, pronounced goo-'nay) but “female” (*thēlus,* #2338 θῆλυς), which in this context is more degrading. See commentary on Romans 1:27, “males… females… males with males.”

**“gave them over.”** See commentary on Romans 1:24.

Rom 1:27

**“males… females… males with males.”** In this context of unnatural sexual behavior, Paul does not use the usual terms “man” and “woman,” but rather “male” and “female.” This serves two purposes. First, because the subject at hand is the proper correspondence between the sexes, using the words for “male,” *arrēn* (#730 ἄρρην), and “female,” *thēlus* (#2338 θῆλυς), draws appropriate attention to the issue of biology and what is natural. Second, as Lenski has pointed out, in this context such language is somewhat degrading, portraying the people as “nothing but creatures of sex.”[[19]](#footnote-19069) For more on sexual sin and homosexual behavior being mentioned in the Bible, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:9.

**“burned with intense desire”** The Greek phrase is *ekkaiomai en tē orexei* (ἐκκαίομαι ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει), and the lexicon by Louw and Nida points out that this phrase is “an idiom, literally ‘to burn with intense desire’; ‘to have a strong, intense desire for something’; ‘to be inflamed with passion, to have a strong lust for, to be inflamed with lust.’ In some languages, the equivalent idiom is ‘to boil with desire,’ ‘to feel hot in the genitals,’….” Both the word “burn” and the word “desire” are used only here in the New Testament.

Rom 1:28

**“they did not regard God worthy….”** This sentence is somewhat difficult to translate. The Greek literally means “they did not approve God to have in knowledge.” The Greek word *dokimazō* (#1381 δοκιμάζω), which is used in ancient literature of the testing of metals or coins to determine their quality, refers to testing something to find out if it is worthy or not. Metals that were tested but found lacking in quality were unapproved and not worthy to be used, and thus were discarded. Paul is explaining how the Gentile nations knew that God existed since His power and divine nature can be perceived from creation itself (Rom. 1:20). However, even though they understood God existed, “they did not judge God worthy.” When they tested in their mind whether God had a high enough “quality” to be approved, they decided He was not satisfactory and so they rejected Him and replaced Him with idols—images of humans and animals (Rom. 1:23). For other occurrences of *dokimazō*, see commentaries on Romans 2:18 and 12:2.

**“to know.”** The Greek is literally “to have in knowledge,” but often the verb εχω, “to have,” in Greek gets paired with other objects and should be translated in English as a simple verb. Thus, “to have in knowledge” is better translated “to know.” The Greek is *epignōsis* (#1922 ἐπίγνωσις), which means “a full and accurate knowledge or acknowledgment.” Paul is not talking about mere “knowledge” or “recognition” of God here. The word *epignōsis* refers to possessing familiarity and understanding about something. The idea that Paul is trying to get across is that even though the Gentiles knew that God existed, they did not approve of Him as being “worthy” to be recognized and honored as the Creator. Instead of fully recognizing God for who He is and keeping Him in their knowledge, the Gentiles discarded Him from their minds. Many people who do not obey God recognize Him to some degree, and obey Him to some degree. God wants people to fully obey Him, not just to believe and act on the things about God that they want to.

**“gave them over.”** See commentary on Romans 1:24.

**“worthless.”** The Greek word is *adokimos* (#96 ἀδόκιμος) which means “unqualified or worthless.” It is the opposite of “being approved.” Paul is using a play on words here to indicate the resulting consequence of the Gentiles’ decision. Since the Gentiles did not judge God “worthy” to be fully recognized in their knowledge, God gave them over to a “worthless” mind. To paraphrase Paul’s implication in this wordplay: A mind that does not think God is “worthy” to be fully recognized will end in nothing but a “worthless” mind.

Rom 1:29

**“malice.”** This comes from the Greek word *kakoētheia* (#2550 κακοήθεια). BDAG’s definition is very insightful: a basic defect in character that leads one to be hurtful to others, thus, mean-spiritedness, malice, malignity, craftiness. The translation “malignity” (e.g., KJV) does not express the sense of the word as well as “mean-spiritedness.”

Rom 1:31

**“natural affection.”** See commentaries on Romans 12:10 and John 21:15. The Greek word is *astorgos* (#794 ἄστοργος), which is made up of the prefix *a–*, “not, no,” and *storgē*, which is familial love. The term however can be used in extension beyond just familial love, to be applied to others in a general sense. Louw-Nida explains the word as “pertaining to a lack of love or affection for close associates or family—‘without normal human affection, without love for others.’”

Rom 1:32

**“they know God’s righteous requirement.”** The word “know” in this verse is *epiginōskō* (#1921 ἐπιγινώσκω), which generally refers to knowing something more fully, completely, or accurately. It is sometimes erroneously taught that if a person really knows God, then he will commit to God and get saved. But the Scripture shows us that is not the case. The Bible is full of people who knew God, some of them very intimately, who never made the heart commitment to follow God and get saved. Demons are a very good example of this because they know God very well and still side with the Devil (James 2:19). Cain knew God and even conversed with him, yet made the decision to follow the Devil, not God. It is safe to say that Solomon knew God better than almost everyone in the Old Testament, in fact, God personally appeared to him on two different occasions, 1 Kings 3:5 and 9:2 (see commentary on 1 Kings 11:9). Nevertheless, Solomon turned from God and did evil in His sight (1 Kings 11:6-10).

**Romans Chapter 2**

Rom 2:1

**“Therefore.”** The Greek conjunction *dio* (#1352 διό) means “therefore, wherefore, on account of.” At first, it seems confusing because a surface reading seems to be saying that because of the vices of the evil people who have been given over to shameful acts and evil behavior, “therefore,” everyone else is without excuse if they judge anyone. Hendriksen writes: “Many are puzzled by the word ‘Therefore.’ It must be admitted that the meaning is not immediately clear.”[[20]](#footnote-20397) Lenski is correct when he states that the “Therefore” connects, not just the closing verses with chapter 2, but the entire previous section, Rom. 1:18-32.[[21]](#footnote-21382) Also, Paul is not writing a blanket condemnation of judging. We must judge others, and judge on a daily basis, in order to obey the commands of God. Jesus said, “Stop judging by the outward appearance! Instead, judge with a righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Paul warned us to “…keep on the lookout for those who cause divisions and temptations *to sin* that are contrary to the doctrine that you learned. Stay away from them!” (Rom. 16:17), and we cannot keep that command unless we make judgments about people. Paul also wrote many instructions to Timothy, including who to avoid and who to select for leadership based on behavior and qualifications, which is impossible to do without making a judgment about people. To fully understand the “therefore,” we must realize it refers back to the whole previous section of Romans, and points forward to those who judge but “are practicing the same things” (Rom. 2:1).

**“O, you.”** The Greek is “O man,” but the word “man” is generic here in the Greek text, and refers to both men and women. Different English versions have tried to make that clear in different ways. Some have almost omitted it altogether, but since the expression is emphatic, that does not seem to be the correct way to handle it. The translation, “*yes*, you” seems to capture both the emphatic and inclusive meaning.

**“in whatever *things* you judge.”** The point is not, in that you *judge*, which would simply criticize the act of judging. The Greek is more specific. Paul speaks of whatever *things* you judge—in other words, the very act that you judge, this act you are doing. Paul is not criticizing judgment in this case, but hypocrisy.

Rom 2:4

**“kindness.”** The Greek word is chrēstotēs (#5544 χρηστότης), and most modern English versions read “kindness.” Kindness is a fruit of the spirit and an essential ingredient to being godly. The Devil is continuing in what has been a very successful campaign to elevate the importance of people “being authentic” and “expressing how I really feel,” and downplaying kindness. Thankfully, God is kind and tolerant toward people, and it is His kindness that finally works in them and opens their eyes to the truth and leads them to repentance. If we are going to be like God, we have to learn to be kind to others even when we do not feel like being kind. (See commentary on Gal. 5:22, “kindness”).

**“restraint.”** The Greek word is *anochē* (a noun: #463 ἀνοχή), and most Greek lexicons define it as forbearance, tolerance, clemency, and patience. It refers to enduring, being patient, and holding oneself back. Richard Trench writes that it “signifies, for the most part, a truce or suspension of arms.”[[22]](#footnote-28243) The noun *anochē* is related to the verb *anechō*, “to endure, put up with, bear with.” Jesus said, “You unbelieving generation! …How long must I put up with [*anechō*] you?” (Mark 9:19 HCSB).

Studying the English words “tolerate” and “forbear” shows us why the English translations differ as to how they translate *anochē*. To “tolerate” usually refers to what you allow; what you do not forbid. In contrast, “forbear” usually places the emphasis on self-restraint and what you hold yourself back from. The Greek word *anochē* contains both meanings, but in Christian circles “tolerate” usually has a bad connotation, so most versions avoid it. Sadly, most of the time we use the word “tolerate,” we use it as something we do even though we are “really bothered” by the situation and are actually just waiting for the chance to do something about it. That is the world’s way of tolerating, but it is not God’s way.

God’s way of forbearing, restraint, or tolerating is the way He tolerates us: He knows He has given us free will, and so even when we are ignorant or in sin, He loves us, is kind to us, and “declares a truce” with us until we wake up to our error. If God and Christ can do that with us and others, and allow us all to live our own lives in spite of our error or sin, then we can do that too. We do not have to “tolerate” people while seething in anger, pouting, or “just waiting for the chance to straighten them out.” If we want to bring people to repentance the way God does, we have to learn to be forbearing and tolerant in a kind and loving way. It is unfortunate that the word “tolerate” has gotten such a bad reputation in Christian circles because godly tolerance is a very important part of winning people to Christ.

Tolerance is the neutral zone between grace and truth. We are forbearing or tolerant in those times when we are with people who do not want to change their disobedient ways. Most of the time we are with such people we do not teach, reprove, or correct them with truth, nor do we act like what they are doing is fine with God. Forbearance or tolerance is not “grace.” Grace is “undeserved,” but everyone deserves kindness and tolerance. Grace is that special undeserved favor that helps people walk with God, while tolerance is the “truce” that we have with people who have not yet decided to walk with God. If we confuse tolerance for grace, then we never have genuine grace.

**“patience.”** The Greek word is *makrothumia* (#3115 μακροθυμία), and it refers to patiently forbearing and remaining composed while waiting for an outcome. This idea is conveyed through the word “patience,” and sometimes the more archaic word “longsuffering.” *Makrothumia* is a compound word from *makros*, “long,” and *thumos*, “wrath or anger,” and it refers to putting up with people for a long time before taking any action. Thayer describes it as “slowness in avenging wrongs.”[[23]](#footnote-32235) Generally, the older versions of the English Bible such as the King James Version, Young’s Literal Translation, Darby’s Translation, and Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, use the word “longsuffering,” while most modern versions avoid it and use the word “patience” instead because “longsuffering” is not a common modern English word and is considered archaic. On a side note, another word similar to *makrothumia* is the Greek word *hupomonē* (#5281 ὑπομονή), which refers to the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. Although today, we speak of being patient with things and with people, the fact that the Greek has a word like *makrothumia* that specifically refers to holding back one’s response to other people and circumstances is important to understand.

[For more on “patience,” see commentary on Gal. 5:22.]

**“is *intended* to lead you to repentance.”** Williams’ translation has the note: “implied in the genitive present.”[[24]](#footnote-10216) What is implied is the idea that this grace is *meant* to lead you to repentance, which is how many versions read (e.g., ESV, NRSV, HCSB).

Rom 2:5

**“But corresponding to your stubborn and unrepentant heart…”** The Greek can also be translated as “corresponding to your stubbornness and *your* unrepentant heart.” Modern versions are divided on how to render the phrase.

**“corresponding to your stubborn...”** The word “corresponding” comes from *kata* (#2596 κατά), which in this context serves as a “marker of norm of similarity or homogeneity, *according to, in accordance with, in conformity with, according to.*”[[25]](#footnote-30754) This is the same meaning as in Romans 2:2: God’s judgment is “according to the truth,” i.e., God’s judgment corresponds to what is truly deserved. Many English versions have the word “because,” and say something such as, “Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath”). But that translation does not fully capture what the verse is saying. The word *kata* is pointing out that the wrath that person will receive on the Day of Wrath is proportional to the sin they have committed due to their stubborn and unrepentant heart. The word “because” simply does not communicate that proportional relationship. The teaching of Romans 2:5-6 is that God’s judgment is just, and that a sinner’s punishment is in proportion to the crime committed. The amount of wrath a person stores up for himself corresponds to the amount he hardens his heart. This is similar to the truth taught in Matthew 7:2, “With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (ESV); and Matthew 6:14-15, “For if you forgive people their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.15But if you do not forgive people their transgressions, your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

We can understand why many theologians do not understand what the verse is saying. If a theologian believes that an unsaved person is thrown into the Lake of Fire and burns forever, then there is no difference between sinners who are genuinely evil (like Hitler) and sinners who were “regular people” but just never wanted to get saved. Both categories of people would have the same punishment: everlasting torment. But if people are burned up and annihilated in the fire after a time of burning, then the Bible would tell us that some sinners suffer longer than others in the fire, and that is exactly what Scripture teaches. Thus, Romans 2:5 is not asking, “Why will the person receive wrath?” This question would be answered with “because of the hardness of his heart.” The question being asked in Romans 2:5 is, “How much wrath will a person receive?” The answer is, as much as they deserve. In other words, the wrath that any person receives is “corresponding to,” or “in accordance with” or “in proportion to” his own hardness, and the unrepentance of his own heart. This is hard to understand by Christians who think that all the unsaved burn forever (thus equal punishment) and all the saved people are in the presence of Christ forever (thus equal reward).

The unsaved are thrown into the Lake of Fire and are burned up (Rev. 20:13-15), but the time they spend being punished before they are consumed is different from person to person. This can be seen in examples such as when Jesus spoke of the people of Capernaum. Jesus said that on the Day of Judgment, it would be “more bearable” for Sodom than for Capernaum. Yet the people of Sodom were not righteous in the sight of God, and the destruction of Sodom is a picture of the future destruction of the wicked in the fire (2 Pet. 2:6). Therefore, Jesus’ statement that it would be “more bearable” for Sodom than Capernaum is very strong reproach (Matt. 11:20-24), and reflects that before they are annihilated in the fire, the people of Capernaum will be punished more severely than even the people of Sodom. Another example of punishment being proportional to the crime committed is in Jesus’ Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt. 18:23-35). In the parable, the unforgiving servant is punished for his evil. Jesus taught the parable and said that when the servant would not forgive others, “his lord was enraged, and handed him over to the torturers, until he paid back all that was owed.” Then Jesus made the powerful statement: “So my heavenly Father will also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart” (Matt. 18:35). In the parable, the evil servant is not punished “forever,” but he is punished until he has paid for his crime. Similarly, in the Lake of Fire, people do not suffer forever, but only until their sin is paid for at which time they are completely burned up; annihilated. Furthermore, there are other verses in the Bible that indicate people will be punished differently depending on their sin (e.g., Mark 12:38-40).

The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but we must be careful not to take that one verse out from the context of the whole Bible. Romans 6:23 never says that the wages of sin is immediate death. Before people die in Gehenna, the Lake of Fire, they are punished in proportion to their sin. The Bible says in many different places that people will be repaid for what they have done on earth (cf. Job 34:11; Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8). This is one reason the Bible says that for the wicked there will be sobbing and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

As encouragement for Christians, just as punishments differ for the wicked, so the rewards Christians will receive in the future kingdom are different from person to person and are based on the works each one has done. See commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:10.[[26]](#footnote-24655)

[For more on varying degrees of punishment, see commentary on Matt. 10:15. For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“stubborn.”** The Greek is *sklērotēs* (#4643 σκληρότης), and it is a noun, meaning “hardness, stubbornness.” It is from *skleros*, which means “dried,” “stiff,” “rough,” or “hard.” It is the picture of a branch that has dried out and is hardened and stiff. It is a noun, standing on its own, not an adjective describing heart. Too many people are “hard” in their lives, being stiff, rough, unchanging, unyielding, and unrepentant toward God.

**“unrepentant.”** The Greek is *ametanoētos* (#279 ἀμετανόητος) and refers to not being repentant (the Greek verb “repent” is *metanoeō*). Thus, it is unrepentant, not turning to God, refusing to turn to God. The Louw-Nida lexicon states, “In a number of languages, it is difficult to speak of ‘a hard and unrepentant heart.’ A more satisfactory equivalent of this expression in Romans 2:5 may be ‘but you are stubborn and refuse to repent’ or ‘refuse to turn to God.’”[[27]](#footnote-12919) Some versions read “impenitent” instead of “unrepentant,” but that does not seem as accurate here because impenitent means, “not penitent, without shame, regret, or remorse.” While it is true that those who do not repent usually have no shame, regret, or remorse, the primary meaning here is that the people have hearts that refuse to repent, i.e., they will not change their ways and turn to God.

**“storing up.”** The Greek verb is *thēsaurizō* (#2343 θησαυρίζω), and it means to gather and store up, to heap up, to treasure up,[[28]](#footnote-22216) to accumulate riches. The noun form of the verb is *thēsauros* (#2344 θησαυρός) and is a treasury or storehouse, or the treasure that is put there (cf. Matt. 6:19, 20 “treasure”). This phrase makes the verse contain the figure of speech irony, for who would store up wrath as a treasure for themselves? Yet this is the picture being presented to them. As a greedy man stores up wealth for himself, these hard and unrepentant people store up more and more wrath for themselves, which they will receive at the Day of Judgment.

**“day of wrath...God’s righteous judgment.”** The day of wrath and the righteous judgment are not two separate events. The day of wrath is the day “when” the righteous judgment of God is revealed. The Greek *kai* (usually “and”) can be understood as a “when” occasionally when it connects an expression of time with something that occurs in that time (BDAG; cf. Matt. 26:45; Mark 15:25). In this verse, the wrath of God and the “righteous” judgment of God are intertwined. The wrath of God is not unrighteous. It is not “a necessary evil.” Rather, it is part of the righteous nature of God to honor mankind’s free will and give people the judgment that they have asked for via their words and behavior. In the Greek, the genitives (“of wrath”; “of the righteous judgment”; “of God”) without the definite article emphasize the quality of the noun.[[29]](#footnote-29632)

Rom 2:6

**“who will repay each person according to his works.”** The teaching that on Judgment Day people will get what they deserve, good or bad, based on what they have done in their life is taught many times in Scripture (e.g., Job. 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; see commentary on Ps. 62:12).

[For more on rewards in the future and people getting what they deserve, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Rom 2:7

**“life in the age *to* *come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Rom 2:8

**“selfishly ambitious.”** The Greek is *eritheia* (#2052 ἐριθεία). Spicq says, “…*eritheia* is used seven times in NT, including twice in the sin lists (2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20), along with *eris* [strife], which indicates that the former does not have the same meaning as the latter and is not derived from it. …it was formed from *eritheuomai*, “work for hire.”[[30]](#footnote-27059) The *erithos* is a day laborer; the term is used especially for weavers and spinners. As a result, the term *eritheia* (paid work) originally had a positive sense, but it came to mean that which is done solely for interested motives (“What’s in it for me?”). Hence the meaning: contrive to gain a position…not in order to serve the state, but to gain honor and wealth. From that developed two other meanings: 1) dispute or intrigue to gain advantages; or 2) personal ambition, the exclusive pursuit of one’s own interest. These connotations of intrigue, disputations, and chicanery appear in all the NT texts.”[[31]](#footnote-15607) Aristotle used the word of those who seek political office by unfair means, and Philo wrote, “The only stable government is one in which there is no strife and no intrigue [*eritheia*].” “The idea is “base self-seeking,” the “baseness” that cannot shift its gaze to higher things.”[[32]](#footnote-31313) It is a complex word that takes on different meanings in different contexts, so attention to the context is important. Meanings include selfishness, selfish ambition, rivalry, base self-seeking, and the use of dishonest means to get personal gain (particularly in political circles).

Rom 2:9

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself while including his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “tribulation and anguish on every person” (cf. ESV, HCSB, NET, NIV), the inclusion of the word “soul” points us to the fact that the thoughts, feelings, and emotions are important. The evil we do is certainly related to our thoughts and emotions, and we are responsible before God to control our thoughts and emotions (2 Cor. 10:5). (This use of “soul” is similar to the one in 2 Peter 2:14.)

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Rom 2:13

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. In this context, being “declared righteous” does not refer to God’s declaring a person righteous in His sight the moment the person believes, but rather refers to God declaring a person righteous in the sense that the person has lived a righteous life and so is righteous in God’s sight. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. See commentary on Romans 3:20.

Rom 2:14

**“do by nature the things required by the law.”** Part of the nature of human beings is that “by nature” they know good from evil. Both God and the Devil stated that, and it is true (Gen. 3:5, 22). We see this in very small children. They know when they have been “wronged,” like when someone takes a toy away from them, and they cry loudly about it. God expects people to do good, and even to go further than that and search for the meaning of life, which will eventually lead to Him. It is because humans innately know good from evil that people will be punished for evil even when it is not clearly described as such (Luke 12:47-48).

**“are a law to themselves.”** Romans 2:13-15 answers the question, “Can a person be saved if they do not believe in Jesus?” The answer is “yes,” but there are important factors to consider.

After the Day of Pentecost, when the Administration of Grace and the Christian Church started, there are only two categories of people: those who are born again of God’s gift of holy spirit, and those who are not. The New Birth comes through making Christ “Lord” (Rom. 10:9; Eph. 1:13-14). People who have made Christ their lord are saved (“born again”) and have everlasting life. People who are not born again did not believe in Jesus, so they either rejected him when they heard about him, or they never heard enough about him to believe.

People who hear enough about Jesus to believe, but do not believe are “against Christ.” There is no “neutral ground.” Jesus said, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, scatters” (Matt. 12:30).

People who never heard enough about Jesus to believe, whether Jew or Gentile, are judged on whether or not, by their nature and natural way of being, they did the works of the Law (Rom. 2:13-15). Just as there were many good people who “by nature” did the things of the Law during the Old Testament times, so too there are many good people today who have never heard of Jesus Christ or heard enough about Christ to form an opinion and believe, but who by nature do the things of the Law, such as they do not steal and they treat their neighbor the way that they would want to be treated (the “golden rule,” Matt. 7:12). These people, like those in the Old Testament time, will be judged by their works (which includes their thought life). God is a righteous God and does not condemn people to death if they have never had a chance to believe.

The reason that people can do “by nature” the things in the Law is that the essence of the Law is love. Every religion teaches the value of love to one degree or another because the value of love is self-evident. We should know not to steal because we know the pain stealing causes. We know to help others because we know how we need and value being helped. To not be loving “by nature” is to be cold and selfish, and thus worthy of death on the merits of one’s own actions.

Once we understand that people who have never heard the truth about Jesus may be saved on the basis of their works, there are a couple of other important points to be made. One is that most people today have heard of Jesus Christ. It is easy to see that most of the people of the world would not have heard about Jesus Christ on the Day of Pentecost, less than two months after he died and was raised, and it is easy to see that it would be unjust for God to condemn people of that generation to death in the Lake of Fire simply because they were born at the wrong place and time. However, with the ease of modern transportation and communication, it is getting harder and harder for people to live their life without having had a chance to believe in Jesus Christ. Even in the darkness of the Great Tribulation, God will send an angel around the world proclaiming the Gospel so that everyone does hear enough to believe (Rev. 14:6). Furthermore, although it is possible to be raised in almost any place on earth and not hear enough about Jesus to believe, it is also amazing that people of basically every religion on earth somehow hear enough about Jesus to believe in him. It would be safe to say that almost no religion on earth has not had people who were raised in that religion convert to Christianity when they heard about Jesus.

Another important point is that people have a responsibility to search for the truth. It is part of the nature of mankind that we know the difference between good and evil (Gen. 3:22), and every honest person knows we are broken inside—people have a “dark side” that must be kept in check. What Paul wrote in Romans 7, that we cannot do what we want to do and end up doing things we do not want to do, causes honest people to look for help (which is why every good bookstore has an entire section of “self-help” books). The Bible promises that if you keep asking and keep searching, you will find (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9), and God has led many to Christ who from a five-senses viewpoint had little chance to find him. Given that, on Judgment Day it will not be good enough for a person who has made no effort to find God or truth to simply say that they never heard enough to believe. God will know if they even desired God or truth in the first place.

Many “good people” seem to have no desire to even search for truth—they are content where they are. And that is the situation for many people in spite of the fact that they know they will die. For people to know that they will die but not seek solid and reasonable answers about it and what lies beyond death is willful ignorance and unconcern—an unconcern that will lead them to everlasting death. But God has provided Jesus Christ as the solution to our problems, and made the great sacrifice of giving His Son so we could be saved and have everlasting life.

On Judgment Day it will be apparent that God knows the heart of all people, and He knows whether a “good” person really ever had a desire to find the truth in the first place, and then whether that person ever really had an opportunity to hear the truth and believe it and get saved. Those people who never did have a chance to hear about Jesus but did good works and walked in love have a chance of being saved and receiving eternal life on the Day of Judgment, just as Romans 2 says.

[For information on how to be saved, see commentary on Rom. 10:9. For more about what happens when a person is saved, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3. For more on the guarantee of our salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For information on what happens to a person who rejects Christ and dies unsaved, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Rom 2:15

**“bears witness.”** The Greek is *summartureō* (#4828 συμμαρτυρέω) and means to bear joint witness. Their works demonstrate what is in their hearts, and their conscience bears a joint witness to that as well.

**“thoughts.”** The Greek is *logismos* (#3053 λογισμός) and it refers to a pattern or way of thinking in one’s thoughts and not just an isolated thought.

**“while their conflicting thoughts either accuse or perhaps excuse them.”** The literal Greek text of “conflicting thoughts” is, “between one another thoughts.” The question is, does this refer to thoughts that accuse some people and excuse other people, or is the phrase in reference to the thoughts themselves that are “between one another” or in conflict with one another? Since the context is about the law being written on Gentiles’ hearts, and the preceding phrase reads, “their conscience also bearing witness,” the context is not really about making other people knowledgeable about sin, but is about one’s knowledge of their own sin. Also, in the Greek text, the “one another” and “thoughts” are both in the genitive case, meaning that the most natural way to understand the two words is that they are paired together. Thus, the phrase should be understood as “conflicting thoughts,” not thoughts that are shared between multiple people. The idea of the verse is that the Gentiles are aware of their sin, but they are in inner conflict with what to do about it, their thoughts either accuse or excuse them.

Romans 2:14-15 is a powerful section of Scripture that is one of the primary passages that supports the moral argument for the existence of God. The moral argument is as follows:

1. Without a God, there should be no inherent moral law in people’s hearts.
2. There is an inherent moral law in people’s hearts.
3. Therefore, God exists.

Romans 2:14-15 gives support for the moral law being written on the hearts of the Gentiles and their conscience bears witness to it, so at that point, they have to either justify their sin (excuse it) or admit their sin, and stand accused of it.

Rom 2:16

**“through Jesus Christ.”** Jesus Christ stands at the right hand of God and in true oriental fashion is the agent through whom God acts. Just as Pharaoh ruled Egypt through Joseph (“Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I am Pharaoh, and without you no one will lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt’” Gen. 41:44) so God rules and judges through Jesus Christ. Jesus knew this was going to be the case even before his death and resurrection, so he said, “…the Father does not judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22; cf. Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16). When Christ spoke about his return, he said, “he” would repay people for what they had done (Matt. 16:27).

Many verses in the Bible point to the fact that on the Day of Judgment, people will have to give an account of how they have lived. This is not just a New Testament revelation; it occurs throughout the Bible. For example, Ecclesiastes 12:14 says, “For God will bring everything we do into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil.” Jesus taught that people will have to give an account for what they say (Matt. 12:36). Many verses say the same thing (e.g., Eccl. 11:9; 12:14; Matt. 12:36; 16:27; Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 4:4-5).

[For more on the Judgment, see commentary on Rom. 14:12. For more on the fact that on Judgment Day people will get what they deserve, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

**“will judge.”** The Greek verb, though translated as future (“will”), is actually in the present tense. This is known as the futuristic present,[[33]](#footnote-22671) which is the figure of speech heterosis, a switching of tenses for effect. Most versions, as the REV does, simply translate the verb according to its future tense meaning rather than its present tense form.

**“what people have kept secret.”** The Greek is more literally, “the secret things of people” since “secret” is an adjective. The genitive is a genitive of possession, i.e., the secret things held by people. It is prideful and futile to have secrets, a “secret life,” or to do things “behind closed doors.” God sees all and will judge all—this is promised. For the righteous, God’s exposure of evil is a great hope, because so much that happens in life must surely be the result of deliberate deception and threats and backroom deals done by evil people. For the evil person, the idea that God will expose and punish evil should shake them to the core of their being, but they will not come to the light and be reformed. They await their punishment.

**“just as *I proclaim in* my good news.”** The Greek is more literally translated “according to [or in accord with] my Good News.” However, that construction can be misunderstood to mean that Paul’s “Good News” is the standard by which God judges, which is not the case. Lenski notes the possible confusion and writes: “This is not saying that the gospel or “my gospel” will be the norm (κατά) of the final judgment; the norm is God’s own righteousness.”[[34]](#footnote-12182) God judges by His righteous standard, which is what Paul’s Good News states and consists of. The NIV translation has picked up on the problem and made a translation that avoids it. “This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.” This verse is a good example of when the usual way of translating κατά into English, which is “according to” or “in accord with,” can cause confusion, and an alternate translation that expresses the meaning of the Greek should be sought.

Rom 2:18

**“determine what is best.”** In the Greek, the word for determine is *dokimazō* (#1381 δοκιμάζω). It means to put something to the test with the hope of recognizing it as genuine, or worthy; to *prove* something in order to *approve* of it.[[35]](#footnote-22978) It was used by the Greeks in the context of metallurgy.[[36]](#footnote-24163) Here it is applied to *ta diapheronta*, literally, “the things that differ,” from *diapherō* (#1308 διαφέρω). The differing things are that which are good and evil, which carry (*phero*) in different directions. The sense of the Greek is that you examine the difference between good and evil, approving of the good things that pass the test. In English, “determine” shows that you examine and arrive at a judgment, while “what is best” captures the sense of difference and approval (see *dokimazō* in the commentary on Rom. 1:28).

Rom 2:20

**“*spiritually* immature.”** The Greek is *nēpios* (#3516 νήπιος, pronounced 'nay-pee-os), and it literally means an infant, a little child, but it was used metaphorically for those who were unlearned or immature. In the older versions, such as the King James, it was traditionally rendered “babes,” but today “babes” is used figuratively for beautiful women and we refer to infants as “babies.” In this verse, it refers to people who are unlearned or immature.

**“embodiment.”** Cf. NAB translation. The Greek word is *morphōsis* (#3446 μόρφωσις), used only here and in 2 Timothy 3:5. This word refers to “the state of being formally structured.”[[37]](#footnote-22021) Hence, the law was the formulation of knowledge and truth, structured and brought together in one work. In this sense, it could alternately be translated as the “formulation” of knowledge and truth (cf. ESV, NIV, NASB).

Rom 2:22

**“do you rob temples?”** What does this question mean in relation to abhorring idols? It is not simply a remark against stealing, for the apostle already addressed this in Rom. 2:21 with the question, “do you steal?” Rather, this phrase is meant to call out hypocrisy and compromise. Rome, along with the entire Roman Empire, was crowded with temples, which were filled with idolatrous images and artifacts. Such artifacts were often very costly, made of gold and silver. Also, some temples were used as banks, in which people’s money was kept. In fact, the English word “money” comes from “Moneta,” the name of a goddess who had a temple in Rome in which money was both minted and stored. Since ancient Temples did not have particularly good security, temple robbery was somewhat common in ancient times. Paul raises the question, “You say you hate idols, but do you get dishonest gain by robbing temples?” Paul thus brings up the commands of Deuteronomy 7:25: “The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God” (NIV). As Lenski writes,

“It is the violation of the first principle of Judaism itself, its abhorrence of all idols. To snatch some jewel, gold, or silver, or other valuable from an idol temple, to buy it from another, to work it up into something else, to sell it yea, even to touch it and in any way to possess it, really destroyed a Jew’s Judaism.”[[38]](#footnote-24831)

Rom 2:23

**“You who boast in the law dishonor God by transgressing the law.”** This verse is a statement and not a question. Compare the ESV and NET translations. It is a verdict paralleling Rom. 2:17, as Lenski says, “What, then, is the verdict? ‘Thou art dishonoring God!’”[[39]](#footnote-31198) If this verse were meant as a question, it would hardly be worth asking, because of course one dishonors God by transgressing the law!

**“by transgressing the law.”** The Greek text literally reads, “by the transgression of the law,” to refer to breaking a commandment of the law.

Rom 2:24

**“For as it is written.”** The reference is taken from the Septuagint versions of Isaiah 52:5, which differs somewhat from the Hebrew text. Paul uses the formula, “for as it is written” before quotations in a number of places.

**“blasphemed.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Rom 2:25

**“indeed… but.”** Cf. NAB. This is a common Greek construction where two sides of a matter are presented. It is often translated as “on the one… on the other hand.” The translation “to be sure” is from the Greek word *men* (#3303 μέν), which here is “introducing a concessive clause… *to be sure.*”[[40]](#footnote-29845) This word works in conjunction with the word *de* (#1161 δέ), which gives the other fuller side of the matter. The apostle Paul concedes that (“on the one hand”) circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law, but what he gives with one hand he takes away with the other, for he immediately adds that (“on the other hand”) if you break the law your circumcision is useless. This is important because the apostle will affirm in the next chapter that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), and so circumcision of the flesh is not profitable for justification, for no one can keep the whole law.

**“transgressor of the law.”** Refers to the act of breaking a commandment of the law.

Rom 2:27

**“in spite of.”** The Greek *dia* refers to things passing through, which may be favorable or hostile. Here it is hostile, and has the sense of “in spite of.”[[41]](#footnote-24375)

Rom 2:29

**“On the contrary.”** The Greek is the strong “but,” *alla* (#235 αλλά), which means “but, nevertheless, notwithstanding, etc.,” and sets in contrast that which comes before from the new thought being introduced. Especially after a negation (“not” and “nor” in Rom. 2:28), “on the contrary” is a good and clear translation.[[42]](#footnote-25392)

**“inwardly.”** The Greek is *kruptos* (#2927 κρυπτός), meaning “hidden” or “secret.” Paul says a true Jew is one who is a Jew in the secret, hidden parts of the soul. In this sense, the translation “inwardly” is good.

**“by the spirit.”** The Greek is *en pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα). It means “by the spirit,” the gift of holy spirit that a person gets at the time of the New Birth. Many Trinitarian translators understand this phrase to mean, “by the Spirit,” meaning that it is the third person of the Trinity, “the Holy Spirit,” who circumcises a person’s heart at the time he believes, but that is not what this verse is referring to. Neither does this use of the word “spirit” refer to our “attitude.” If that were the case, the verse would read something such as: “true circumcision is of the heart, in the attitude, not by the written code….” Although there are verses where “spirit” does refer to an activity of the mind and can mean “attitude,” that is not its meaning here. Even if a person was a Jew who had a wonderful attitude about obeying God’s laws, he could not be righteous in God’s sight except through Christ. The Christian, whether Jew or Greek in background, was part of the “true circumcision” only by virtue of being born again of the spirit of God. Thus, true circumcision is always “in union with,” or “in connection with,” the spirit.

[For more on what the holy spirit is, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**Romans Chapter 3**

Rom 3:2

**“First of all…”** This short verse reveals the feelings of the Jews (and rightfully so) toward the Law. Christians have been influenced by the writings to the Christian Church (Acts-Jude) to see the Law as a yoke of bondage, a burden, and weak through the flesh. Thus, it seems that all we can say about it is that we are glad we did not live under the Law. The Jews, on the other hand, considered the Law one of God’s greatest gifts to them as a nation. The Law (meaning the Tanakh, the entire Old Testament) was God’s guidance that showed them how to live, how to run a just society, and how to be holy before God. Indeed, Jewish life would not be Jewish life were it not for the Law.

It also helps us to see the wonderful attitude the Jews had toward the Law when we recognize that other nations did not have anything like it. It is truly a gift of God’s grace that He gave the Law and in doing so revealed Himself, His love, His righteousness, what He expected from mankind, and how to live prosperous and blessed lives. The gods of other nations gave no such gift. There is no “Word of God” in the pagan religions. Poets and authors such as Homer wrote about the gods, but what did they reveal? First, the stories themselves were contradictory in many ways. And the gods they revealed were often worse than any good human would be. They were jealous, vengeful, capricious, and often delighted in causing trouble. Furthermore, unlike the Law of Moses, which told people exactly what God wanted, pagans never quite knew how to please their gods, or if they were angry (something the people assessed by bad fortune such as sickness, losing a war, a famine, pestilence, etc.), they did not know exactly how to appease them. No wonder the Jews loved the Law and considered it a gift. Compared to our freedom in Christ, it was very restrictive, but how many of the commands of God to the Church are in the Law in one form or another? Many! Romans 7:12 will tell us that the Law is holy, just, and good. The Law, and the Christ, and the New Testament, are a true and unique witness of the love that our true God has for mankind. He not only wants a relationship with us, He wants to make sure that we know how to live such that life is a blessing and joy.

**“words.”** The Greek word is *logion* (#3051 λόγιον, pronounced 'log-ee-on), and it is the diminutive of *logos*, “word” or “message.” Literally, it is “little words.” See commentary on Acts 7:38.

Rom 3:3

**“some did not believe.”** This is the figure of speech, tapeinosis, or understatement. “Some?!” Oh if only that were the case, that “some” did not believe, but in fact, “most” did not. Sadly, for most of Israel’s history, only “some” believed, while the majority lived in unbelief. Yet those who believed had such a huge impact that it could surely seem like only some did not trust God.

[See Word Study: “Tapeinosis.”]

**“faithfulness.”** “Faithfulness” is the best translation of the Greek word *pistis* (#4102 πίστις), in this context. “Faithfulness” was a very common meaning of *pistis* in the Greek-speaking world, as most Greek-English lexicons show. Furthermore, God is a faithful God (Deut. 7:9; 32:4), and no amount of unbelief or unfaithfulness on the part of people will keep God from being faithful, as this verse points out.

Rom 3:4

**“declared righteous.”** In a sense, this is a strange verse because the Most High God, creator of the universe, allows Himself to be put on trial for His actions. God did this so that His creation could see that, unlike others who have sin and guilt, God is “declared righteous” in all that He says. In this case, God is “declared righteous” because He is righteous—He is just and loving in every instance and totally without fault. The “righteousness” (right acts) of God sets the standard for all others to live by.

[For more on “righteousness,” see commentary on Rom. 3:20.]

Rom 3:5

**“when he inflicts.”** The Greek verb is *epipherō* (#2018 ἐπιφέρω), and it means to bring upon, inflict, impose. In this verse, the verb is in the present tense, indicating that God’s wrath can be a present thing, not only reserved for the future. Thus, this verse confirms Rom. 1:18, that the wrath of God “is being revealed from heaven” against people for their sin. It is sometimes taught that God will only act in wrath against humans in the Tribulation period when the seven seals are broken, the seven trumpets blow, etc., and there are mighty plagues on the earth. In fact, God has often acted in wrath, especially to protect His people. Examples include: the Flood of Noah; the Tower of Babel; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the plagues on Egypt; the death of Korah and his fellow rebels (Num. 16:1-33); and the hailstones on the Canaanites (Josh. 10:11). An example of God’s wrath in the New Testament is the blindness of Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:11).

**“wrath.”** The Greek word for “wrath” is *orgē* (#3709 ὀργή, pronounced or-'gay), and it refers to wrath or anger. In this verse, it is “the wrath,” referring to “the” wrath that is promised when people disobey God or rebel against Him. However, since in Christian jargon, “the wrath” generally refers to the wrath of God that will be poured out in the book of Revelation, we thought it best to just say “wrath” here, rather than give the wrong impression.

**“I am speaking from a human perspective.”** The verse starts out by saying that “our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God,” and if that is the case, then by some twisted human logic our unrighteousness should be a good thing, because it more clearly shows the righteousness of God. So why would God inflict us with his wrath if what we are doing is a good thing? That is the “human standpoint,” and the failure of human logic. God does not need us to be unrighteous to show off His righteousness, even though our unrighteousness makes His righteousness very clear. Furthermore, He does not inflict people with wrath to show off His righteousness. It does that, of course, but it does so many other things as well: it serves as an example and warning to others so they will not take God lightly and live in sin; in serving as a warning to sinners, it helps assure that society will be godly and peaceful for mankind; it proves that God will keep His promises to punish evil; and it righteously recompenses people for what they have done in life, and thus repays them for their thoughts and deeds.

Rom 3:8

**“slanderously.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. This is a good example of the word *blasphēmeō* being used to refer to slander against a person rather than against God or a god.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

**“deserved.”** The Greek word is the adjective *endikos* (#1738 ἔνδικος), meaning “according to right, according to what is right, righteous,” from *dikē* (right). The people who say, “Let us do evil so that good may come” will receive a righteous judgment—they will be condemned.

Rom 3:9

**“under *the power of* sin.”** The Greek text simply reads “under sin.” It is clear from reading the rest of Romans, and especially Romans 7, that every human is under the power of sin. Our very lives are a power struggle, because we desire and try to do good, but the sin nature that lives in us tries to reproduce its nature in us and cause us to sin. The reading, “under *the power of* sin” is clearer than just “under sin,” which leaves most readers just wondering what the phrase means, but the longer reading does have a weakness. As Lenski points out in his commentary on Romans, we are also under the indictment of sin.[[43]](#footnote-19773) So we are under the power of sin, but we are also under the “guilty” verdict in God’s court because we have sinned. So in its fullness, the verse is saying that we are both under the power of sin and are guilty for having sinned.

Rom 3:12

**“kindness.”** See commentary on Galatians 5:22.

Rom 3:19

**“the law.”** This use of “law” is the general use of the word that refers to the whole Old Testament, not just the Torah, or Mosaic Law (Genesis-Deuteronomy). We know this because not one of the quotations in the earlier verses is from the Torah, they are all from the Psalms, writings, and prophetic books.

**“the whole world.”** It is fair to ask how, since “the law” was given to Israel, the “whole world” becomes guilty because of what “the law” says. Although the law was spoken in general to Israel, and there are certainly things in it that refer only to Israel, there is much of the “Old Testament” that applies to, or even was written to, the Gentiles. Considering that “the law” in the verse refers to the entire Old Testament, and not just the Torah, we can see that what is said in the verses quoted is true of both Jews and Gentiles.

Rom 3:20

**“declared righteous.”** No person will be declared righteous in God’s sight just by the works they do. Everyone sins, so everyone must be declared righteous by God, and that declaration of “righteous” occurs because of the work of Christ.

R. C. H. Lenski correctly notes:

“The word [*dikaioō*, #1344 δικαιόω] is not ethical (middle in force): ‘becomes righteous,’ but everywhere forensic (a straight passive): ‘declared righteous.’”[[44]](#footnote-11599)

The difference between, “becomes righteous” (or “is made righteous”) and “is declared righteous” is subtle but extremely important. The Christian is “declared righteous” by God based upon the sacrifice of Christ. God declares that we are righteous even though we are still sinners and still sinning. Christians are not “made righteous,” in the sense that they no longer sin or their sin no longer matters. It does matter, which is why we are to try hard not to sin (Rom. 6:12), and why we are to confess our sin if we do sin (1 John 1:9).

Being “declared righteous” is a judicial decision. In God’s court of law, He declares the Christian “righteous” due to the work of Christ in spite of the sin nature that lives in us and the sins we commit—and being declared righteous means that Christians have everlasting life. We can perhaps better understand “being declared righteous” if we consider the example of a man getting arrested for stealing and going to court, but making such an impassioned promise that he will not steal again that the judge decides to “declare him righteous.” The man is still a thief, but in the eyes of the law he is “righteous,” and without guilt for the crime he committed. Similarly, we are sinners, but in the eyes of the law of God, we are “declared righteous,” because we accepted Christ’s payment for our sin, and thus we will not suffer God’s penalty of death (cf. Rom. 6:23, “the wages of sin is death”).

The well-known theologian N.T. Wright expresses what “declared righteous” means when he wrote, “‘Righteousness’ within the lawcourt setting…denotes the *status* that someone has when the court has found in their favor.”[[45]](#footnote-25093) In a court of law, a declaration of “righteous” does not mean that the person is actually morally upright due to their ethical and moral behavior. It means the person’s *status* as far as the court is concerned is “righteous.” But in declaring us to be righteous, God does not “make us righteous.” We are still sinners, but now we are sinners with everlasting life.

It is a wonderful truth that a person can be “declared righteous” in the eyes of God due to the work of Christ, because, as Paul discovered, no amount of human effort will ever make us righteous in God’s sight. Furthermore, however, once a person has been “declared righteous” and is a born-again Christian, he or she then has the obligation to do their best to live a godly life and not sin. It is sometimes taught that once a person is a Christian, he or she has been made righteous and does not have to worry about sinning. That is an incorrect and harmful teaching. Sin is harmful in many ways. It hurts us and others in this life, and it affects the rewards or lack of rewards a person will receive in the next life, in Christ’s future kingdom on earth.

[For more on getting or losing rewards in the future Kingdom of Christ, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10. For more on the words “righteousness” and “justification,” and Christians being declared righteous, see commentary on Rom. 3:22.]

**“comes the knowledge of sin.”** The context says that no flesh will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the Law. Then it says why: “for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” The context implies that making people know sin is what the Law does, it cannot make one righteous in God’s sight. A number of versions translate the verse: “all that the Law does is to tell us what is sinful” (NJB); “The law simply shows us how sinful we are” (NLT); “For all the law can do is to make men conscious of sin” (Williams).

**“knowledge.”** The Greek is *epignōsis* (#1922 ἐπίγνωσις), which is *gnōsis* (knowledge) with the *epi* prefix, which intensifies the meaning of the word. Hence, *epignōsis* does not just refer to “knowledge,” but rather a full or complete knowledge or complete realization. Also, the word *gnōsis* emphasizes experiential knowledge, such that the law brought realizing and thus experiencing sin in a fuller or clearer way. When the Law came, “sin increased” (Rom. 5:20). People did not just know about sin, they more fully knew sin because they experienced it, and its dreadful consequences, for themselves. Lenski writes about *epignōsis* and says, “It is more than ‘knowledge’ (our versions) which may be merely intellectual; it is ‘full realization’ borne in upon us, personal inner conviction. There is much false *gnōsis* but no false *epignōsis.*”[[46]](#footnote-28111) BDAG would translate Romans 3:20 as the “consciousness of sin,”[[47]](#footnote-10741) and some English versions adopt that translation. Indeed, the law brought a consciousness, an awareness, of sin, and not just sin in the world, but our own sin.

Rom 3:21

**“righteousness from God.”** This is the genitive of origin (cf. NIV). The “righteousness” comes from God. The phrase “The Law and the Prophets testify to it” points out that the principle of being righteous by one’s trust in God (“by faith”) is revealed in the Law and the Prophets. They bear witness to the principle (law) of faith. For example, Romans 4 points out that Abraham was righteous by his trust in God (cf. Gen. 15:6). Abraham was not righteous by his trust in Jesus Christ, because the life and work of Jesus Christ came some 2,000 years later.

[For more on righteousness, see commentary on Rom. 3:22.]

Rom 3:22

**“righteousness.”** Righteousness is such a vital topic in Romans (indeed, in the New Testament!) that we must take some time to try to understand it. The book of Romans clearly establishes that a Christian is declared righteous, or “in right standing,” before God by trust (“faith”) in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22, 26, 28; 4:5, 13; 5:1; 9:30; 10:6).

Complicating our understanding of “righteousness,” however, is that almost every English version of the New Testament uses both the words “righteousness” (or “righteous”), and “justification” (or “justify”). Understandably, most people think these two different English words are translated from two different Greek words, but that is not the case. The same Greek root word underlies both the translation “righteousness” and the translation “justification.” That is the major reason why, when we compare different English versions of the New Testament, they do not agree as to when to use “righteousness” and when to use “justification.”

The reason that two different English words, “righteousness” and “justification” are used even though the Greek words are the same is that, in general, scholars have agreed to use the word “righteous” when translating the attributes of God, but to use the word “justification” when translating what God has done for people. D. W. Diehl writes:

“Even though there is no distinction between righteousness and justice in the biblical vocabulary [i.e., the Greek words], theologians often use the former to refer to the attribute of God in himself and the latter to refer to the actions of God with respect to his creation.”[[48]](#footnote-16408)

But generally, translating the same Greek words by two different English words, “righteousness” and “justification,” causes more problems than it solves. First and most obviously, the English words “righteousness” and “justification,” while related in meaning, do not mean the same thing. In English, “righteousness” means “to act in accord with divine or moral law,” while “justification” relates to a judicial pronouncement that the person has been found innocent or absolved from guilt, ostensibly based on the facts of the case. Scholars cannot agree on exactly when the Greek words have those separate meanings, and this is evident from the fact that different English versions differ in their usage of “righteous” and “justification.”

A second major problem with translating the same Greek words both as “righteousness” and “justification” is that the internal consistency of the Church Epistles, especially in Romans and Galatians, is lost. If “righteous,” “righteousness,” etc., appear all the way through the New Testament, then the reader can see the consistent message that God is giving us in His Word. However, if in versions such as the NIV and ESV, we see “righteousness” through faith in Romans 3:22, but “justified” by faith in Romans 5:1, we lose the consistency of what God is saying.

A third problem with translating the same Greek words both as “righteousness” and “justification” is that the flow of the pattern of salvation is not clearly maintained from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The idea of salvation, which is quite often communicated by the word “saved” (Greek: *sōzō*) in the New Testament, was generally communicated by the word “righteousness” in the Old Testament. If we read in the Old Testament that the “righteous” will live forever, and then we read in the New Testament that we have “righteousness” with God because of our trust (faith), we can easily make the connection between “righteous” and “righteousness.” But if we read that we have “righteousness” with God because of our faith in the Old Testament but we are “justified” by faith in the New Testament (cf. KJV, ESV, NASB, NIV), we can easily miss the connection between the Old and New Testaments.

We can clearly see that in the Old Testament, “righteous,” “righteousness,” etc., often had the connotation of salvation by reading the verses that use those words and substituting “saved” or “salvation.” The list of verses relating righteousness to being acceptable to God and having everlasting life is far too large and too varied to include here, but here is a small sampling. The Israelites would be “righteous” if they were careful to obey the Law (Deut. 6:25). The righteous will stand (i.e., do well) in the Day of Judgment, but the wicked will not (Ps. 1:3-6). The righteous are the ones who will live on the earth forever (Ps. 37:29). The righteous will not be moved (i.e., taken from the earth; Ps. 55:22; 112:6; and Proverbs 10:30 and 12:3 expand that to say although the righteous will not be moved, the wicked will not dwell in the land). The righteous have a reward, referring to an everlasting reward (Ps. 58:11). The righteous are enrolled in the Book of Life (Ps. 69:28). The righteous flourish and are planted in the house of Yahweh (Ps. 92:12, 13). Righteousness delivers from death, meaning everlasting death (Prov. 10:2). The righteous person who does not sin will live forever (Ezek. 3:21). At the Day of Judgment people will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, and the wicked will be burned up while the righteous will be healed (Mal. 3:17-4:2).

Righteousness has always been by trust (faith). This was clear at the time of Abraham, continued during the administration of the Law, and is still true today, in the Church Age. It has always been vital that a person maintained their trust in God. That is why Ezekiel 33:12-20 says that if a “righteous” person becomes unrighteous, he will “die” (i.e., “die” on the Day of Judgment), while if a wicked person repents and becomes righteous, he will “live” (i.e., live forever). It is why Habakkuk says, “the righteous person will live by his faithfulness” (Hab. 2:4).

The Greek words in the New Testament that relate to righteousness, and are all from the root *dikē*, “right,” are: *dikaios* (an adjective); *dikaiosunē* (a substantive: an adjective used as a noun); *dikaioō* (a verb); *dikaiōs* (an adverb); and *dikaiōma* (a noun). We will now take the time to define these, but to do that, we have to combine concepts found in Greek lexicons, such as BDAG and Thayer’s, with Hebrew concepts of righteousness. It is absolutely vital that we remember that the New Testament concept of righteousness is anchored in the Old Testament concept of righteousness. We must keep in mind that in the Gospels, when Jesus spoke of righteousness (cf. Matt. 5:6, 20), he was speaking in Hebrew and Aramaic, the language of the Old Testament. By using those languages, he brought the Hebrew meaning of “righteousness” into what he said. This important fact is obscured by the fact that the four Gospels are written in Greek as if Jesus spoke Greek words with purely Greek meanings. He did not.

What Jesus said and did was intimately connected with the Old Testament, and he used the language and concepts of the Old Testament when he taught. This would be much easier to see if the page in the Bible that is traditionally placed between Malachi and Matthew, and says in huge letters, “The New Testament,” were placed between the Gospel of John and the book of Acts. When we think about it, “the New Covenant” (“New Testament”) was inaugurated in Christ’s blood, with his death (Matt. 26:28), which is at the end of the Gospels, not at the beginning. Until the time of Jesus’ death, people were still living under the Old Covenant, and in the Gospels, Jesus spoke the languages of the Old Covenant, which were Hebrew and Aramaic. If the page that says, “The New Testament” was placed between the Gospel of John and the book of Acts, we would be able to better understand two things: first, that Jesus spoke and taught as an Old Testament prophet, fulfilling the Law, and second, that the New Covenant was inaugurated at the end of his life. Historically, the reason the page “The New Testament” is placed between Malachi and Matthew has nothing to do with the subject matter of the Bible at all. It was placed where it is because the books before it—the Old Testament books—were written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and the books after it—our modern “New Testament”—were written in Greek, with the likely exception of Matthew. In conclusion, it is very misleading to put the “New Testament” marker page where it is because the average Christian just assumes that “the New Covenant” somehow started with the Gospels, when it did not.

Paul and the other apostles continued using “righteousness” in a way that certainly had overtones of the Hebrew meaning. The righteousness that the Old Testament and Jesus spoke about did not change because now it was being spoken about in Greek instead of Hebrew. So, for example, the righteousness that Paul spoke about when he used his native language and spoke to Jews, and the righteousness he spoke about when he spoke in Greek in cities like Thessalonica or Corinth, was the same righteousness. In fact, it is specifically because the concept of righteousness in the Epistles is the same as it is in the Old Testament that the Church Epistles can legitimately spend so much time referring to people such as Abraham and David, and that they were righteous by their trust in God.

In summary, the overtones of “righteousness” that are part of the Old Testament and clearly part of the meaning of the Hebrew word, are also brought into the Greek words used in the writings of Paul, and we must be aware of those overtones if we are going to understand the Epistles and the message of the New Testament. We would expect this anyway because Paul is not inventing a new Gospel, a new salvation, or a new way of right-standing in the sight of God.

The meaning of the Hebrew adjective *tsaddiq*, “righteous” (#06662 צַדִּיק), the noun *tsedeq*, “righteousness” (#06664 צֶדֶק), and the related Hebrew words for aspects of righteousness all relate to the same basic concepts. Of course, “righteousness” in Hebrew and Greek has a range of definitions, just as it has in English, but a central meaning is “conformity to a norm.” When we are speaking of God’s righteousness, then, we are speaking of God’s keeping the norms that He Himself has established; for example, His covenant and His promises. We can see this in verses such as 2 Chronicles 12:6, where the people said, “Yahweh is righteous.” In that context, God had just told the people through a prophet that they had abandoned Him, so He was going to abandon them. They responded “Yahweh is righteous,” because they understood that God’s actions were in conformity with His norm, after all, God had said in the Law that if they forsook Him, He would forsake them. We today use “righteous” as being in conformity to a norm, and when we speak of people being “righteous,” or performing “righteous acts,” we are generally thinking in terms of those people’s actions being “right” in accordance with some external standard. In other words, one aspect of “righteousness” is integrally related to our actions in relation to a norm.

However, there is a second quite different meaning to “righteous.” Integrally part of the meaning of the Hebrew words for “righteous” is the concept of being vindicated in a court of law. It is vitally important to understand this part of “righteousness,” because being “declared righteous” in a court of law is very different from being “made righteous,” or “acting in a righteous manner.”

N.T. Wright expresses this well when he says, “‘Righteousness’ within the lawcourt setting…denotes the *status* that someone has when the court has found in their favor.”[[49]](#footnote-19254) “Righteousness” in the law court does not mean that the person is actually morally upright and “right” in God’s eyes by virtue of his wonderful moral behavior. Nor does it mean the person acts in a righteous way. It means the person’s *status* as far as the court is concerned is “righteous.” Because Jesus died for us, we can be “declared righteous” in the heavenly court even though we are not upstanding Christian citizens. Thank God for that! We also need to know that, in declaring us to be righteous in His eyes, God does not “make us righteous.” Because we are declared righteous, we get to have everlasting life. However, there is a “but” we need to be aware of.

Our salvation, or everlasting life, is by grace, and since we are declared righteous, we get to live forever. But there is the matter of rewards. Rewards are not by grace, they are by works. The Christian is “declared righteous,” not “made righteous.” Augustine (and his followers) missed this point. This is no doubt in part because he did not understand what happens when we die, the way the future will unfold with the Messianic Kingdom coming to earth and rewards in that kingdom, and it is also due to his not believing in genuine free will. Augustine believed that the Christian was actually “made righteous,” that God imputed righteousness to the person. That theology is in part responsible for the translations “justify” and “justified” in so many versions, as if the person was actually made “just.” We are not “made righteous,” we are judicially declared to be righteous. Just because we trust in Christ does not make us morally righteous—we still sin. It is our *status* in the eyes of God that is changed when we become a Christian, not our *character*.

[For more on rewards, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

To be clear, then, there are times when “righteous” refers to our actions, and there are times when it refers to the status we have in the sight of God in spite of our actions. Matthew 6:1 is a good example of “righteousness” referring to our actions and doing what is right: “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ in front of people in order to be seen by them.” Another example is in 2 Timothy 3:16, where Scripture is profitable for “training in righteousness,” meaning, training in what righteous things to do. An example of “righteous” referring to Christians’ righteous status in the sight of God, apart from our actions or how we live, is Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by trust, we have peace with God.” Another example is Romans 3:21, “But now a righteousness from God has been revealed apart from the law.”

It has always been people’s duty to live righteously, that is, according to God’s standards. The Old Testament made it clear that for God it was more acceptable for a person to live righteously than to perform sacrifices (Prov. 21:3), and righteousness was the plumb line by which God measured a person’s actions (Isa. 28:17). However, no one could ever perfectly uphold the righteousness demanded by the Law. Therefore, it was people’s faithfulness to try to keep the Law or do what was righteous, and their trust that God would reward them for it, that God counted it to them as righteousness, and saw their status as “righteous” in His sight. The New English Bible does an excellent job of translating Habakkuk 2:4, “…the righteous man will live by being faithful.” In this verse, like many others in the Old Testament, the word “live” refers to living forever. Thus, we could expand Habakkuk to read, “…the righteous man will live [forever] by being faithful.” In many contexts, the concept of living righteously often included being faithful year after year.

1. *Dikaios* (Adjective. #1342, δίκαιος). “Observant of what is right (*dikē*).” “Righteous, observing divine and human laws; one who is such as he ought to be.” (The neuter denotes that which is obligatory in view of certain requirements of justice, right, fair, equitable). In a broad sense, “upright, righteous, virtuous.” Keeping the commands of God; used of Old Testament people noted for piety. In a narrower sense, rendering to each his due; and in a judicial sense, passing just judgment on others, whether expressed in words or shown by the manner of dealing with them. In a context that has a negative idea predominating, “innocent, faultless, guiltless.” When *dikaios* describes a believer’s status in the sight of God, it is hearkening back to God’s courtroom declaration that the person is “right,” in His eyes. In that case, the person can be a “righteous” person but not act righteously in his life.
2. *Dikaiosunē* (Substantive: an adjective used as a noun. #1343, δίκαιοςυνη). The virtue or quality or state of one who is *dikaios* (righteous). In the broad sense, the state or status of the one who is “righteous” in the eyes of God. The condition of being acceptable to God. Thus, in the writings of Paul, *dikaiosunē* has a peculiar meaning, opposed to the views of the Jews and Jewish Christians who were still zealous for the Law, that *dikaiosunē* denotes the state and status of being acceptable to God which becomes a sinner’s possession through faith in Jesus Christ. *Dikaiosunē* is also used in the narrower sense of justice, or the virtue which gives each one his due; thus, the quality, state, or practice of judicial responsibility with focus on fairness, justice, equitableness.
3. *Dikaioō* (Verb. #1344, δικαιόω). To declare or pronounce someone to be righteous, just, or such as he ought to be. To declare and treat someone as righteous. To be better understood, *dikaioō* should be compared to *hosioō and axioō*, which do not mean “to make holy” or “to make worthy,” but rather to “declare, judge, or treat” as holy or worthy. The emphasis of the verb is not that God “makes” us righteous, but rather that God “declares” us righteous, and thus that is how we are in His sight in spite of our sins and shortcomings. The glory goes to God, who declared sinners to be righteous. *Dikaioō* is especially used as “declare to be righteous,” in the technical phraseology of Paul, respecting God who judges and declares such men as put faith in Christ to be righteous and acceptable to Him. In contexts where the negative idea is predominant, it means “to declare guiltless.” The passive voice is used reflexively, “to show oneself to be righteous.”
4. *Dikaiōma* (Noun. #1345, δικαίωμα). Universally, of an appointment of God having the force of law; a regulation relating to just or right action, what has been established and ordained by law: thus, a regulation, requirement, commandment, or ordinance. A judicial decision or sentence, either the favorable judgment which acquits, or the unfavorable one that is a sentence of condemnation; even sometimes extending to mean a punishment. Also, *dikaiōma* is used of a righteous act or deed.
5. *Dikaiōs* (Adverb. #1346 δικαιως). “Righteously” (*EDNT*), justly, properly, uprightly. As is right, agreeable with what is right.
6. *Dikaiōsis* (Noun. #1347 δικαίωσις). “Righteousness, justification, vindication, acquittal.” It is both the process and state of being. It is the act of God’s declaring men free from guilt and acceptable to him; adjudging them to be righteous; it is also the righteousness we have as a result of that action. (Rom. 4:25).

[For more on being “declared righteous” in the sight of God, see commentary on Rom. 3:20.]

**“trust in Jesus Christ.”** This verse is a genitive phrase in Greek; literally, “trust of Jesus Christ.” As is typical of genitive phrases, this one can be translated many different ways, and people disagree about what it means and how it should be translated. As always, therefore, the context of the verse and the scope of Scripture are necessary for arriving at the proper translation of the phrase and the meaning God intended the phrase to communicate.

The whole book of Romans is about the change that God instituted due to the sacrifice of Christ. Salvation is no longer a matter of doing the works of the Law, but rather of having trust [or “faith”] in Jesus Christ. God says in many verses in the NT, which are worded many different ways, that today a person is saved through trust in Jesus Christ. That is one reason that this verse is an objective genitive, where Jesus Christ is the object of our trust. “Trust in Christ” is the correct translation in this context. This verse contrasts the revelation of the Church Epistles, which say salvation comes through trust in Jesus Christ, with the revelation of the Old Testament, which says the works of the Law are also necessary (Deut. 6:25). This verse and many others like it in Romans, Galatians, etc., make it clear that our righteousness in the sight of God comes by having trust in Jesus Christ. There is, however, a possible sub-current in the verse that we should pay attention to.

It is also grammatically possible to translate the Greek phrase as a subjective genitive, in which case it would mean, “Jesus Christ’s faithfulness.” There is a huge debate among theologians today as to whether the Greek phrase means “trust in Christ” or “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” We do not feel “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ” is the primary meaning in this verse. For one thing, if our righteousness came by Jesus Christ’s faithfulness, then everyone would be righteous. There has to be something we do, some part we play in being righteous, or everyone would be righteous, and that part is to have trust, and since Romans 3:22 is the first place this phrase appears, it is appropriate that it is referring to the part we play in becoming declared righteous in God’s sight.

Also, and importantly, the next chapter, Romans 4, expands on the teaching of righteousness by trust. Chapter 4 says Abraham “found” the principle of being declared righteous by trust when he trusted God. It is clear that chapter 4 is saying that Abraham was declared righteous by God when he trusted God. So, for chapter 4 to be an expansion and clarification of chapter 3, then chapter 3 has to be saying that we are declared righteous when we have trust. If chapter 3 were saying we are righteous by Christ’s faithfulness, then chapter 4 would have to be saying that Abraham was righteous because of God’s faithfulness, but that is clearly not what it is saying. Chapters 3 and 4 reinforce a single point: that righteousness can come through our trust—Abraham trusted God, and we have trust in Christ.

The debate rages because the Greek phrase can have two different meanings, and it is also clear that God could have had the text worded in such a way that there was only one clear meaning. Because of that, it seems that in wording the phrase the way He did, God is setting forth a primary meaning, and then another meaning as well, a secondary meaning. In that case, the secondary meaning is that righteousness is only available because of the faithfulness of Christ. Had Christ not been faithful, everlasting life would not be available, but it is only procured by a believer by his or her faith in Christ.

**“to all those who believe.”** This phrase is not “redundant” as some people believe, but what scholars call “repetitive emphasis” (Most people who say it is “redundant” are trying to prove that the phrase we translate as “faith in Christ” should be “faithfulness of Christ”).

Given the animosity that existed between Jews and Gentiles, and the belief by many Jews that Gentiles could not be saved without becoming proselytes and keeping the Law, there was a need to state that salvation came by faith in Christ and then specifically emphasize that that was true for ALL who believed, not just the Jews. The stubbornness of the Jews when it came to rejecting Gentiles and hanging on to their Law is well documented, and shows up graphically in the book of Acts. The books of Romans and Galatians are especially clear about salvation by faith, that Christ was the fulfillment of the Law, and that there is no difference between Jews and Greeks. But even years after those books were written, Acts 21:20-25 shows us that James, the leader of the Christians in Jerusalem, was still teaching that there was a difference between Jews and Greeks, and he never said a word about salvation by faith. History teaches us that many of the Jewish Christians never did accept the writings of Paul on many points, and one of them was that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ.

**“*between Jews and Gentiles*.”** This supplied prepositional phrase is carried forward from Rom. 3:9 only for the sake of clarity. At this juncture in history, the Bible separated people into two main groups: Jews, who had been God’s chosen people, and non-Jews, who were sometimes referred to as “Gentiles.” The people to whom Paul was writing were very sensitive to the differences between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews), and the claims that being Jewish entitled one to everlasting life. Thus, in that culture, when Paul wrote “there is no distinction,” everyone knew precisely that Paul was saying that there was no difference between Jew and Gentile, and that all of them had sinned. Today, however, especially since the subject of Jews and Gentiles was as far back as verse 9, that meaning can become lost.

Rom 3:23

**“have sinned”** is aorist, because we have sinned in the past. But “fall” is present tense. We have not just “fallen” (past) short of the glory of God, we “fall” (present) short of it on a regular basis. There was a temptation to translate this verse, “…all have sinned, and *even now* fall short of the glory of God.”

Rom 3:24

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. See commentary on Romans 3:20; and for more on righteousness, see commentary on Romans 3:22.

**“*accomplished* by Christ Jesus.”** The Greek phrase uses the word *en*, which can mean “by,” or “in” with the idea of “in connection with” (cf. commentary on Eph. 1:3; Lenski; Hendriksen).[[50]](#footnote-22766) Some scholars would expand that to mean the redemption that is embodied by Christ. Scholars who support the translation, “in connection with” correctly note that God is the author of the plan of redemption and is referred to as the Redeemer throughout the Old Testament. It is God who set forth Christ as the atoning sacrifice in the context (Rom. 3:25), thus our redemption is “in connection with” Jesus Christ. However, we must note that the concept of “by” is clearly in the Greek word “*en*.” The NIV uses “by,” and scholars such as Boice[[51]](#footnote-18948) prefer “by” for several reasons. Our redemption was paid for by Jesus Christ, as many Scriptures attest. It was Christ who gave himself for us (Titus 2:14) and redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13). Also, it fits with the Old Testament concept of the “kinsman-redeemer,” the close family member who could redeem a person or piece of property. The best example of the kinsman-redeemer in the Old Testament is Boaz, who appears in the book of Ruth. To be a kinsman-redeemer a person had to be a close relative, be willing to take the responsibility upon himself, and be able to pay the price. Jesus Christ is the ultimate kinsman-redeemer. He was a close relative, a member of mankind. He was willing to die for our sins even when we did not deserve to have our sins forgiven, and he, and he alone of all mankind, was able to pay the price for the sins of mankind since he alone was sinless.

In spite of all that, the fullness of our redemption was not just “by” Christ Jesus; in a very real sense, it was “in” him (in connection with him) because it “was” him. He was the fulfillment of the promise of a seed of a woman, a lamb from the flock, a lion from the tribe of Judah, a sinless sacrifice, a perfect offering with no bones broken, and so much more. And so, the meaning is more than just instrumentally “by” Christ; it is also “in” Christ Jesus himself. Therefore, the verse is really an amphibologia where both meanings are true and accurate (see Word Study: “Amphibologia”). God is the great Redeemer, and Jesus Christ was His way of redeeming mankind—indeed, much more than that, redeeming the fallen world itself. Jesus Christ participated in this by offering himself, thus becoming the de facto redeemer.

Rom 3:25

**“set forth.”** The Greek is *protithēmi* (#4388 προτίθημι), and it has two important meanings that are relevant to this verse. 1) to set forth, put forward publicly, present, offer; 2) literally, to set before oneself; hence to plan, purpose, or intend. Historically, scholars and commentators have been divided as to which meaning fits in Romans 3:25. In favor of “planned” or “purposed” is the fact that *protithēmi* only occurs three times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:13; 3:25; and Eph. 1:9), and the other two times it refers to “plan” or “purpose.” Also, there is no doubt that God “planned” for Jesus Christ to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind. On the other hand, “set forth” is the overwhelming meaning of *protithēmi* in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and thus the believers in Rome would have been accustomed to hearing about the sacrifices and offerings that were “set forth” by God (Exod. 40:4, 23; Lev. 24:8; Ps. 101:3). And Romans 3:25 is in the context of Jesus being an atoning sacrifice. From a larger perspective, however, there is no doubt that in the context of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, both “planned” and “set forth” apply well, and this could be an example of the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre), where one thing is said but two things are meant. God both planned and set forth Jesus as an atoning sacrifice.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

**“atoning sacrifice.”** The Greek is *hilastērion* (#2435 ἱλαστήριον). It has two distinct meanings, both of which are significant in this verse. The first meaning is: A sin offering; a sacrifice to atone; an appeasement necessitated by sin. In this first definition, there is a “focus on the means by which sins are forgiven; having atoning power, bringing about reconciliation.”[[52]](#footnote-30293) The second meaning of *hilastērion* is: The place where the expiation occurred. The majority of translators and commentators believe that the idea of an offering or payment for sin is the primary emphasis in this verse, and thus translate *hilastērion* as “sacrifice of atonement” (NIV, NRSV), “sacrifice for reconciliation” (NJB; cf. Williams); “expiation” (RSV, Cassirer), and “propitiation” (ESV, HCSB, KJV, NASB). Although “propitiation” is used by a lot of translators, we agree with Louw-Nida that it misses the point. They write:

Though some traditional translations render ἱλαστήριον [*hilastērion*] as ‘propitiation,’ this involves a wrong interpretation of the term in question. Propitiation is essentially a process by which one does a favor to a person in order to make him or her favorably disposed, but in the NT God is never the object of propitiation since he is already on the side of people. ἱλασμός [*hilasmos*] and ἱλαστήριον [*hilastērion*] denote the means of forgiveness and not propitiation.[[53]](#footnote-21825)

Although one of the results of Christ’s sacrifice was the withholding of the wrath of God, a wrath we deserved, we believe it is wrong to translate this verse in such a way as it presents Christ’s death as “appeasing” God. The sacrifice of Jesus did not placate God, but rather was a provision that our loving God made for mankind so that we would be acceptable to Him even though we had sinned against Him. This is a case where we really do have to pay attention to the theme of the Bible, and not just look at the way the Greek word was used in Greek culture.

The Greek gods were angry, jealous gods who did not have any particular love for mankind. They often acted immorally, and were sometimes offended by things, such as being spurned at love, that they should not have been offended at. Much of the ritual and sacrifice in the pagan world was to appease these gods, and *hilastērion* is accurately translated “propitiation,” a sacrifice that appeases the wrath of the gods, in the context of these pagan deities. However, when it comes to our God, He has always loved people, and His wrath is a function of His justice and righteousness, not any immoral nature or actions. Before mankind had ever sinned, in the Garden of Eden, God warned that sin would result in death (Gen. 2:17) and since that time, people have continually sinned against God. Sacrifices, including the death of Christ, were not made to “appease” God, as if He were angry because people were breaking His laws. Instead, the sacrifices pay the legitimate debt we incur when we sin, and thus they allow God to withhold any judgment and wrath and yet still be righteous in His judgments. Thus, translations such as “sacrifice of atonement,” “sacrifice for reconciliation,” or “expiation” are much better than “propitiation.”

Now we turn to the second definition of *hilastērion*, which, in biblical contexts, refers to the “mercy seat.” *Hilastērion* is the word the Septuagint used for the “mercy seat,” the solid gold lid on the ark of the covenant that was sprinkled with the blood of the sin-offering on the Day of Atonement (Exod. 25:17; Lev. 16:14-16). Although some commentaries and translations have “mercy seat” in Romans 3:25, we do not see that as the primary meaning here. The mercy seat received the blood of the sacrifice, but it did not itself bleed or die. There had to be a shedding of blood in order for there to be remission of sin (Heb. 9:22). God had decreed that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and there had to be the death of a sinless sacrifice if people’s sin was to be atoned for. Jesus Christ died in our place, and it is his atoning sacrifice that we appropriate to ourselves by having faith in his blood. Did the children of Israel have faith in the blood on the mercy seat? Yes, but it was in connection with the entire ceremony on the Day of Atonement. They would not have had faith in blood being on the mercy seat if that blood was not from an animal that had only been cut and wounded, but had not died. There had to be the death of a sacrifice of atonement for God to forgive people and declare them righteous, and that is the point Romans 3:25-26 are making.

There is merit, however, in recognizing the subtle double meaning in *hilastērion* in this verse. The verse says that God showed His righteousness by passing over “the sins previously committed,” i.e., the sins of those people who lived before Christ. The idea being communicated is that God passed over the sins of the people who lived before Christ died, but when Christ died, his sacrifice atoned for the sins of those Old Testament people, too. Thus, in a way, Christ is like the mercy seat, which one day each year is sprinkled with blood to atone for the sins Israel has committed. When the people of Israel sinned, their sin was not immediately atoned for, but awaited the Day of Atonement. On that day, the tenth day of Tishri (the seventh month), the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies and atoned for all the sin of the people. Thus, individuals often waited many months for atonement for their sin. In the same way, God passed over the sin of the people before Christ, and did not judge them for it. Then, many years later when Christ died, his death atoned for their sin. “What actually took away the sins of the Old Testament saints was Christ’s blood.”[[54]](#footnote-17444) “The merits of the cross reach backward as well as forward.”[[55]](#footnote-18609)

**“sacrifice.”** People often wonder why God required animal sacrifices in the Old Testament and the sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament as an atonement for sins. However, God had some very good reasons for doing this.

First, the sacrifices that God commanded showed His love for us. People do not usually think of sacrifice as a demonstration of love, but it is. People are sinners and “the wages of sin is death.” However, God so loved people that He set things up such that a substitute could die in the place of the sinner, thus sparing the sinner of deserved death. The sacrifice of animals, and then Jesus, demonstrated that our God is a God of love and mercy by not requiring people to receive the full consequence for their sin. Thus, sacrifices show us God’s love, and the Bible is very clear in Romans 5:8 when it says, “But God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place” (see commentary on Rom. 5:6).

Second, the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They did this by establishing from earliest times that God allowed a substitute to pay the price for someone’s sin. Although making the effort to do an animal sacrifice demonstrated the sincerity of the sinner, he or she was also supposed to see that the sacrifice was not a final payment for sin, but pointed forward to the sacrifice of “the lamb of God,” which alone could completely atone for the sins of mankind (see commentary on Rom. 3:26, “*planning* to demonstrate”).

Third, animal sacrifice showed the costly nature of sin. Sacrifices always cost somebody something: animals were valuable property to their owners, and it goes without saying that Jesus Christ was beyond value to God.

Fourth, animal sacrifice graphically showed the terrible and final result of sin, which is death, and “death” is the absolute and terminal end of a person’s life. (see commentary on Rom. 6:23). Sin is horrible and the pain and death sin produces are horrible. Animal sacrifice and the death of Jesus were costly and horrible too, so horrible that they are only understandable and acceptable in the context of what God was accomplishing through them, including reconciling the sinner to God. God knows that sacrifice is repulsive, but in being repulsive, we are powerfully reminded of the repulsive nature of sin and its consequence and thus motivated to do whatever we can to keep from sinning. If we truly understand the lessons God was trying to teach us via the sacrifices He commanded, we will do our best not to sin instead of excusing ourselves when we sin or entirely ignoring our sin. Only because God provides sacrifice as an offering for sin can we embrace this action of atonement.

Historically, the Devil has blurred the lessons that God has tried to teach through sacrifice, and he has done this by inspiring ungodly people to sacrifice things apart from God’s redemptive system. Many cultures perform sacrifices, even human sacrifice. These are not commanded by God, are not redemptive, and do not cover for sin. Furthermore, the way these sacrifices are conducted can be indescribably cruel. The uninformed people do not see a difference between the sacrifices God commands and the sacrifices done in pagan cultures, and thus they often say God is “bloody” or “unrighteous.” We need to remember that God did not have to be “bloody” and require sacrifice. He could have allowed each person to pay for his or her own sin by dying. That would have pleased the Devil greatly, who would be delighted if all God’s potential family died in the flames of Gehenna. Thankfully, God loved us enough to allow people to accept a substitutionary sacrifice for their sin, in spite of the fact that this has caused Him to be misunderstood by people who have not made the effort to get to know how lovingly and righteously He set up the provision of sacrifices set forth in the Bible.

**“to demonstrate.”** See commentary on Romans 3:26, “*planning* to demonstrate.”

**“passed over.”** The Greek is *paresis* (#3929 πάρεσις), and this is the only use of this word in the New Testament. It means a passing over, letting pass, neglecting, disregarding. This is a very exact recounting of what happened with God’s justice and judgment before the death of Christ. Israel offered sacrifices to God, but in actual fact, the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb. 10:1-4). God knew that, so He withheld His final Judgment of people until Christ could come and atone for sin. It is a very good thing that God waited for Christ to be the sacrifice for sin before He judged the world. Before Christ died there was no actual effectual atonement, no effective payment for sin, and thus there was no actual forgiveness for sin available. Thus, if God had judged people when they died, instead of waiting until Christ had come to judge, the people before Christ would all be doomed, because not one person would be righteous in God’s sight. Job would have been quite right: “How then can a man be righteous before God?” (Job 25:4). However because God’s Judgment is future, and well after the death of Christ, atonement resulting in everlasting life is available for everyone—those who lived both before Christ and after him.

Romans 3:25 is very good evidence that people do not live on after they die, as most Christians believe. If people’s souls or spirits lived on after they died, then those souls would have been judged right after the person died. But if the person died before Christ, nothing he could have done would have made him righteous in God’s sight, and so he would have been doomed. However, because all the resurrections occur in the future, after the death of Christ, salvation is available.

Rom 3:26

**“*planning* to demonstrate.”** The commentator R. C. H. Lenski is quite right that many versions and commentators miss the sense of what God is saying in Romans 3:25 and 3:26 by breaking them into two sentences that start the same way, thus making them into independent thoughts in which the second sentence elucidates the first. For example, the ESV has, “This was to show…it was to show…,” the NIV has “He did this to demonstrate…He did it to demonstrate…,” and the KJV has “to declare…To declare….” If we are to understand this verse, it is important to see how these phrases are connected and why. The Greek phrase in Rom. 3:25 starts, *eis endeixis*, while Rom. 3:26 opens with *pros ho endeixis*. The noun *endeixis* is a “pointing out,” and hence a demonstration or showing forth. Being a “verbal noun,” a noun that inherently connotes action, it is not off the mark to translate it as a verb in English, which most versions do. Thus, *endeixis* is translated “show” (ESV, RSV, NRSV); “declare” (KJV); “demonstrate” (NASB, NIV), “prove” (NAB), etc.

Romans 3:26 starts with *pros ho endeixis*, which is not like *eis endeixis*, which means “to show” (more literally, “for a showing”), but instead refers to something like an outward demonstration and thus means, “with a view to showing.”[[56]](#footnote-17217) Most translators see no essential difference in the two phrases, and that is why they have them start two different sentences. However, if the translators make the verse into two sentences, as we saw with the KJV, NIV, and ESV above, then the subject of both sentences is God’s making Christ an atoning sacrifice, and then God gives two different reasons for doing that, the first being the last half of verse 25 and the second being verse 26. Essentially, translated the way the KJV, ESV, NIV, and many others have it, the verses mean: “God set forth Christ as an atoning sacrifice to show His righteousness in connection with passing over the sins previously committed.” And also, “God set forth Christ as an atoning sacrifice to show His righteousness at this present time.” We do not believe that is what these verses mean. Rom. 3:26 is not an explanation of why God set forth Christ as an atoning sacrifice; it is an explanation of why God passed over the sins “previously committed,” that is, committed before the death and resurrection of Christ.

God passed over, disregarded, ignored the sins committed before Christ. He had to, because if He had judged mankind before the death of Christ, everyone would have been guilty of sin and then sentenced to everlasting death. Even those people who sacrificed animals under the Law were only symbolically covered from their sin. Hebrews is clear: the Law was only a “shadow” of the things to come (i.e., Christ), and “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:1, 4). God’s condemnation would have been “just” because the people would have truly deserved everlasting death because of their sin, but that would not have accomplished God’s purposes for mankind, which was to have a family that would live forever with Him. Furthermore, since no one can really be righteous before God on his own merits, condemning mankind without giving them a fair chance to be righteous before Him would not have even really been righteous. So God passed over the sins committed before Christ—why?—“with a view to show his righteousness at this present time.” God set forth Jesus to be an atoning sacrifice to show His righteousness, and He also overlooked people’s sins before Christ in order to show His righteousness now, because in light of Christ’s atonement, He would be seen to be truly righteous, and also One who declares people righteous who have faith in His Messiah no matter when they lived. Thus, the atoning work of the cross not only points from the death of Christ forward, atoning those who make Christ Lord, but it atoned backward, allowing God to judge those who lived before Christ through the lens of the shed blood of Jesus.

**“trusts in Jesus.”** This translation takes the genitive as an objective genitive, where Jesus is the object of our faith (see also Romans 3:22). In this verse, “trust” is a noun, not a verb. At the time we trust in Christ, we believe in him and take him as our Lord, we get “born again,” are sealed with holy spirit (Eph. 1:13), and are declared “righteous” in the sight of God, which is why even a brand-new believer is righteous in the sight of God (Rom. 10:10; Rom. 5:1; 8:30, 33).

Rom 3:27

**“By what kind of law?”** The Greek phrase is *dia poios nomos*, and the Greek word *poios* can mean “what” or “what kind of, what sort of.” In this verse the word *nomos* is not referring to the Mosaic Law, but just “law,” or “principle,” “norm,” or “basis,” so it is better to render the phrase by “what kind of law,” opening the door for multiple possible answers (cf. ESV, NASB).[[57]](#footnote-18617)

Rom 3:28

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter (see commentary on Rom. 3:20). Romans 3:28 shows clearly that people are righteous in God’s sight because of the work of Christ, not because of their good works.

Rom 3:30

**“declare righteous.”** See commentary on Romans 3:22. In this verse, the Jews are declared righteous *ek pisteōs* (“out from trust”), while the Gentiles are declared righteous *dia tēs pisteōs* (through the [that] trust”). It is important to note that the second use of “trust” has the definite article, which in this context means more “that” than “the.” For the Jews, trust in God had always been the essence of what gave them righteousness, as Abraham (Rom. 4:2-3) and David (Rom. 4:6-8) discovered. Thus, for the Jews, trust was the source from which (*ek*), or the basis of (*ek*), their salvation. This verse is pointing out that the righteousness of the Gentiles also comes “through” (*dia*) that same thing—trust. We added the word “same” in italics for clarity.

[For more on why pistis, which is usually translated “faith” is translated as “trust,” see Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust.’”]

Rom 3:31

**“uphold.”** The Greek word is *histēmi* (#2476 ἵστημι, pronounced 'hiss-tay-mee), and in this context, it means “uphold, establish, confirm, validate.”[[58]](#footnote-15490) Some scholars[[59]](#footnote-16873) believe that Paul would have been thinking about the Rabbinic language that trust “fulfilled” the law, but that is impossible to prove, and it seems that he could have worded the Greek better if that is what he meant. Paul’s teaching that righteousness upholds the law is true, because it was the law (the five books of Moses) that confirmed that Abraham was declared righteous by his trust (Gen. 15:6).

**Romans Chapter 4**

Rom 4:2

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. See commentary on Romans 3:20.

Rom 4:4

**“gift.”** The word is the usual word for grace, *charis* (#5485 χάρις), but here it is not used with its theological trappings. The word also has a cultural meaning of “a gift of favor” (see commentary on 2 Cor. 12:9).

Rom 4:7

**“Blessed.”** The word for “blessed” is *makarios* (#3107 μακάριος), which also means “happy.” Not only are we blessed, but we should feel happy that our sins have been covered and not counted against us.

**“have been forgiven… have been covered.”** Most versions translate these verbs in the present tense, “are forgiven… are covered.” The verbs are in the aorist (past) tense, however, so we rendered it “have been covered.”

Rom 4:8

**“person.”** The Greek is *anēr* (#435 ἀνήρ), which refers to a man, a male. The quote comes from the Greek translation of the Psalms 32:1-2 (31:1-2 LXX) where it uses *anēr* to represent the Hebrew *adam*, man.

**“absolutely not.”** The Greek is stronger than simply the English “not.” It is the phrase *ou mē*, literally, “not not,” using two different Greek words that mean “no” together to form a very strong negation.

Rom 4:9

**“or for the Uncircumcised also.”** The blessing had to be for the uncircumcised also, because Abraham was a Gentile, not a Jew, when he believed. Abraham lived before God designated the Jews in Jacob, Abraham’s grandson.

Rom 4:11

**“the sign of circumcision.”** The seal of the covenant that God made with Abraham was circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14).

**“seal.”** The Greek word *sphragis* (#4973 σφραγίς) referred to a seal, the way that ancient books and scrolls were marked with a seal as proof of authenticity and to prevent tampering with or altering the content.

**“so that he would become.”** The phrase is a purpose idiom (cf. ESV, RSV, NRSV).[[60]](#footnote-14479) It is hard to communicate the purpose with just “that.” This shows that God had a plan to clearly reveal that He would justify people by trust, which He has done since Genesis—and Abraham is “the father of all who believe.” Salvation comes from trusting God. The object of that trust may change, for example, now we trust that Jesus was raised from among the dead and is Lord, however, salvation has always come from trusting God, and “without trust it is impossible to please him [God]” (Heb. 11:6).

**“but are not circumcised.”** This is the general idea of the statement. The Greek, “the ones believing through uncircumcision,” would not be clear. It means those who believe and are in the condition of uncircumcision.[[61]](#footnote-14411) The phrase in Greek means without being in a state of circumcision.

Rom 4:13

**“to Abraham and to his seed.”** God promised Abraham that he and his seed would inherit the land. God repeated the promise that He would give the land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants many times, and said it in slightly different ways. He told Abraham that he and his descendants would get the land (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:7, 18; 17:8). He told it to Isaac (Gen. 26:3). He told it to Jacob (Gen. 28:13; 35:12; 48:4). Then over and over He told Israel about the promise or that He would give them the land (cf. Exod. 6:4, 8; 12:25; 13:5, 11; Lev. 14:34; 20:24; 23:10; 25:2). The Greek translated as “seed” is *sperma*, “seed,” but “seed” was also used to mean “descendants” or “offspring.” Although many English versions have “offspring” or “descendants” in Romans 4:13, the REV retains the more literal “seed.”

The Greek text reads “to Abraham or to his seed,” but the REV, like some other English versions, nuances the “or” to an “and” for clarity (cf. CEB, CJB, ESV, NAB, NIV). The “or” made more sense in the strict wording of the Greek text (cf. “For not through law *was* the promise to Abraham, or to his seed, that he should be heir of the world, but through the righteousness of faith”), but when the English is reworded for clarity, the “or” is more easily understood as an “and.”

**“that he would inherit the world.”** God clearly promised Abraham and his seed the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:7, 18-21; 17:8). But there are also clear indications, even as early as Genesis, that the land promised to Abraham would expand far beyond Canaan. So, for example, God promised Abraham that his seed would be like the dust of the earth and like the stars in the sky in multitude (Gen. 13:16; 15:5) Also, God said that Abraham would be the father of “a multitude of nations” (Gen. 17:5; cf. Gen. 18:18). Those promises indicate that Abraham’s seed would expand beyond the boundaries of Canaan.

God told Abraham that it was through his seed that all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). Then, Galatians 3:16 lets us know that the “seed” is Jesus Christ. Then Galatians 3:29 says that anyone who belongs to Christ—which happens by believing in him—is Abraham’s seed and an heir of what God promised Abraham. The trajectory is clear. One day Christ will come and set up his kingdom on earth, and at that time all the wicked and unbelieving people will be killed off (cf. Isa. 11:4; 63:1-6; Matt. 25:31-46). At that time, “the meek”—those who believe in Christ—will inherit the earth. At that time Abraham’s seed will occupy much more than just Canaan, they will occupy the whole earth.

**“that comes by.”** The Greek is literally, “righteousness of trust,” but it is not clear what that means. This is likely a genitive of means indicating the basis for which righteousness would be declared.

Rom 4:14

**“nullified.”** The Greek word *katargeō* (#2673 καταργέω) means, in this context, to cause something to lose its power or effectiveness, invalidate, make powerless, make ineffective, nullify, make the Law invalid.[[62]](#footnote-13042)

Rom 4:15

**“For the law produces wrath.”** A simple statement of fact. No one could keep the Law, therefore it produced wrath from God.

**“transgression.”** The Greek, *parabasis* (#3847 παράβασις), literally means an overstepping, hence, a violation or transgression.

Rom 4:16

**“under the law.”** The Greek is literally “by/from the law,” which refers to the people of Israel who lived in covenant with God according to the law. Thus, they are living under the authority of the law.

Rom 4:17

**“in the sight of.”** Greek is *katenanti* (#2713 κατέναντι). There are two ways to understand the phrase “in the sight of”: (1) He is the father of us all (as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) in the sight of God. This has the meaning represented in the HCSB: “He is the father of us all in God’s sight.” Or (2) “to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”)—in the presence of God” (NRSV), meaning the promise is secure to those who share the faith of Abraham in God’s sight.

**“the one who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist.”** The context is Abraham. Sarah’s womb was “dead” (Rom. 4:19), and yet God spoke to Abraham in the past tense (see commentary on Eph. 2:6, “raised…seated”).

Rom 4:18

**“without *any reason for* hope.”** The point is that considering Abraham and Sarah’s bodies, naturally speaking, they were without any hope of having a child. They were beyond hope. Although Abraham and Sarah didn’t have any cause to hope, they believed in hope because God had told them they would have a child.

This is the figure of speech antanaclasis, “the use of the same word in the same sentence in two different senses.”[[63]](#footnote-30325) Here “hope” is repeated, but used in different senses. The first occurrence refers to natural, worldly hope—in that sense, Abraham is beyond hope. The second occurrence of hope, however, is put by metonymy[[64]](#footnote-21781) for the promise in which Abraham believed—he believed in hope, that is, he believed in the promise of God who said he would have an heir.

[For more on the figure of speech antanaclasis, see commentary on 1 Sam. 1:24.]

[See Word Study: “Antanaclasis.”]

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Rom 4:19

**“as already dead.”** The passive perfect participle. Abraham considered his own body to be “dead” when it came to having children without a miraculous intervention by God, and Sarah was in the same situation. To us, translating the Greek as “as good as dead” blurs the clear meaning of the text. What is a body “as good as dead?” Could he, or could he not have children? The Greek is clear as a bell—he was dead!

Rom 4:20

**“*looking toward* the promise.”** (Cf. Lenski)[[65]](#footnote-25868)

**“did not doubt.”** A use of *diakrinō*.[[66]](#footnote-28589)

**“in unbelief.”** There is no preposition. “Unbelief” is in the dative case, and here it is the instrumental dative,[[67]](#footnote-24639) thus “unbelief” is what causes people to be divided, or waver, or stagger. They doubt, and move in and out of a state of faith. Not Abraham. He did not allow himself to be divided by unbelief. To say “he did not waver in unbelief” is to say he was always in unbelief without varying from it, which of course is not the case. Wuest uses “vacillate” instead of “divided.”[[68]](#footnote-13036) Abraham did not vacillate because of unbelief.

**“grew strong in his trust, giving glory to God.”** Two things that occurred in concert with Abraham being strong in his trust of God were that he gave glory to God [i.e., praised God] and that he was fully convinced. The Greek would allow for these things to reinforce each other, so, for example, his praising God could, and likely did, contribute to him being strong in his trust of God.

Rom 4:22

**“it was credited.”** That is, Abraham’s trust was credited to him as righteousness. The “it” refers to trust in Romans 4:22, 23, and 4:24.

Rom 4:24

**“it will be credited *as righteousness.*”** Many versions translate this phrase simply as “it will be credited to us who believe” (ESV, NASB), and some translations even go so far as to translate the phrase, “righteousness will be credited” (NIV, Amplified Bible ) thus, many readers understand the phrase as, “righteousness will be credited to us who believe.” However, when one looks at the context, it is evident that the “it” in the phrase “it will be credited to us” refers to trust, not righteousness (Rom. 4:3, 22). Paul has simply shortened the phrase and only included the first half, with the ellipsis, “as righteousness,” being meant as well. So, although Paul only quoted, “it will be credited to us who believe,” the ellipsis is implied. Therefore, he meant, “it will be credited *as righteousness* to us who believe.”

This is one of the clearest explanations of justification in Scripture. Christians get righteousness credited to their “account” because of their trust in Jesus. It is the great exchange. We will be judged as righteous and perfect, not because of our own righteousness but because of a righteousness that was given to us.

**“from among the dead.”** Almost every English version reads “from the dead.” When the average English speaker reads that Christ was “raised from the dead,” he thinks that “dead” refers to the state of death, as if the verse were saying that “Christ was raised from the state of death,” or that “Christ was raised from being dead.” This is not the full meaning of the phrase.

There are problems with the translation, “from the dead.” The word “dead” in the English phrase “from the dead,” is a noun, but in the Greek text, “dead” is an adjective. More than that, it is a plural adjective. The Greek text literally reads, *ek nekrōn*, which is the plural form of *nekros,* and means “from among dead *ones*” [or “dead *people*”].[[69]](#footnote-16257)

The Greek word *ek* means “out from,” and the word *nekros*, as we said, is a plural adjective. An adjective modifies a noun, and there is no noun in the Greek text for it to modify. This is an indication that the adjective is likely functioning as a substantive, which means that it is acting like a noun. Thus, the question is “What object must be supplied that the adjective *nekros* is alluding to?” The scope of Scripture indicates that the answer to that question is “dead people.” Since Adam, people have died. Thus, Christ rose from among the dead *people*, who not being raised by God, are still dead. This explains why the word “dead” is plural; it refers to the many dead who are still in the ground. What the Bible is saying, and what a proper English translation should support, is that when God raised Jesus, He raised him up and from among all the myriads of dead people who are buried in the ground. Everyone who has died is in the ground, but God raised Jesus from among those dead people, and gave him life. Furthermore, there will be other times people will be raised from among the rest of the dead people as well. At the Rapture, Christians will be raised from among the rest of the dead, and then at the first resurrection the righteous will be raised from among the other dead people, and then the unrighteous being left in the ground until after the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:14; Rev. 20:6). There are 44 usages of *ek nekros* in the New Testament, and not one of them refers to the resurrection of the unrighteous (Acts 24:15). At the resurrection of the unrighteous, which occurs at the end of Christ’s 1,000-year reign, no one is left in the ground.

[For more on the Rapture and the two resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15, and see John W. Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope.*]

Although *ek nekros* could be considered an ellipsis, with the emphasis on “dead” and the word “ones,” or “people” being supplied by the scope of Scripture, the phrase is more an idiom than a true ellipsis. This verse is not saying that Christ was raised from “death or “being dead” (a nominative use of death). It is saying that Christ was raised from among those who are dead. The rest of all the humans who had died are still dead and in the ground, and Christ was raised from among them.

**Romans Chapter 5**

Rom 5:1

**“Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by trust.”** Paul has now spent a lot of verses establishing the fact that people are declared righteous by trust (e.g., Rom. 3:22, 28, 30; 4:5, 13, 16). So now he bridges off of that to conclude that Christians have peace with God.

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. Also, many Bible versions read, “justified by faith” instead of “declared righteous by trust.” The words “justified” and “righteous” are translated from the same Greek words, and there are a lot of disadvantages to using the two different words, “righteousness” and “justification,” when the Greek is the same (see commentary on Rom. 3:22).

[For more on “righteousness” and being declared righteous, see commentaries on Rom. 3:20 and 3:22.]

**“we have peace with God.”** Christians are “righteous” in the sight of God, that is, “right” with God. So Christians are at peace with Him and He is at peace with Christians.

Rom 5:2

**“by trust.”** The phrase “by trust” is omitted in some of the oldest Greek manuscripts.

**“we boast.”** The verb “boast” can also be taken as a subjunctive (cf. CJB, Rotherham).[[70]](#footnote-32023)

**“the glory of God.”** There are multiple ways to take the genitive “of God” here at the end of the verse. First, one could understand this glory to be God’s glory. Paul would be boasting in the hope of experiencing God’s glory to the fullest in the age to come, when the fullness of his salvation came. Second, one could understand it as the glory “that comes from God.” In this understanding, the text would communicate that Paul is boasting in the hope of his own glorification, which happens in the age to come when he will be glorified by God and given glory or beauty from God (Rom. 8:18, 30; 1 Cor. 15:43; Col. 1:27; 3:4). Either option is possible, thus, the REV just leaves the translation as “the glory of God.”

Rom 5:4

**“character.”** The Greek is *dokimē* (#1382 δοκιμή), a noun that can mean a test or ordeal, or the experience of going through a test, with emphasis on the result; thus, standing a test, being proven by test, proof, or “character.” The verb *dokimazō* means “to prove by test” and was used of testing precious metals to see whether or not they were genuine. We believe “character” is a good translation of *dokimē* in this context because “character” is both developed, and shines forth, in difficult circumstances. Character is the sum total of our moral and ethical qualities, and it can be good or bad. It is based in the heart, but shines forth in the choices we make and what we say and do. The character of Christ is in part described by the fruit of the spirit, which is what the new nature produces in a Christian if the Christian strives for it: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). On their website, the organization “Character Counts” organizes good character in the categories of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.[[71]](#footnote-16233)

Rom 5:5

**“disappoint *us*.”** The Greek is *kataischunō* (#2617 καταισχύνω), which means to dishonor or disgrace; put to shame or humiliate, or disappoint.[[72]](#footnote-21603) The point is that our hope, which is real, will not disappoint us or put us to shame, while false hopes will disappoint and put to shame those who believe in them.

**“through the holy spirit.”** The Greek text does not have a definite article before “holy spirit.” In Greek, if a preposition (in this case, *dia*) precedes a noun, the noun can be definite without specifically adding the definite article; the subject and context are the final arbiters. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.”[[73]](#footnote-25148) A. T. Robertson writes: “… the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. … The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. … [As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.”[[74]](#footnote-20539) In this case, the holy spirit is the gift of God’s nature with which we were born again and which is sealed in us. Robertson then cites some examples that use *ek*.

When a person is born again, what is “born” (actually “created” 2 Cor. 5:17) inside the person is the nature of God, which becomes part of them, indeed, becomes a new nature in them (2 Pet. 1:4). Because this new nature is now part of the person and thus cannot be removed, it is said to be “sealed” in the person (Eph. 1:13), and is a “guarantee” of everlasting life (2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:14). God works through the spirit that is now inside each believer in order to help them be like Christ. And He and Jesus Christ communicate through the spirit with each believer, so they are working in each one “to want to do, and to do,” their good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). In this verse, they work to show us their love and help us be loving to others.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Rom 5:6

**“helpless”** The Greek is *asthenēs* (#772 ἀσθενής), which is more literally, “without strength,” usually meaning sick or weak. Here it is used more idiomatically to express that the sinner was helpless; we are “weak” (helpless) to change our condition and save ourselves. We were dead in sins, totally unable to help ourselves, and God, in his grace and mercy, sent Christ, who died for us so that we would be strong in him.

**“at the proper time.”** The phrase in Greek is *kata kairon* (κατὰ καιρὸν) which means literally “according to the time” or “at a time.” The phrase can also mean at a proper time.[[75]](#footnote-22467) Here there are two possible meanings. One is that Christ died at the proper time, in other words, there was a specific time that God intended the Messiah to die; this would be similar to the idea in Galatians 4:4. Another way to take the phrase would be something like, “For while we were still helpless, *that is when* Christ died in place of the ungodly.”[[76]](#footnote-16701) This would mean that the point Paul is stressing is not that there was a specific time of day or year that Christ needed to die, as if one day late or one year earlier would not have worked, but rather his point is to emphasize that Christ died *while* we were still helpless, that is when he died. He did not die while we were deserving but while we were sinners (Rom. 5:8). Many commentators see both as true, Christ died at the right time in history, and also while we were still sinners.

**“in place of the ungodly…in place of…in our place**.” The phrase, “in place of” occurs three times in Romans 5:6-8. All these translations are from the Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ). *Huper* can have the sense of “in place of, instead of, in the name of,” and more commonly, “for.”[[77]](#footnote-24346) Here in Romans, the meaning of substitution is indicated, as can be seen in Romans 5:7: “For rarely will someone die in place of [*huper*] a righteous person; though in place of [*huper*] a good person …” The verse is speaking of dying *in place of* someone else. This becomes important for understanding the nature of Christ’s atonement for our sins—it was a substitutionary atonement. Christ literally died instead of us, thus taking our place in death: “Christ died in place of [*huper*] the ungodly … while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place [*huper*] (Rom. 5:6, 8).

Although there are other theories of atonement besides substitution, substitution was a part of atonement for sin.

Rom 5:7

**5:6-8.** See commentary on Romans 5:6.

Rom 5:8

**5:6-8.** See commentary on Romans 5:6.

Rom 5:9

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. See commentary on Romans 3:20.

Rom 5:10

**“we will be saved.”** Romans 5:10 is one of the verses in the Epistles to the Christian Church that shows that once a person is born again and thus a Christian, their salvation is guaranteed and not in doubt. Christ’s death paid for the sin of the believer even before they believed and got born again, all the sinner had to do to accept the payment was confess Christ as Lord and believe God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). When the sinner confessed and believed, they were born again and reconciled to God; and then, having been reconciled, they “will be saved.” No “ifs” and no “maybes,” the reconciled sinner “will be saved.” That is not because they somehow became “sinless” or “good enough,” but because of the blood of Christ.

[For more on Christian Salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

Rom 5:11

**“continue to boast.”** The present participle of “boast,” *kauchaomai* (#2744 καυχάομαι), calls for the translation “continue to boast.”[[78]](#footnote-28911) This is known as the continuous present.

Rom 5:12

**“through one man sin entered the world.”** We learn in Romans 5:14 that the “one man” who sinned was Adam. This is proof that the record of Adam and Eve is literal. Adam’s sin subjected every human to condemnation to Gehenna, the Lake of Fire, and thus everlasting death (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). The work of Christ made it available for people to live forever in spite of Adam’s sin. Romans 5 is nothing more than an allegory without a certain meaning if the record of Adam and Eve is not true.

[For information on the original sin and its effects, see commentary on Rom. 7:17.]

Rom 5:14

**“who did not sin in a similar way to the transgression of Adam.”** This is a very important verse in that it shows that there is an inherent “moral law” that is vital to a godly society. The Devil said (Gen. 3:5), and God confirmed (Gen. 3:22) that when Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he became “like God” in that he knew “good” and “evil.” After Adam sinned, all mankind now knew the difference between doing good and doing evil. At a very basic level, everyone knows right from wrong, and that is why God can righteously judge every person on the Day of Judgment.

Adam sinned in a different way than many who came after him. Adam broke a very specific command of God. But after Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden and people began to multiply on the earth, there were very few specific commands of God for a very long time, nevertheless, people still sinned. They sinned against God and one another by doing immoral things. The Mosaic Law had not been given, and so there was no specific statute against things like lying or stealing, but we don’t need a statute that says, “lying is wrong” to know that it is wrong. Much of the “law” that God will hold people accountable to on the Day of Judgment is not statute law, but rather the moral law that should guide us all. It is because of the primacy of the moral law that God said that it was upon the two commandments—love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself—that all the rest of the Law hangs upon (Matt. 22:40).

It is because at a basic level every human can know the difference between good and evil that Jesus said that if someone knew God’s will but did not do it they would be beaten with many stripes, “but the one who did not know, but did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few *stripes*” (Luke 12:48). People are responsible for knowing basic moral law.

**“who is a type of the Coming One.”** That Adam was a “type” of Christ is a profound addition here. Adam was created sinless, but sinned, and his sin tainted all of mankind as we see in this verse: they all sinned. It would take another sinless man, a “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), to be able to be the perfect sacrifice and pay for the sins of the people. No sinful person can pay for the sins of another sinful person and thus absolve him of the consequence of death; it took the death of the sinless man, Jesus Christ, to pay for the sins of mankind. So the sinless Adam was a type of the sinless Christ; and the sinless Christ, dying in the place of sinful man, bought salvation for all who would accept it.

Rom 5:16

**“judgment came from one *transgression*.”** For information on the original sin and its effects, see commentary on Romans 7:17.

Rom 5:17

**“reign in life.”** In this context, “life” refers to the everlasting life that believers have. The Greek text places “life” first in the phrase for emphasis: “in life will reign,” i.e., “in everlasting life will reign.” The word “life” is sometimes used to refer to everlasting life (e.g., Matt. 7:14; John 3:36; 11:25; 20:31; Acts 3:15; 11:18; 2 Cor. 2:16; Gal. 3:21; 2 Tim. 1:1). See commentary on Luke 10:28.

Rom 5:18

**“through one transgression the result was condemnation.”** The English translation only implicitly refers to the conduits through which the results of condemnation and justification come. In the Greek, however, this verse strongly communicates both the *results* and the *means through which* the condemnation and justification come. It indicates result with the preposition *eis* (#1519 εἰς), meaning “resulting in,” and it shows the means through which the result comes with the word *dia* (#1223 διά), meaning “through.” Literally, the Greek reads: “through (*dia*) one trespass unto all men results in (*eis*) condemnation, so also through (*dia*) one righteous act unto all men results in (*eis*) justification of life.” The one trespass was the conduit through which the result of condemnation came, and the one righteous act was the conduit through which the result of justification to life came.

[For more information on the original sin and its effects, see commentary on Rom. 7:17.]

**“righteousness that brings life.”** This is an objective genitive,[[79]](#footnote-25956) meaning that *life* functions as the object of the verbal noun “righteousness;” i.e., the life that is brought by the action of righteousness.[[80]](#footnote-10704) The BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* has the “acquittal that brings life.” The NIV84 has, “justification that brings life for all men.” What Jesus did made available righteousness that then brings life to all people.

**“life.”** This refers to “everlasting life.” See commentary on Luke 10:28.

Rom 5:19

**“will be made righteous.”** In this remarkable verse, we receive great comfort knowing that we will be made righteous. It is not just some figment of our imagination; our righteousness will be just as real as our sin is now. Romans 5:19 refers to the reality of the resurrection in which our nature will be changed, and we will be made righteous and will have a whole different kind of glory (1 Cor. 15:40). Our bodies will be glorified and made like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2). Our new body will be unstained by sin, and we will dwell with God forever (1 Cor. 15:42; Rev. 21:3-4).

Now, how can we reconcile the fact that Paul says in Romans 5:1 that we *have been* declared righteous with Romans 5:19, which is in the future tense? We get clarity on the situation when we see that two different Greek verbs are being used in these places, and also when we see Paul’s use of the phrase “declared righteous” throughout Romans. In Romans 5:1 the Greek verb is *dikaioō* (#1344, δικαιοω) which is the common verb that is often translated as “declared righteous” in Paul’s writings. In contrast, in Romans 5:19, the verb is *kathistēmi* (#2525, καθίστημι), which means to be made into something, or appointed to something, and the object, in this case, is “righteous.” So, that is why we translate this phrase as “made righteous.” Thus, we see that the emphasis is different in these two locations. They do not have the exact same meaning.

Once we have trust, we are put into the category of being declared righteous (Rom. 5:1), but in reality, the actual act of justification has not happened yet, we have not been judged righteous at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Nevertheless, Paul can speak of our righteousness as being a current reality because he is so sure that it will come to pass because God has promised it. This convention of speaking of future things as if they have already happened is quite common (Gen. 15:18; commentary on 2 Sam. 14:21). The Bible says the believer is already redeemed (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), but also awaiting redemption (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30).

Therefore, our future righteousness is so sure, it is as if it has already happened, and thus Paul can say, we have been declared righteous (Rom. 5:1), but the actual reality of our bodies being resurrected and transformed awaits the future (Rom. 5:19).

[For more information on the word “declared righteous” see commentary on Rom. 3:22.]

Rom 5:20

**“was brought in.”** The Greek is the compound verb, *pareiserchomai* (#3922 παρεισέρχομαι), built from the prefix *para* (beside, alongside) and *eiserchomai* (to come or to go). *Pareiserchomai* has two meanings: 1) “to come in beside,” “to come in alongside of,” and 2) “to come in secretly or by stealth” (Gal. 2:4). In this context it means, “to come in alongside of.” Eight verses earlier, in Rom. 5:12, sin “entered” into the world. Now in Rom. 5:20, law “enters in alongside” the sin that was already here. Most versions simply say “came in” or “entered” because the scope and context make it clear that sin was already in the world, and writing “came in alongside of” can confuse the reader.

**“so that / with the result that.”** The Greek is *hina,* which can be used to indicate purpose or result.[[81]](#footnote-28067) In this case, *hina* is used with the verb *pleonazō* (in the subjunctive mood) to indicate a result but (howbeit one that was not intended)—that is, God did not introduce the law with the *intent* of making trespasses increase, that trespasses increased was merely the *result* of the Law being brought in (see also commentary on Rom. 7:10). Cf. Wallace: “This use of *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood expresses the result of the action of the main verb. It indicates a consequence of the verbal action that is *not intended*. The *hina* is normally translated *so that, with the result that.*”[[82]](#footnote-29399)

[For more information, see Word Study: “Hina.”]

The *hina* clause should not be translated as a purpose clause, as though the Law was introduced for the purpose of making transgression increase. That God never intended for the Law to produce an increase in transgressions is continued in Romans 7:7-13, which specifically refutes the idea that the Law is culpable for bringing evil. The Law was holy and just (Rom. 7:12), yet when the command came, sin came alive and produced death (Rom. 7:7-11). Paul writes that “by no means” did the Law become death for us (Rom. 7:13), for it is sin, not the Law, that produces death. If the purpose of the Law was to increase transgression, then the law would indeed have become death for us and Paul’s entire argument in Romans 7 would fall apart. The purpose of the Law was not to increase sin, but to silence everyone who was under its standard, to make us aware of the extent of our transgression, and be our “guardian” until Christ came (Gal. 3:24). A guardian is meant to protect. So if the Law brought us closer to sin, and the wages of sin is death, then how can the Law protect us when its purpose was to take us to death? (See also commentary on Rom. 7:13, “with the result that,” and commentary on Gal. 3:19, “because of transgressions”).

Scripture is telling us that it was not God’s *intent* that sin would increase by introducing the law. But if he knew that it would, how could this not be his intent? It is much like a doctor who performs a surgery that he knows will result in weeks of painful recovery for the patient but is necessary to save the patient’s life. The surgeon does not perform the surgery with the *intent* that pain ensues—his intent is to save the patient. It is the sinful human body that is the reason for the need for the surgery and the pain that follows. The pain is simply a byproduct of the good being accomplished in an already sinful situation.

In the case of God putting forth the Law, the Law’s purpose and result was to bring righteous laws to mankind, the preservation of Israel, and the preservation of the Christ-line and the Christ, and it did all that. God’s adding the Law did not force people to sin, they were already sinning. Sin entered when Adam sinned (Rom. 5:12). The Law just made clear that the way people were living was sinful. Once the Law came, sin could no longer be hidden, and people became accountable for specific sins.

Rom 5:21

**“by means of death.”** This use of the Greek word *en* is an “instrumental dative” and can be translated “by means of death.”[[83]](#footnote-23439)

Death is the means that sin used to reign over people. It is not that sin reigned “in death,” as if it reigned over them when they were dead. We can see this because of the “in this way also” (*houtos kai*) construction of the sentence. Grace is said to reign “through” (*dia*) righteousness, expressing the means through which grace reigns; this is set in comparison (“in this way also”) with sin reigning by death. Just as grace reigns “through” righteousness, so sin reigns “by means of” death.

**“grace will reign.”** The Greek word *basileuō* (#936 βασιλεύω, pronounced bass-i-'loo-ō), translated “reign,” is in the aorist tense, subjunctive mood. The aorist does not mean that its reign has ended, only that it was established as a one-time event. The subjunctive mood is caused by the conjunction *hina* at the beginning of the phrase and so the verb needs to be understood from the context, which is not that grace “might reign” or “may reign,” but that it is reigning now. Grace has encroached into sin’s reign, and now, even though sin still reigns by means of death, grace also reigns and gives people everlasting life.

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[For commentary on this phrase, see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

**Romans Chapter 6**

Rom 6:1

**“will increase.”** The verb “increase,” *pleonazō* (#4121 πλεονάζω, pronounced pleh-on-'ad-zo), is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” increase, but the Greek conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) earlier in the sentence is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore in these cases, we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, if grace covers our sin, if we sin, grace “will” increase.

Rom 6:3

**“baptized...baptized.”** This is not baptism in water, but baptism in the gift of holy spirit. We can tell that this refers to baptism in holy spirit because of the two baptisms, baptism in water and baptism in holy spirit, only baptism in holy spirit actually produces what this verse says, “baptized into union with Jesus Christ.”

There is a huge difference between being baptized in water and being baptized in holy spirit. Baptism in water is symbolic. It does not mean the person is saved. Many people go through the motions of being immersed in water and never have the true faith in Jesus that gets them saved. It is well-known that many people who have been water baptized never gave their life to Christ or had faith in Christ to the point of salvation. People such as those are baptized in water, but it does not result in “union with Jesus Christ.” Baptism in holy spirit is totally different. It is not a ceremony or ritual, and it is not done by people. Only Jesus can baptize a person in the holy spirit, and he only does so when that person has true faith in him. A person who is baptized in the gift of holy spirit does not just participate in a ceremony that represents going from death to life; the person actually passes from everlasting death unto everlasting life. A person baptized in holy spirit is truly baptized “into union with Jesus Christ.” When a person is baptized in holy spirit, he is no longer the same person. He is saved and has spiritual power. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that Christians are baptized in holy spirit, and it is that baptism, not water baptism, that brings us into union with Jesus Christ such that when he was crucified, we were crucified, when he died, we died, when he was buried, we were buried, and when he was raised from the dead we were guaranteed new resurrection life.

**“into *union with*.”** This phrase is translated from the Greek preposition *eis*, which can refer to relation as well as to motion. In this context, the word *eis* (#1519 εἰς) is defining a relation, which is referred to as the static sense of *eis*. R. C. H. Lenski writes:

“It is the task of the grammars to tell the story as to how the Koine *eis* has expanded and invaded the territory of *en* [in] so that it reached even the static verbs, even those of being, letting us have the construction *einai* and *ōn eis*, this invasion being completed in modern Greek, *en* there being swallowed up entirely by *eis*. All the old grammars and all the old exegesis are superseded by the immense volume of new information now at hand in the papyri, etc. We now see how wrong it was in scores of instances in the New Testament to interpret *eis* as “into,” and how only sheer ignorance forced the idea of motion into the preposition. Here in Rom. 6:3-4, where it is found three times, as in Matt. 28:19, *eis* denotes sphere (Robertson’s *Grammar*, p. 592)[[84]](#footnote-31565) and not motion. The grammars now call it static *eis*.”[[85]](#footnote-13472)

In the context of Romans 6, *eis* is denoting a relation (also see commentary on Acts 19:3). Most English versions have the very literal translation “into Christ” in spite of the fact that that phrase usually only confuses the reader and despite the fact that the native Greek speakers of the first century would have understood what Paul meant. The Greek indicates that the Christian is baptized by holy spirit “into Christ,” i.e., into a relationship of union with him. Lenski translates it “as many as were baptized in connection with Christ Jesus were baptized in connection with his death.”[[86]](#footnote-19001) While “in connection with” is good, it is not as clear as it could be. When Christians are “in Christ,” there is more than just a connection; we have a spiritual union with Christ. The Christian was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8; 2 Tim. 2:11), was buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and was raised and seated in the heavenlies with Christ (Eph. 2:6). Also, it is due to our union with Christ that we are “circumcised,” not just the foreskin, but our entire flesh body (Col. 2:11). Thus, although we have a “connection” with Christ, the word “union” seems much more appropriate and clear. Several English versions besides the REV use the word “union” to express the relationship that *eis* is describing in this verse and context (*The New English Bible*; Goodspeed’s translation; Charles Williams’ *The New Testament in the Language of the People*; and Cassirer’s translation, *God’s New Covenant*).

Lenski noted that the meaning of the preposition *en* had been “swallowed up” by *eis*, but *en* is still used to describe a relation or association, and “in Christ” or “in the Lord” are important phrases.

[For more information on the static use of *en*, and being “in Christ” and part of the Body of Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3.]

Rom 6:4

**“buried with him by baptism.”** The baptism in Romans 6:4 is not water baptism. Many insincere people are water baptized without really believing that Jesus is their Lord (cf. Rom. 10:9). The baptism here in Romans 6:4 is baptism in holy spirit: “For we were all baptized in one spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free” (1 Cor. 12:13). It is baptism in the gift of holy spirit that baptizes people “into one Body,” the Body of Christ, and at that time people are born again and become Christians. When a person is born again, baptized in holy spirit, they become part of the mystical Body of Christ, and are in union with Christ in such a way that they are baptized with him, crucified with him, died with him, were buried with him, and will be resurrected as he was.

**“into *union with*.”** See commentary on Romans 6:3.

**“glory.”** The Greek word translated “glory” is *doxa* (#1391 δόξα), and usually means “the condition of being bright or shining, brightness, splendor, radiance.”[[87]](#footnote-25163) However, it can also include the idea of power or might, and that is the case in this verse,[[88]](#footnote-15597) which is why the New Jerusalem Bible reads “glorious power” instead of just glory. Rather than add “power” to the REV, we thought it best to just educate the reader that the “glory” of God often includes His power. Romans 6:4 is one of the places where “glory” is related to power. In this case, the “glory of God” was His power in action (His exercised power), and seeing God’s power in raising Jesus from the dead was seeing God’s power in action and thus His “glory” (cf. John 11:40; Rom. 6:4; Eph. 3:16). In 1 Corinthians 6:14 it is God’s power that raised the dead.

**“*his* death.”** The Greek has the definite article: “the” death. It is referring specifically to the death of Christ, thus we translate it “his” death to indicate the particularity being expressed.

**“from among the dead.”**[[89]](#footnote-18516) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

**“a new way of life.”** The Greek is more literally, “newness of life,” but the word “newness” is not from *neos*, new in time, but from *kainos*, new in quality. We might well translate the phrase as “walk in a new quality of life.” The Christian has everlasting life, to be sure, but also right here and now we can live in a new quality of life because our sins have been paid for and we are guaranteed everlasting life. If a person gets saved, but does not live like it, but instead lives without outward joy and hope, then although their salvation is real, they are not enjoying the benefits of it now and “walking in their new quality of life.” Salvation is a blessing now as well as in the future.

Rom 6:5

**“united with.”** The Greek is *sumphutos* (#4854 σύμφυτος). This union or identification is an amplification of the union expressed in the phrase “into union with Christ” in Rom. 6:3. *Sumphutos* literally means “planted together,” and is an example of how translating in a strictly literal manner, without taking into account how a word was used in the culture, can be more confusing than helpful. After all, what would it mean to be “planted together” with Christ? The word *sumphutos* was used when two things grew together and became intertwined. Thus, English versions translate it as “united with him” (ESV, NASB, NIV); “joined with him” (HCSB); “identified with him” (DBY); “incorporate with him” (NEB); and “become one with him” (Cassirer). Kenneth Wuest describes the meaning of *sumphutos*: “It speaks of a living, vital union of two individuals growing up together. The word could be used of the Siamese twins whose bodies were connected at one point, and whose blood stream flowed through the two physical bodies as it does normally through one.”[[90]](#footnote-21597) Wuest’s example of the Siamese twins shows how closely the Bible portrays our lives being intertwined with Jesus’ life.

**“like his.”** This is translated from the Greek word *homoiōma* (#3667 ὁμοίωμα), which many versions translate as the word “likeness” or “like his.” Robert Thayer, referencing this very verse, says that *homoiōma*, “amounts almost to equality of identity.”[[91]](#footnote-32429) This further confirms our identity with Christ. No wonder so much of what we have as Christians we have “in him” (“in union with him”), not alone or “on our own.” Due to our union with him we have “every spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3), “glorious grace” (Eph. 1:6), “redemption” (Eph. 1:7), our being sealed with holy spirit (Eph. 1:13), our being raised to life and our promise of being seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6), God’s kindness (Eph. 2:7), and we are part of the living sanctuary of God (Eph. 2:21).

**“certainly also be in a resurrection like his.”** This phrase shows that when Christians trust in Jesus, they will have everlasting life.

[For more information on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

Rom 6:6

**“was crucified.”** No doubt Paul uses “crucified” here on purpose to make a valuable point. The old self was “crucified,” which is “a violent, accursed death—our old man was literally murdered in our baptism, he did not die willingly.”[[92]](#footnote-30494) We made the free will choice to kill our “old self” and open ourselves up to waking in a new way of life. But like Paul, somehow the old self hangs around, and although it is dead in the sense that it does not have control over us, it still raises its ugly head so that we cannot live quite like we want to (Gal. 5:17), and we constantly have to make war on our old nature while in this flesh body.

**“body of sin.”** This is not just the genitive of character for “sinful body,” but in the context, seems to be a genitive of possession, “the body owned by sin,” or “the body used by sin.” Lenski would make it attributive, “the body marked by the sin.”[[93]](#footnote-32478) It is not the genitive of apposition, “the body; namely sin,” or a genitive of content, “the body made of sin.” The context makes the genitive of possession very clear, and it is not only personified here in Romans 6, but in Romans 7 as well.

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

**“powerless.”** The Greek word is *katargeō* (#2673 καταργέω), and in this context, it means to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative, powerless. “Destroyed” is too strong in this context. The body, our flesh body, which is being used by sin, is made powerless with the intent that it can no longer serve as a slave to sin.

**“be slaves.”** The Greek word is *douleuō* (#1398 δουλεύω, pronounced “dool-'yoo-o”), related to *doulos*, a slave. The verb *douleuō* means to serve or to be a slave, so “serve as a slave” is a good English translation. “Be in bondage” is not wrong, but it fails to put enough emphasis on the service that sin is forcing the slave to do, instead placing the emphasis on the state of bondage that exists. While the flesh body is indeed in a state of bondage, the emphasis here is that it is forced to serve. Slavery was a part of Roman society, and a person could serve as a slave in a bad sense, be a wicked slave, or serve an evil master, such as sin, or a person could be a valuable help and serve in a good sense if the master is good, such as God.

**“to sin.”** Here Paul uses the figure of speech personification, presenting sin as if it were a living being, to increase the emotional punch of the points he is making. He continues to personify sin in Romans 6 and 7. Depicting sin as a powerful Lord increases the emotional impact of the points he is making, especially in the Roman culture in which slaves were forced to do the will of their masters. In Rom. 6:6, and in the following verses (Rom. 6:6 twice, Rom. 6:7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14; 7:8, 11, 14, 25), “sin,” while retaining its literal meaning, also is the figure of speech personification. As a powerful lord, Mr. Sin uses our flesh body (Rom. 6:6); we must not be its slave (Rom. 6:6). The person who has died is free from Sin just as any slave is free from the master’s control once he is dead (Rom. 6:7), and we died to sin (Rom. 6:10), so now we must consider ourselves dead to it (Rom. 6:11), and not let it reign in our body (Rom. 6:12). We are not to offer any part of our body to sin (Rom. 6:13), for sin is not to exercise lordship over us.

Rom 6:7

**“has been set free.”** The Greek word is *dikaioō* (#1344, δικαιόω). It is from the root *dikē,* “right,” and thus it is related to all the uses of “righteous,” “righteousness,” etc. here in Romans. However, although it would literally be “render righteous” or “pronounce to be righteous,” it was used in the culture for a person being set free; death sets people free from their debts and obligations. Therefore, “set free” is the clearest and best translation in this context, even though when it is translated that way, the reader does not see the verbal relationship between us being “righteous” and us being “set free.”[[94]](#footnote-27301) Most English versions have “freed from sin” or a phrase that is similar in meaning.

Rom 6:8

**“since.”** The Greek word *ei* (#1487 εἰ) usually means “if,” but in some contexts it can mean “since.” Friberg states that in some cases, *ei* can “express a condition of fact regarded as true or settled; *since, because*.”[[95]](#footnote-32388) R.C. H. Lenski referred to it as the “if of reality.”[[96]](#footnote-21354) E. W. Bullinger wrote that it: “assumes the hypothesis as an actual fact, the condition being unfulfilled, but no doubt being thrown on the supposition.”[[97]](#footnote-31518) Meyer writes: If the former, the ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ [died with Christ] be true, we cannot doubt the latter.”[[98]](#footnote-13669) Weymouth says, “seeing that we have died with Christ.”[[99]](#footnote-11662) The Moffatt Bible has, “We believe that as we have died with Christ....”[[100]](#footnote-24693) (Cf. commentary on Col. 2:20). We follow the Stern (*Complete Jewish Bible*) and Estes (*The Better Version of the New Testament*) in our translation, “since.”

Whether to translate *ei* as “if” or “since” in some contexts has been debated by Greek grammarians. Grammarians such as Daniel Wallace point out that there is no single pattern of words that can be translated “since.”[[101]](#footnote-18155) And this seems to be the problem from a grammatical standpoint. Grammarians would like to find a grammatical pattern in which *ei* would always best be translated as “since” (a pattern such as, *ei* combined with a word or words in the indicative mood having any tense). However, there is no such pattern. That has caused some translators to always translate *ei* as “if.” But just because there is no grammatical pattern to when *ei* should be translated “since” does not mean that there are not times when “since” is clearly the meaning of the word *ei*. This is shifting the definition of *ei* from a grammatical pattern to a contextual judgment call, which occurs constantly in Greek. Most Greek words have multiple definitions, and the proper one for any context is determined by that context, so the reader or translator makes a “judgment call” about the meaning of the word in that context. It seems clear that *ei* works that way as well.

Thus, regarding certain cases involving the indicative mood, Wallace agrees that, “...the point of the argument [using *ei*] is based on the assumption of reality.” However, if there is an assumption of reality, then translating *ei* into English as “if” in those cases is suspect at best, and wrong at worst, because although in English we do sometimes use “if” when there is an assumption of reality, it is very rare. So rare, in fact, that a look through the *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* did not turn up a single example of “if” being used as assuming the reality of something. The plain fact is that in English, the word “if” almost exclusively introduces doubt. So since the word “if” generally introduces doubt in English, but sometimes does not in Greek, then we should feel free to translate *ei* as “since” (or a similar way such as “seeing that”) in the English text if that is what it will take to make the meaning of the verse clear and keep doubt from being introduced when there is no doubt implied in the Greek.

**“we have died with Christ.”** The fact that we died with Christ, were buried with Christ, and were raised with Christ shows that the salvation of the Christian believer, which has spiritual substance in the New Birth, is never in doubt. A Christian is a child of God by birth and that cannot be undone. (See commentary on Rom. 6:3. Also see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation”).

**“believe.”** The Greek verb translated “believe” is *pisteuō* (#4100 πιστεύω), and it means to believe, to have confidence in. The evidence is clear that Christ died and rose from the dead to everlasting life, and the Bible says that when he died, we died with him, so the natural conclusion is that we will be raised from the dead to everlasting life, something that is made very clear by Ephesians 2:6, which says we are seated in heaven with him, a prophetic perfect idiom for the fact that we will be there with him in the future (see commentary on Eph. 2:6).

We must understand that when Paul writes that we “believe” we will live with him, he is not using “believe” like it is sometimes used in common English, for “think, wish, or hope.” This verse is not saying, “We think we will live with him,” or “We hope we will live with him,” it is saying, “This is what we believe: we will live with him.” Paul did not doubt he would live with Christ. Paul believed he would live with Christ, and we need to be confident of that also. When a Christian is saved, born again, he is baptized with Christ; died with Christ, buried with Christ, raised with Christ to everlasting life, and seated with Christ in heaven.

**“live.”** This refers to living forever. See commentary on Luke 10:28.

Rom 6:9

**“from among the dead.”** See commentary on Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

**“has dominion.”** The Greek verb is *kurieuō* (#2961 κυριεύω, pronounced kū-ree-'you-ō), and it is related to *kurios*, “lord.” It means to rule, have dominion over, have power over, or, as we would say, “be lord over” or even “lord it over” someone. Wuest translates it “exercises lordship,”[[102]](#footnote-31455) which seems to catch the sense exactly. Before coming to Christ, people were lorded over by death and had no escape from it. When Christ becomes the Lord in a person’s life, that person is guaranteed everlasting life, and death no longer exercises Lordship over the person. (cf. commentary on Rom. 6:14).

Rom 6:11

**“in *union with* Christ Jesus.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3.]

Rom 6:13

**“and do not offer *any* parts of your *body* to sin as instruments of unrighteousness.”** The plural, “any parts” makes perfect sense when it comes to a Christian’s real life. It is usual for “part” of a Christian’s life to be given over to sin, but not all the parts. For example, some Christians have not disciplined their mouth, and regularly disobey God in what they say and the way they say it. Other Christians may have good control over what they say, but not good control over what they touch. Romans 6:13 is making the point that Christians should have godly control over their whole life.

Rom 6:14

**“have dominion.”** The Greek verb is *kurieuō* (#2961 κυριεύω, pronounced kū-ree-'you-ō), and it is related to *kurios*, “lord.” It means to rule, have dominion over, have power over, or, as we would say, be lord over or even “lord it over” someone. Wuest translates it “exercises lordship,”[[103]](#footnote-18524) which seems to catch the sense exactly. Before coming to Christ, the sinner’s lord was Lord Sin, who made a slave of the person and influenced him to sin. When the sinner comes to Christ, he dies in Christ and gets both a new Lord, and his body is made powerless to Sin (Rom. 6:6). Given the exchange of lordship, it needs to be expressed clearly that Sin no longer has lordship. (cf. commentary on Rom. 6:9).

Rom 6:16

**“sin resulting in death.”** Disobeying and defying God only leads to more disobedience, and eventually death and everlasting death (cf. Rom. 6:19 and commentary on 2 Tim. 3:13).

Rom 6:17

**“slaves of sin.”** The Roman Cicero mentioned ways that a free citizen could still be a slave. “…anyone who is saddled with a greedy, violent, or simple-minded nature could be considered a slave. …a man who is under the thumb of a woman…People who devote inordinate amounts of time and effort to admiring and acquiring works of art could be considered slaves of the very things that they aspire to control through ownership…An excessive ambition…can turn a free man into a slave, if he is willing to sell out his honor to satisfy that ambition….”[[104]](#footnote-22803)

**“were entrusted.”** The Greek word *paradidōmi* (#3860 παραδίδωμι, pronounced par-a-'did-ō-mee) means to give over into the hands or power of someone else, to give something to keep to someone else, to deliver someone over into the custody of another. Lenski writes that it, “always implies handing someone over to what he does not want. It has that force here, for what sinner wants to be handed over to the slavery of God, wants to ‘be enslaved to righteousness?’”[[105]](#footnote-27214)

We were sinners and slaves to sin, but we were bought and paid for by Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:20), and so we were handed over to be slaves of righteousness. It was common in the Roman world for slaves to be bought and sold like cattle, so this illustration of being a slave to sin but then being bought and delivered over to being a slave for God would have had a great impact. And just as true to the text, although we know we wanted the sale to occur, our flesh still often resists being a slave of God and we battle with obeying the lusts of our flesh and with acting as if “Sin” was still our owner and master.

Rom 6:18

**“having been set free”** is in the passive tense. It is something that happens to us, we do not accomplish this freedom for ourselves.

Rom 6:19

**“impurity.”** The Greek word translated “impurity” is *akatharsia* (#167 ἀκαθαρσία), and it refers to being “unclean” before God. *Akatharsia* is “a state of moral corruption; immorality, vileness, especially of sexual sins”;[[106]](#footnote-20185) “in a moral sense, the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living; used of impure motives in 1 Thess. 2:3.”[[107]](#footnote-32348) The dominant use of *akatharsia* in the New Testament includes sexual sin, but here it has a more general meaning but would include sexual sin.

[For more information on *akatharsia*, see commentary on Gal. 5:19.]

**“resulting in *more* lawlessness.”** Disobeying and defying God only leads to more disobedience (cf. commentary on 2 Tim. 3:13).

Rom 6:20

**“free from *obedience to* righteousness.”** The word “righteousness” is in the dative case. However, simply saying “freed to righteousness,” (which would be typical for a dative) is not very clear. The dative is a dative of relation, but what is the relation? Many translations simply set forth the relationship by saying, “free in regard to righteousness,” which is good but perhaps not as clear as it could be. Other versions say things such as “free from the control of righteousness” (NIV), or “free from allegiance to righteousness” (HCSB). The context makes it clear that this verse is describing the “master-slave” relationship, and continuing the personification of sin, but adding “Righteousness” as another Master (see commentary on Rom. 6:6). A slave only has one master to serve, and serving that master is an act of obedience within the framework of slavery. The Christian became a willing slave of Righteousness (Rom. 6:18). However, when we were unsaved and still slaves of Sin, we had no obedience to righteousness. Not surprisingly, that is how many unsaved people feel and act. They live their lives doing whatever they want, with no obedience to Righteousness at all. The obedience that exists in the master-slave relationship is the reason we define the relationship in this verse as one of “obedience.”

Rom 6:22

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Rom 6:23

**“in *union with* Christ Jesus.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ. The wages of sin is death, but because the Christian is “in union with Christ,” when he died, it is as if we also died and paid that penalty.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3.]

**“the wages of sin is death...the free gift of God is life in the age to come.”** Romans 6:23 is one of the verses that sets forth the two ultimate future destinies God has prepared for humans. In the future, every human will either live forever or die forever—and it is their choice which future they will have. In Deuteronomy 30:19 God says, “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life so that you will live.” God wants everyone to be saved and have everlasting life (1 Timothy 2:4), but God gives the choice to us humans. John 3:16 is another verse that sets forth the two future destinies: God gave His Son “so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have life in the age *to come*.” The two destinies are sometimes set forth by more than one verse (e.g., Matt. 7:13-14; 13:41-43, 47-50; , but as we see here in Romans 6:23, sometimes the two destinies are set forth in one verse (e.g. Matt. 13:30; 18:8, 9; 25:46; Mark 9:43, 45, 47).

To fully understand the difference between “death” and “life” in Romans 6:23 and other verses, we must understand that “death” is really “death,” it is not “living forever in pain.” Living forever in any state, good or bad, is not “death.” The teaching that unsaved people “burn forever in hell” is not correct and not biblical.

Something that helps to understand that “death” means “death” is to understand the difference between “telic” words and “atelic” words. A “telic” word inherently has an endpoint, while an “atelic” word does not have an inherent endpoint. Words like “torture,” “pain,” and “suffering” are atelic; the words themselves do not have an endpoint. Torture and suffering may go on for a minute, a month, a year, or forever. In contrast, words such as “death,” “destruction,” and “annihilation,” are telic, they have an inherent endpoint. If something does not actually die, then what happened to it was not “death.” The same is true with “annihilation.” If in the end, nothing is “annihilated,” then the process was not “annihilation.” It is important to understand the difference between telic and atelic words because the vocabulary God uses when it comes to the wicked is telic. They are dead, destroyed, and annihilated. They no longer exist in any way or form.

[For more on the unsaved experiencing death and annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire,” and for more on telic and atelic words, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire,” under the New Testament word *Apōleia*]

**“For the wages of sin is death.”** Romans 6:23 is a general statement about sin causing death. Sin causes our first death, and if a person is not saved, it will cause his second death. The statement, “the wages ‘of’ sin,” is a subjective genitive and means “the wages paid by sin.”

Romans 6:23 continues the personification of “sin” that occurs in verses such as Romans 6:12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, and 6:22, in which “sin” is personified as a slavemaster. When we disobey God and live in sin, we are working for the slavemaster Sin, who pays us, but pays us by our own death. The word “sin” in Romans 6 has to be followed very carefully and can be somewhat confusing because it can refer to the sin we commit and/or it can refer to the personification of sin as a slavemaster.

The sin that would result in our death in Romans 6:23 is both original sin—that we have a sin nature—and the sins that we commit while living. Romans 5 tells us that Adam’s sin affected all people, and every person born after Adam except Jesus Christ, who was fathered by God, had a sin nature that doomed him to die.

Why are the “wages of sin,” i.e., the consequences of sin, so harsh? Why death? The answer is that by making the “wages of sin” death, God designed a righteous way of ridding the world of evil. Evil people will not humble themselves and come to God to be saved, so they will die forever and will not be part of the next life. A large percentage of the sorrow and pain we experience in this life is due to wicked people. So, in order to make the next life truly wonderful, God had to design the laws of life in such a way that wicked people would not live forever while at the same time honoring their free will choices. God did all those things by making death the consequence of sin.

God, in His love and grace, gave people free will. Also, He commanded us to obey Him, and told us that if we sinned we would die (Rom. 6:23). In fact, God made it very clear even from the time of Adam that the consequence of sin is death (Gen. 2:17). God’s desire, however, is for people to choose life over death (Deut. 30:19; Ezek. 33:11). But evil people are prideful and selfish and will not submit to God or be obedient to Him. They do not realize they are wrong and that they need to change, no matter how clearly and lovingly they are confronted and shown the harm they are doing. Like the Devil, they cannot be reformed unless they reform themselves, which they are generally unwilling to do (cf. Prov. 27:22). So, of their own free will they choose to live sinful lives without any genuine repentance even though God clearly stated their sin would result in their everlasting death. On the Day of Judgment God will honor their free will choice to continue in sin and not repent and get saved. He will give them the consequence that He warned them was coming—death. On the Day of Judgment, evil people will be consumed in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:13-15).

The wages of sin is now, and has always been, death. This means that anyone can pay for his own sin, although this truth is not often taught. All a person has to do to pay for his own sin is die. Of course, the problem with paying for your own sin is that you are dead; you cease to exist. Thankfully, God allows us to have someone else pay for our sin, but to make that payment the substitute must himself be sinless, and the only sinless person to ever live was Jesus Christ. So, the way for a person to acquire everlasting life is by having Christ pay for his sin.

From the very beginning and the very first sin, God showed that a person’s sin could be atoned for by someone else. For example, after Adam and Eve sinned, the evidence in Genesis is that God killed animals as a sacrifice, and from the skin of those animals He clothed Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21). Thus, Adam and Eve were temporarily forgiven their sin by the death of a substitute, just as the New Testament says the “wages of sin” is death, but then allows us to avoid that death by accepting Jesus’ sacrificial and substitutional death. Animal sacrifices were a “type” of Christ, but they never totally forgave sin; they only covered sin temporarily until the sacrifice of Christ occurred. (see commentary on Rom. 3:26).

Another reason we know that sacrifice for sin was established by God very early is that Cain, the first human ever born, and his brother Abel, knew about sacrifice and even that there was an acceptable and unacceptable way to offer the sacrifice (Gen. 4:2-5). Also, there are many verses in the Torah, especially Leviticus, about people sacrificing animals to atone for sin and those sacrifices also served as a portrayal of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In fact, many things in the Tabernacle and the Temple helped portray the life and one-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ for everyone’s sin.

Everyone sins (Rom. 3:23), so how do people who want to obey God but sin because of their human weakness avoid their own death? As was stated briefly above, God has always provided a way for sinners to avoid death by accepting a substitute that will die in their place (Rom. 5:6-8). In the Old Testament, the sinner became identified with the sacrifice by placing his hand on the head of the animal as it was being killed, and in this way, it became a substitute for him and died in his place (Lev. 1:4). Today, we become identified with Jesus Christ by confessing that Jesus is our Lord and believing that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). His sacrificial death atoned for our sins once and forever so that, in spite of our sins, we can have everlasting life.

When the Bible says “the wages of sin is death,” it is not saying, or implying, that death is the only consequence of sin. The “wages of sin” is death (Rom. 6:23), but we must be careful not to take that one verse out from the context of the whole Bible. For example, Romans 6:23 never says that the “wages of sin” is immediate death. Before people die in Gehenna, the Lake of Fire, they are punished in proportion to their sin. The Bible says in many different places that people will be repaid for what they have done on earth (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8). This is one reason the Bible says that for the wicked there will be “sobbing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

Romans 6:23 and Universalism: Some people believe that everyone who has ever lived will be saved. Theologically, this is called “Universalism.” Universalists believe that in the next life, things will be better because in part the people who are evil in this life will decide not to be evil in the next life. They think that God will reform all the evil people so they will be godly, or they think that when evil people really see God for who He is, they will repent of their evil and become kind and loving. They also usually assert that God is love and it would be unloving to annihilate anyone in the Lake of Fire. However, there is no reason to believe any of that.

When it comes to reforming people, how exactly would God do that? God gave people free will, and most people who are evil and hurtful do so out of the freedom of their will. They know they are being hurtful but they do not care. God gave angels and humans free will so we could make the free will choice to love Him and each other, and He is not going to take away free will in the next life. In fact, it is because people will have the free will to sin in the next life that the Bible says Jesus will rule as king with “a rod of iron” (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). It is wishful thinking unsupported by any Scripture to believe that people who have decided to be evil in this life will suddenly decide not to be evil in the next.

Although some Universalists say that people will change because they will see God and life for what it really is, that is just a theory, and there is no Scripture to back it up. In fact, we know that logic is false from the example of the Devil and his demons. They know God and come directly into His presence. They also know—because they are the cause of it—all the hurt and harm they cause, nevertheless, they remain evil, obstinate, and disobedient (Job 1:6; Matt. 8:29; James 2:19).

It is also a mistake to say that because God is love, He would not destroy anyone in the Lake of Fire. That idea is a complete misunderstanding of love. True love honors and values people by giving them free will, then giving them accurate information, and then honoring the choices they make, even if those choices are harmful or not what God wants for them. We would be offended at God if every time we did something that was not good for us, God intervened and stopped us. We would be upset with God if we wanted a coke and cookie but God turned it into water and broccoli to “help” us. We would be upset if we wanted to sleep late on a Saturday but God teleported us into the gym in a workout suit; or if we owed money on our credit card but tried to go out to eat, only to have God teleport us back to our kitchen for a less expensive meal; or if we had not read our Bible one day but sat down to watch TV only to have God make the TV disappear and a Bible appear beside us.

We instinctively recognize that love means giving others the right to make their own decisions, even if they are harmful and have harmful consequences. We also instinctively recognize that micromanaging someone’s life is not loving. God is love, and so He tells people how He wants them to live, and also what is wise to do and what is foolish and dangerous to do. He even sends prophets, pastors, teachers, and encouragers to help people make godly decisions. But in the end, God’s love means that He honors the choice the person makes. So, for example, if a person decides to commit suicide, He honors that terrible choice, and if a person decides to commit everlasting suicide, He honors that choice too. Sadly, wicked people are so selfish they would rather act in a way that brings them everlasting death than humble themselves to God and accept His narrow way to life, but that is their choice. God lovingly honors it.

The Bible has many verses that say the wicked will be destroyed and perish. Some only go so far as to say the wicked will be thrown into the fire, but Revelation 20:14 lets us know that the Lake of Fire is the “second death.” People thrown into the fire die, they do not repent and then get saved. The clear meaning of the Bible should not be distorted or twisted to say that unsaved people will not perish, they will indeed perish (cf. Job 20:8-9; 27:8; Ps. 1:6; 9:7; 37:9-10, 20; 52:5; 73:17-19; 92:7; 145:20; Prov. 10:25; 11:7; 13:13; Isa. 41:11; Ezek. 18:4, 20; 33:13-16; Nah. 1:10; Mal. 4:1-3; Matt. 3:12; 5:29; 7:13, 19; 10:38; 13:40-42; 18:8-9; 25:41, 46; John 15:6; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2 Pet. 2:6; Rev. 20:15; 21:8). Even Romans 6:23 is pointless if no one ever dies forever. Why say the wages of sin is death if in fact everyone is saved and lives? That would make Romans 6:23 a lie, and it is not a lie, it’s the truth.

[For more on sin, what it is, and what it does, see commentary on 1 John 1:7, “sin.” For the Old Testament statement that the wage of righteousness is life, see commentary on Prov. 10:16. For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20. For more on the wicked being punished in proportion to the evil they did, see commentary on Rom. 2:5. For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“life in the age** ***to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

**“in Christ Jesus.”** The Christian’s life in the Age to come is due to, and in connection with, Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3.

**Romans Chapter 7**

Rom 7:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women, and it does so here.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

Rom 7:4

**“brothers and sisters.”** See commentary on Romans 7:1.

**“became dead in regard to the law.”** The Greek for “became dead” is *thanatoō* (#2289 θανατόω, pronounced than-a-'tah-ō), and it is the passive voice. It is literally, “put to death,” or more generally, “became dead,”[[108]](#footnote-27649) or “rendered dead.”[[109]](#footnote-16499) *Thanatoō* is a very strong word, and different from the word for “dead” in Rom. 7:2 and 7:3. It is not just that the believer “died,” but that we were put to death; we became dead to the law. How? “Through the body of Christ.” This is a continuation of our identity with Christ, which was a huge subject in Romans 6, which states that because of our union with Christ, our identity with him, we were crucified with him and died with him. By virtue of our identity with Christ, we were “put to death” with him to the law, or otherwise stated: we became dead in regard to the law through our identity with the body of Christ.

One can see that the marriage analogy is not exactly correct, but gets us heading in the right direction. In the marriage analogy, the husband dies, which allows the woman to marry another. But in this analogy, it is not the law that dies, but it is the wife (the Christian); and it is by death then that we are freed to be married to Christ. This hearkens back to Romans 6, which says that we died with Christ when he died, and thus any ties to this world are broken by our death.

**“dead in regard to the law through the body of Christ.”** The “body of Christ” in this verse is not the Church, but the physical body of Christ, and the meaning of the verse is that we died to the law by means of Christ’s physical death on the cross.

**“from among the dead.”**[[110]](#footnote-31272) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Rom 7:5

**“to produce fruit for death.** It seems that Paul is personifying “death” here in the same way that he personifies “sin” in Romans 6 and 7 (see commentary on Rom. 6:6). There is a wonderful parallel in Romans 7:4 and 7:5. In Romans 7:4, the believer became “dead” in regard to the law due to the death of Christ, and then is able to produce “fruit for God.” In contrast, when we lived in the flesh, the law aroused sinful passions in us that worked in us to produce “fruit for death” (which could be understood by personification to be “produce fruit for Mr. Death”). Just as the believer produces “fruit for God” that blesses and helps God and His purposes and people in many ways, so too, the person who lives in the flesh produces “fruit for Mr. Death” that helps Death and his purposes and his evil people in many ways. The person who lives in the flesh helps the Devil and death in many ways.

It is important to note that the Greek can be read as a purpose or result clause. The REV translates it with the understanding that “for death” is a personification and parallel to “for God” in the previous verse. Some versions translate the verse as a result clause. For example, the NLT reads, “the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death.” It is true that living by one’s sinful passions results in death, but while that translation is one legitimate meaning of the Greek, it seems that understanding “death” as a personification and magnifying the parallel between Romans 7:4 and 7:5 is what the text is trying to do.

Rom 7:6

**“the new way of the spirit.”** The Greek is literally “in newness of spirit” and it is contrasted with the old way of the “letter,” or better here, the “written code.” The concept of “new way” comes from the Greek *kainos* (καινός #2537), which is new in quality. The Greek language has an advantage over English because it has two completely different words for “new.” *Kainos* is new in quality, while *neos* (νέος #3501) is new in time. This verse uses *kainos*, so it is not a brand new spirit, but a new quality of the spiritual thing being referred to, thus a “new way.”

**“of the spirit.”** This genitive, “of the spirit,” has many possible meanings, all of them having some value. The most dominant meaning seems to be the genitive of character, where “spirit” defines the character of the relationship: that we have a new, “spiritual” way of living, not an old life based on the legal code. Also, however, the genitive of origin (the new way we do things originating from holy spirit) is true also, and the genitive of relation, the new way of life that involves our interrelation with the spirit, not just obeying the letter of the law.

Rom 7:7

**“is the law sin?”** God did not give Israel laws that were not good. The Bible specifically tells us “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). Furthermore, God did not give Israel permission to ignore and twist His laws. God often warned the Israelites not to follow the pagan practices of other nations (cf. Lev. 18:3), but they made the free will choice to disobey Him. What ended up happening was that with the introduction of the law, there was a standard introduced, which the Israelites broke and thus were found to be living in sin.

**“I would not have known sin if it were not for the law.”** The law teaches us what sin is, or rather perhaps what is sin. Paul says that he would not have known what was sin and what was not except for the law, so the law became a guide to help us recognize sin. But as we read through Romans 7 we see that the law reveals sin but has no power to remove it. No amount of righteous behavior removes sin; sin sneaks in by way of our unrighteous behavior and sets us up to die. Life is not a game of “Which is more in your life, righteousness or unrighteousness? May the greater one win.” No, this is a game of “the wages of sin [any sin at all] is death” (Rom. 6:23). If you sin, you are a sinner and the wages of sin is death unless that sin can be atoned for. The law cannot do that. Only Jesus Christ can cleanse the sinner from sin and thus save his or her life.

So Paul finds out that the law shows him what sin is, but it does him little good. Now he knows he is a sinner but cannot get help from the law to cleanse himself from sin.

Rom 7:8

**“But sin, seizing an opportunity.”** Here Paul uses the figure of speech personification, presenting sin as if it were a living being, to increase the emotional punch of the points he is making. He continues to personify sin in Romans (see commentary on Rom. 6:6).

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

**“*that came* through.”** Cf. NIV. This is the preposition *dia* (#1223 διά) in the Greek. It is used here in Romans 7:8 to indicate the *means by which* sin seized the opportunity to produce coveting. It was “through” the command that sin did this; the command was the means through which sin seized the opportunity, thus, the opportunity was “afforded by” the command. It is important to note that it is not the law, “the commandment,” that produced the coveting, but the sin inside Paul.

Rom 7:9

**“And I was alive apart from the law once.”** This is not when Paul was a child. It was before his conscience and self-awareness grew to the point that his breaking of the law, ignorantly or purposely, pricked his heart. Thus, “when the commandment came” does not refer to the giving of law or “the Law,” because the commandment “came” centuries before Paul was born. It refers to when the commandment “came” into Paul’s heart and it really mattered to him to obey the commandment and please God.

Rom 7:10

**“and I died.”** Obviously, Paul did not physically die. Paul’s lighthearted, carefree, confidence that he was doing fine in life died, and Paul himself realized he could well be on his way to physical and everlasting death (this was before he believed in Christ and understood the New Birth). Ironically, before the law came to Paul, it was dead and he was alive (Rom. 7:8-9). But then sin came to life and Paul died (Rom. 7:9-10). So it is with us all. Before we truly understand the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the value and necessity of obeying God, the law is “dead” to us and we are carefree. But when our conscience awakes to the sin we commit, and sin becomes alive in our lives, then we “die.” The sinning we do will remain as long as we are alive in this flesh body, and the consciousness of our sin will haunt or tend to haunt us all our lives, but thankfully we do not have to let that keep us from serving God. It did not stop Paul, and it does not have to stop us.

**“*was meant to* result in life…resulted in death.”** The Greek text of Romans 7:10 uses the preposition *eis* (#1519 εἰς) two times, and *eis* can express both *purpose* and *result.* The first use of *eis* is in the phrase “*was meant to* result in life,” and the *eis* conveys the *purpose* of the law, that it was given with the purpose of life. The second use of *eis* conveys the *result* (“resulted in death”) (see also commentary on Rom. 5:20).

The law was given “for life,” that is, to guide people so they could avoid sin and live: “You must therefore keep my statutes and my ordinances, which if a person does, he will live by them; I am Yahweh” (Lev. 18:5). But sadly it resulted in death because no one could keep the law.

**“*actually*.”** Compare NIV translation. There is no Greek word in this verse explicitly meaning “actually,” but it is nevertheless implied. Bringing out this implicit “actually” accomplishes two things. First, there is an emphatic “this” (*hautē*) in the Greek, literally, “the commandment for life, **this** resulted in death.” The translation “actually” serves to highlight the emphatic nature of the result. Second, it captures the sense of the two uses of *eis*, bringing into English how the purpose-result prepositions are playing off each other in Greek; the purpose of the law was life but it actually resulted in death.

**“resulted in death.”** The “death” in this verse is not physical death, but the “death” of the carefree state of living without an awareness of sin (see commentary on Rom. 7:9).

Rom 7:11

**“sin.”** Here the text uses the figure of speech personification, presenting sin as if it were a living being (see commentary on Rom. 6:6).

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

**“and through it, killed me.”** If we were to bring this verse into more vernacular English we might say, “For *it was* sin *that*, finding an opportunity through the commandment, completely deceived me, and used the commandment to kill me.”

Rom 7:12

**“So then.”** The opening question was, “Is the law sin?” Then followed the argument that made clear that it was the law that showed us right from wrong, but it was sin that used the law against us and by it, killed us. This, then, concludes the argument: “So then, the law is holy, righteous, and good; it is sin that is evil.” In fact, the reason that sin could use the commandment to kill us was that the commandment was so holy and righteous and good that we could not keep it, so we were always breaking it and bringing the penalty of “death” down upon ourselves.

**“good.”** See commentary on Romans 3:2.

Rom 7:13

**“with the result that… with the result that.”** This is the translation of *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood. We feel this should not be translated as a purpose clause, “*in order that* sin might be recognized…*so that* through the commandment.” The Greek conjunction *hina* can introduce a purpose clause or a result clause, and here it should be a result clause. Sin does not produce death with the purpose of being revealed for what it is. Sin does not want to be revealed, it prefers darkness and ignorance.

[For more information, see Word Study: “Hina.” Also see commentary on Rom. 5:20.]

Rom 7:14

**“*into slavery* under *the power of* sin.”** Here in Romans 7:14, the text uses the figure of speech personification, presenting “sin” as if it were a living being (see commentary on Rom. 6:6). The Greek in this verse literally says we are “sold under sin,” but that was idiomatic for being sold as a slave to someone, whose power the slave was then under. That being said, there is no reason to introduce a literal reading that would not be understood by a modern reader, so we should translate the meaning of the idiom.

The Greek word for “sold” is *pipraskō* (#4097 πιπράσκω), and it is used of the selling of slaves (cf. Matt. 18:25), many of whom were captured in a war, and that is the context of Romans 7:14. In Romans 7:8, sin seized the opportunity, and in Romans 7:11 it found an opportunity. Sin made a surprise attack on us and enslaved us. The phrase paints a picture of sin’s dominating power over us. Like slaves being sold to a master, we are under the power of sin. The root of the power of sin in our lives is the sin nature that lives in us (see commentary on Rom. 7:17, “sin”).

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

Rom 7:15

**“For I do not understand.”** The Greek sentence starts with the word “for,” and introduces a reason or explanation. Many versions omit the “for” because it is not immediately clear, especially to the modern reader, why it is there. To understand what it is communicating, we must understand that to most people, it is not readily apparent that they are the slaves of “Mr. Sin.” They just think that wanting things and doing things that are bad for them is “just natural.” But it is not, it is due to our sin nature, i.e., the fact that we are slaves to Mr. Sin. If we were going to fully expand Rom. 7:14-15 and add the unstated thought, we might say: “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, having been sold as a slave to sin. I know this because I do not understand my own actions, for I am not practicing what I want, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”

**“understand.”**[[111]](#footnote-18340) Romans 7:15 is very hard to translate accurately because it contains three words that all more or less mean “do.” Thus, the NIV translates them all as “do,” but then a lot of the meaning of the verse is lost. Here are the three words: “actions,” the Greek word *katergazomai* (#2716 κατεργάζομαι), is to bring about a result by doing something. “Practice,” the Greek word *prassō* (#4238 πράσσω), is to behave in a certain way, do, accomplish, perform. In this context, it would refer to that which is done a certain way, or “practiced.” “Do,” the Greek word *poieō* (#4160 ποιέω), is the closest to the English word “do.” Because the three words are all used in the same context, they are juxtaposed with each other, bringing out the subtle differences.

**“hate.”** The Greek word is *miseō* (#3404 μισέω), “hate,” but in Hebrew and Greek the word “hate” has a large range of meanings from actual “hate” to simply loving something less than something else, neglecting or ignoring it, or being disgusted by it. Here, Paul does the things that disgust him, and this is a common human experience. We want to be better than we seem to be able to be, and when we fall short, we are disgusted and disappointed in ourselves, we “hate” what we do.

[For more on the large semantic range of “hate” and its use in the Bible, see commentary on Prov. 1:22, “hate.”]

Rom 7:17

**“sin.”** “Sin” dwells, or lives, in us even when we are not in the act of “sinning.” This is due to our “sin nature,” the nature we have as descendants of Adam. We have a sin nature, and it leads us to sin in our flesh. An unanswered and historically much-debated question is exactly how it came to be that everyone is under the power of sin. The term “original sin” does not occur in the Bible, but the doctrine of original sin and subsequent sin nature is clearly in the text. To summarize: the “original sin” was the sin that Adam committed, producing in him and then all of his descendants (thus all humans) an inescapable sin nature that results in the verdict of “death” in the eyes of God. When Adam knowingly and willingly disobeyed God and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:6), his nature actually changed from being pure and blameless before God to being an impure, sinful nature. Worse, this sin nature was then somehow passed down to all his descendants; all mankind. But how did that happen? We do not know “how” the sin nature is passed from generation to generation, although there is much speculation about it. Perhaps it would be more honest just to say we are not sure. What we do know is that the Bible makes it clear that the nature of the Devil became the nature of Adam and Eve, and mankind has had a crafty nature ever since then.

In Genesis 2:25, Adam and Eve are portrayed as “naked” (Hebrew is *arvm*)*.* In the next verse, Genesis 3:1, the serpent (which is the figure of speech hypocatastasis for the Devil,[[112]](#footnote-30913) cf. commentary on Rev. 20:2) is said to be more “crafty” (*arvm*) than any other creature. In the original Hebrew text, which had no vowel points, the root words are spelled the same: *arvm* (once the vowel points are added, which did not exist until after the time of Christ, the word could then be specifically seen to be pronounced “ah-'room” or “ah-'rome” depending on whether is it “crafty” or “naked”). Although many scholars say these two words are built from different trilateral roots, the spelling of the root words in Genesis is the same: ARVM; *ayin*, *resh*, *vav*, *mem*; as any good lexicon will show. Nevertheless, in Genesis 2:25 and Genesis 3:1, no one confuses them. No one thinks that in their primal state, Adam and Eve were “crafty” and the serpent was “naked.” However, after Adam and Eve sinned, what meaning do we assign to *arvm*? In Genesis 3:7, immediately after they sinned, the Bible says their eyes were opened and they knew they were *arvm*. But is that naked, or crafty? Actually both. They dealt with their nakedness in Genesis 3:7 by covering themselves, and they displayed their craftiness in Genesis 3:8-13 by first hiding from God and then, when He confronted them, blame-shifting. Adam openly blamed Eve, and although Eve told the truth when she said she had been deceived, she does not tell the “real truth,” which was that she thought the tree would be good for her (for food and to make her wise) and so willingly ignored God and followed the serpent’s advice.

Thus, although the Bible does not say exactly “how” Adam and Eve took on the nature of the serpent, something happened when they sinned that was deeper than just “a sin.” A regular sin can be forgiven with a simple and heartfelt, “I am sorry, will you forgive me?” But what happened to Adam and Eve could not be forgiven that easily. Their sin eventually resulted in their death, and the subsequent sin and death of all of their descendants. Furthermore, their sin could not be atoned for by a confession, it could only be paid for by death. God temporarily covered people’s sin by animal sacrifice in Old Testament times, but eventually, Adam’s sin had to be atoned for by the death of another perfect human being, the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

How do we know there is a “sin nature” that lives and works in all of us? Many ways. One of them is our inability to stop sinning. Countless thousands of good people have struggled with sin and tried desperately not to sin and to live blamelessly before God—all to no avail. One reason we sin, and cannot stop, is that it is our nature to sin. Paul wrote eloquently about man’s inability to do what he wanted and how we all end up doing things we do not want to do. He wrote: “I do not understand my own actions, for I am not practicing what I *truly* want, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15). Our sin and sin nature is why every human sins and needs a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we are 6,000 years removed from Adam, and the reality of Adam’s life and sin in the Garden is only “head knowledge” that we learn from the Bible. However, those who lived much closer to the time of Adam were much more in touch with the cause and reality of their sin nature and inability to stop sinning. Noah and his immediate descendants knew only too well about Adam and his sin, and the subsequent sin that brought the wrath of God upon the earth in the form of the Flood. So it is not unusual that people who lived about that time would write about mankind’s inherent sinfulness. Thus, an Akkadian text reads, “All humans who exist are sinful.”[[113]](#footnote-21697) The city of Akkad was founded by Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah and grandson of Ham, and is mentioned in Genesis 10:10). Similarly, an early Sumerian wisdom text reads, “Never has a sinless child been born to its mother.”[[114]](#footnote-25792) (Sumer was a city-state that predated Abraham). The inherent sinfulness of people was also mentioned by biblical characters who lived close to the time of the Flood. Eliphaz, a friend of Job, rightly said that man was “abominable and corrupt” (Job 15:16), and Bildad, another friend of Job, said, “...how can he who is born of woman be clean?” (Job 25:4). Later biblical writers also acknowledged the existence of a sin nature that made all people sinful. The Psalmist wrote that sin nature is passed on to the new human at conception (Ps. 51:5), and so the Psalmist says that the wicked, i.e., people who give in to that nature, go astray right from the womb and err from their birth (Ps. 58:3).

Another reason we know we have a sin nature and are inherently sinful before God is that if we did not have a sin nature, then a baby that died before it had a chance to sin would not need a savior to die for its sin, and so it could have everlasting life on its own merits. But the Bible makes it clear that babies must be saved too. For example, Romans 3:23 says that “all” have sinned. Not “all” except babies who have not sinned yet, but “all,” because babies are born with a sin nature and require a savior. Thankfully, the Bible says that God considers babies born to saved parents to be saved until they reach the age they can believe in Christ on their own (1 Cor. 7:14). That is a huge argument for being saved!

Although the sin nature and its effect are mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments, it is most clearly explained in the Epistles of Paul. We have already seen that Paul wrote about the effect of the sin nature on us—that we don’t do what we want to do and end up doing things we hate to do. Romans also shows us that sin is not only seen as an act against God that people do, but is seen as an independent power that lives in people and corrupts them. Romans 6 and 7 personify “Sin” as if it is a slaveowner who exercises an inescapable influence over us.[[115]](#footnote-12658) Romans 6:6 says we are slaves of Sin until we die (cf. Rom. 6:17, 20). In Rom. 6:12, 14, we have to fight to keep from obeying Sin and being subject to its lordship. In Rom. 6:18, we were freed from Sin by virtue of having died with Christ. In Rom. 7:5, 8, the Law, which should have helped us live godly lives, instead simply aroused sinful and rebellious passions in us, which is due to our sin nature, which naturally tends to resist godly authority. Romans 7:11 says that Sin searched for an opportunity to kill us, and did so through the Law. Then Romans 7 covers again the reason why we seem to be so rebellious, and it turns out that, “now I am no longer the one who is doing it, but it is the sin that lives in me” (Rom. 7:17). So Romans clearly sets forth a doctrine that there is sin living in me and lording itself over me that is not part of “me” but yet definitely inside me and influencing me. That is the sin nature, and we all have one that we inherited from Adam. Romans tells us we will be freed from our sin nature when we die. I serve Sin in my flesh now (Rom. 7:25), and I will serve Sin until I die and get a new body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:42-57; Phil. 3:21).

Romans is also clear that sin came into the world through one person, Adam, and came to all mankind, resulting in death for everyone (Rom. 5:12). This “sin” has to refer to the sin nature, not just an act of sin, because Adam’s act of sin would not have made everyone else a sinner and doomed to death. Only a sin nature passed down from generation to generation to every human could do that. Romans continues to elucidate this truth, telling us that from one man who transgressed, sinning and condemnation to death came upon all people (Rom. 5:16-19). Why were all guilty, even those such as babies or those people born with no mental faculties? Because of the sin nature.

Galatians is another book that sets forth the difference between our sin nature and our godly nature. Galatians 5:16-17 shows the difference between the new godly nature a Christian gets when he is saved, called the “spirit,” and our ungodly sin nature bound up in our flesh.

The Bible does not answer many of the questions we have about original sin, such as how Adam’s sin affected the whole human race, or how the sin nature is passed from generation to generation. As with most subjects, there are many questions the Bible does not answer. However, that does not mean the Bible is not clear on the existence of original sin and its effect, which is everlasting death unless we are rescued by the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:24-25).

Rom 7:20

**“I *myself*.”** Up to this point in Paul’s discussion regarding his struggle between sinning and living righteously, even as a Christian, he has been portraying Sin as a person. He has been personifying sin (Rom. 6:12, 17; 7:8-9, 11) and even other things like the law as well (Rom. 7:23). Here in Romans 7:20, Paul even further personifies sin to the extent that there are almost two people inside Paul, his true self and Sin (personified). This dichotomy is clearly laid out in Romans 7:25 when Paul distinguishes “I myself” and his “mind” against his “flesh.” Since Paul associates his righteous side with the phrase “I myself,” the REV clarifies this phrase in Romans 7:20 with “I *myself*” to help show that Paul sees himself as having two “selves” in this section, his true, righteous self, and the sin nature that lives in his flesh.

This should not be understood literally in such a way that Paul has lost control of his body, and a person ‘Sin’ has taken over, but in continuing his personification, he is describing how when he sins, because ultimately he does not love sin (Rom. 7:15), it is as if someone else is doing it, namely, Sin.

Rom 7:21

**“So I discover.”** Through self-examination and honest searching of himself and his circumstances, Paul “discovers” (or finds) the “law” “although I want to do *what is* good, evil is present in me.” The Greek word translated as “discover” is *heuriskō* (#2147 εὑρίσκω), which in this context means to discover or find after searching. Paul searched his heart and would have also searched the Word of God available to him, and found that the sin nature and thus the proclivity to sin was within him. No matter how he tried to rid himself of it, “evil is present” in his life (and in ours too!).

“**this law.”** Although the Greek word is usually understood as “law,” it can also refer to a principle or rule, which is what it means here (cf. CEB, CJB, CSB, NAB, NASB, NJB, NLT). It is not technically a “law” that every human has a sin nature or that every Christian has both a spiritual nature and a sin nature, it is a principle, the way things happen to be. It is likely referred to as a “law” because in many ways it acts like a law, it is an inescapable principle. The word “law” here in Romans 7 is also a sort of wordplay that is designed to catch the attention of the reader because the word “law” has different meanings in different verses in the section. For example, in Romans 7:9, 12, 14, 16, and 7:22, the “law” is the law of God, but in Romans 7:21 and 7:23, the “law” is more like a principle. Paul “discovered” this “law,” this “principle,” while he was striving to do good, because he constantly fell short of the mark and could not be as holy and good as he wanted to be.

**“although I want to do *what is* good.”** In the Greek, the word is *wanting*, a present participle showing a continual fact of wanting, from *thelō* (#2309 θέλω). Translations that read, “when I want to do good” make it sound as though the wanting is a particular singular instance, a one-time wanting to do a good thing; however, this is not the case. The “law of sin” (Rom. 7:23, 25) that Paul is discussing is the continual desire to be doing what is right, yet having evil within, and further, often giving in to it even though it is not what one truly desires. This is the culmination of the battle described in Rom. 7:14-20.

**“evil is present in me.”** Evil is present with each person both internally in the form of the sin nature, and outwardly as the sin nature outworks as the sin that each person commits. The evil in us needs to be suppressed, which is an effort of the will, and some people work hard to suppress evil and obey God, while others follow the leading of their evil nature and become very evil and ungodly.

Rom 7:22

**“so far as my inner self is concerned.”** The “inner self” is the real “you.” The “inner self” is the “you” that can talk to yourself. It is the invisible “self” that thinks and plans, and has desires and aspirations, and has deep emotions and feels great joy in some circumstances but great pain in other circumstances, and that makes decisions about what to do. It is the “you” that will be judged on the Day of Judgment. Paul refers to it in short as “my mind” in the last part of the sentence in Romans 7:23 (Paul also speaks of the inner self in 2 Cor. 4:16 and Eph. 3:16). Paul carefully separates his “inner self,” the “real Paul,” from his flesh body. In this context, note that he carefully defines his inner self as “I”: the real Paul does not do the good he wants (Rom. 7:19), it is sin in his body that makes him disobey (Rom. 7:20). Paul (“I”) wants to do good, but evil is with him and wages war against his mind and captures him to the law of sin in his physical body. Paul asks, “Who will rescue “me” (the real Paul)?” Jesus Christ will at the Rapture, when Christian salvation is complete and every Christian has a new, everlasting body like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21).

What Paul is saying here in Romans 7:22, is that his “inner self,” the “real Paul,” consists of his thoughts and emotions and decision-making capacity (his “mind”), and he delights in the law of God. However, Paul has a problem, which we can see when we read Paul’s complete sentence: “For I delight in the law of God so far as my inner self is concerned, but I see a different law *at work* in the parts of my *body*, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me captive to the law of sin that is in the parts of my *body*” (Rom. 7:22-23). The “law of sin” that is in Paul’s body is his sin nature. The sin nature is referred to in the Bible and by Christians by other names, including: “the law of sin” (Rom. 7:23, 25), the “flesh” (Gal. 5:16-26), and the “fleshly nature.”

Paul (and every human alive) has a sin nature that permeates his flesh body, which is why he writes, “I see a different law in the in the parts of my *body*...the law of sin that is in the parts of my *body*.” The “law of sin” is the sin nature that resides in every human born since Adam and Eve and is a reason every person sins (cf. Eccl. 7:20). The sin nature wages a war against godly thinking (Gal. 5:17) and takes us “captive to the law of sin that is in in the parts of my *body*” (Rom. 7:23). The sin nature in people is the reason that they cannot completely stop sinning even when they want to stop (Rom. 7:13-20), and because of the dominating effect of the sin nature, Paul rightly compares it by the figure of speech personification to a slave owner, with Paul (and us) being the slaves to sin: “I am of the flesh, having been sold *into slavery* under *the power of* sin” (Rom. 7:14). We will only be delivered from sin when Christ returns and we have new bodies like his glorious body (Phil. 3:21). Until that time it is up to us (the “real you;” the inner self) to do our best to control our lives and be godly.

Here in Romans 7:22, the Greek text has the preposition *kata* (#2596 κατά), which some English versions translate as “according to.” However, that translation is unclear in this context and makes the verse difficult to understand. The Greek preposition *kata* has many meanings and some Bible versions pick up on that and translate the verse more clearly. For example, the Moffatt Bible has, “I cordially agree with God’s law, so far as my inner self is concerned.” James Dunn has “But I rejoice in the law of God so far as the inner man is concerned.”[[116]](#footnote-22015) Other scholars shorten the sentence somewhat, for example, the ESV has, “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,” the HCSB has, “For in my inner self I joyfully agree with God’s law,” and many other modern translations are similar. Richard Longenecker has, “For in my inner being I delight in the law of God.”[[117]](#footnote-14190) The point of the preposition *kata* is to show that Paul’s thoughts and attitude agree with the law. However, Paul’s body is weakened by sin and the sin nature, so he ends up doing things he does not want to do.

[For more complete information on the “inner self,” see commentary on 2 Cor. 4:16.]

Rom 7:23

**“different law.”** The “different” law that is in Paul’s body is the law of the flesh, called here in Romans 7:23, “the law of sin.” This “law,” is also sometimes referred to as the “sin nature,” the “fleshly nature,” or simply “the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Paul words this sentence in a strange way because in Paul’s train of thought, the “different law” is taking Paul captive to “the law of sin” which is actually the same law as the “different law.” So, a clearer way to express this idea would be that the “different law” is taking him captive to itself.

Rom 7:24

**“Who will rescue me.”** Paul’s cry expresses the cry in the heart of every person. Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, we humans have been in broken, mortal bodies, and there is nothing we can do about it. No amount of exercise, vitamins or healthy eating can keep us healthy and alive, and no amount of “self-help” advice can fix our broken mental state. We need someone to rescue us, and it is the height of hubris and naïveté for anyone to think that they do not need help. Some people bravely speak about how they do not want to live forever and are happy just to get old and die without a savior and everlasting life. Sadly, they will not feel that way on the Day of Judgment, but then it will be too late—they will have made their choice and God will honor the choice they made. The best things a concerned Christian can do for those people is to tell them honestly that they should highly value their life and manner of living, pray for them, and hope that the seed planted about salvation through Jesus Christ will grow.

**“this body of death.”** Paul is speaking of the literal human body, which is mortal, just as he did in Romans 6:6; 6:12; and 7:23. This grammatical construction is the figure of speech antimereia which uses a noun in the genitive case as an adjective.[[118]](#footnote-17126) Although the phrase basically means, “this dead body,” there is a lot more to it than that. First, however, by using “death” as a noun in the genitive case the phrase emphasizes “death,” whereas a simple adjective phrase, “this dead body,” emphasizes “body.” Another example would be, if we wanted to speak of how powerful angels were, we might say, “angels of might,” emphasizing “might,” instead of “mighty angels.”

Grammarians who do not recognize the figure of speech sometimes say the Greek phrase should be, “the body of this death,” but that is not the case. Besides, Paul is not speaking of “this death” as if there was some other kind of death. There is only one death, and “this body” is subject to death—it is always in the process of breaking down and dying—and it will eventually totally die.

The phrase “this body of death” is more than just a way to say, “this dead body” and emphasize “dead.” As well as being an antimereia, the phrase “of death” can also be a genitive of relation, that is, our body that has a relationship with death, and it can also be a genitive of production, our body that produces death. Many things about our life are marred by our body “of death.” Of course, we age and die, but we also constantly live under the threat of unexpected death. And because our bodies are “of death,” we constantly deal with what our “body of death” produces in us, including both physical weakness and sicknesses, and mental weakness, disease, and deficiency.

We humans are all inherently broken people, both mentally and physically, but that is unacceptable to the world around us, and we spend a good deal of time and energy trying to cover up our faults and failures and “have it all together.” That leads to fear, shame, blaming, and dishonesty in general. Each of us needs to be rescued from our body of death, and Jesus Christ will rescue every Christian. No wonder we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:2).

Occasionally a commentator will say that Paul’s cry to be delivered from this “dead body” is an allusion to the fact that apparently, at least one ancient tyrant tied a dead body to a living criminal as a form of execution. In the *Aeneid* (lib. viii. ver. 485) the Roman poet known as Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro; 70-19 BC) described an ancient tyrant who had a dead body tied face to face with a criminal until the criminal died of the putrification. However, even Virgil called the act a “monstrous crime,” and there is no evidence it was a custom in Greek, Roman, or Eastern society. Besides the fact that tying a criminal to a dead body was at best an extremely rare form of punishment with only one attested case in ancient history, a couple of other things also militate against the passage being an allusion to Virgil.

For one thing, the parallel is not accurate. The tyrant tied a dead body to a criminal, but in our case, we ourselves are the dead body. Both our mental life and physical life are dying, then dead, and always in need of redemption. “We” are not tied to a dead body, we are the dead body. (We should point out that at first glance orthodox Christianity seems to fit the analogy here in Romans because it teaches that our “spirit” is our “true self” and is tied to our body until it is released when our body dies. But our spirit is not released when we die, “we” are dead in every sense of the word (see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead”). Furthermore, the analogy would not be accurate because at the resurrection all the saved people get new bodies, so we are not delivered from having bodies, we are delivered from our dead bodies).

Another thing that militates against this being an allusion to Virgil is that the message of the New Testament is that God will redeem our sin-stained flesh and make it new flesh. Jesus is our great example. His resurrected body was spiritually powered, but was nevertheless still flesh and bone, even as he said. When the disciples called him a “spirit,” he retorted: “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39 ESV). At the Rapture, our old flesh becomes new flesh, but it is still flesh. This is not what happened with the criminal and dead body. The criminal’s body was not redeemed from the dead body it was tied to, it died along with the other dead body. But Paul does not want to be dead, he wants to be delivered from the body of death and have a new “living” body, like Jesus promised he would have (Phil. 3:21). Thus, most commentators stay away from the analogy, and simply make the point that is made throughout Romans, that our flesh is dead and not able to keep God’s law or attain to His righteousness. Paul knows this and is tired of fighting his weak and carnal flesh, and wants to be delivered from it, which he knows will happen someday through Christ Jesus.

Rom 7:25

**“sin.”** Here the text uses the figure of speech personification, presenting sin as if it were a living being (see commentary on Rom. 6:6).

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

**Romans Chapter 8**

Rom 8:1

**“Therefore.”** If we were to have an expanded and paraphrased version of Romans 8:1, it could read like this: “Therefore, based on the arguments and logic presented in chapters 3-7, now, due to the death of Christ that paid for sin, there is no “condemnation”—that is, no sentence of death and no death in the Lake of Fire—for those people who confessed Christ as Lord and thus got born again and who are now in *union with* Christ Jesus by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ.”

Here in Romans 8:1, the “therefore” is pointing to a conclusion that is based on the arguments presented earlier in Romans, especially Romans 3-7. The word “therefore” is not the typical Greek conjunction *oun* (#3767 οὖν; meaning “then,” “therefore,” “accordingly,” “consequently”), that is translated as “therefore” numerous times in Romans, but rather it is the conjunction *ara* (#686 ἄρα). *Ara* denotes a declarative statement that follows as a consequence or outcome on the basis of what precedes, much like other conjunctions that indicate corollaries or conclusions drawn from previous discourse. But Paul’s typical construction using *ara* is usually in combination with *oun* (cf. Rom. 5:18; 7:3, 25; 8:12; 9:16, 18; 14:12, 19). Here, the conjunction *ara* by itself is likely functioning as a weaker conjunction and probably is used not so much to indicate a direct link to what immediately precedes (chapter 7) but more so to indicate a broader scope of context that includes the entirety of what Paul has been building toward all along in his letter (chapters 3-7). That makes sense in light of the fact that Romans 8:1 then becomes a kind of conclusion to the arguments that Paul has been building since the beginning of Romans, especially chapters 3-7.

**“no condemnation for those who are in *union with* Christ Jesus.”** The meaning of this sentence is that those people who have taken Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9) and are in union with him will never die in the Lake of Fire. They have everlasting life and will be with Christ in his kingdom forever. God condemned sin (Rom. 8:3), so there is no condemnation for saved people.

The negation “no” (*oudeis*) is a much stronger negation than other simple words commonly translated “no” in Greek (e.g., *mē* or *ou*). *Oudeis* is actually an emphatic term that indicates the totality of the negation. Paul uses it again in Rom. 14:7, “For none [*oudeis*] of us lives for himself, and none [*oudeis*] *of us* dies for himself.” The idea is that there is absolutely “not any” condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

“Condemnation” is the Greek word *katakrima* (#2631 κατάκριμα), and in this context, it refers to both the pronouncement of guilt and also ultimately the infliction of punishment. Thus, in a legal setting, as here in Romans, *katakrima* refers to both the guilt of the offender and the retribution the offender deserves and will receive for the offense.

The word *katakrima* only occurs three times in the New Testament: Romans 5:16, 18, and here in Romans 8:1. The use of *katakrima* in Romans 5:16 and 5:18 reveals its meaning here in Romans 8:1. Romans 5 is about Adam’s transgression and how Adam’s sin resulted in condemnation for all people. Romans 5:16 says that “judgment came from one *transgression* [Adam’s sin] resulting in condemnation,” and Romans 5:18 says, “So then, just as through one transgression the result was condemnation for all people….” Romans 5 is saying that Adam sinned, and the result was “condemnation” for everyone: every person is guilty before God and without Christ’s intervention will die in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

But no one has to die in the Lake of Fire. Romans 5 also says that Jesus died in place of sinners (Rom. 5:6-10). Thus, people who trust in Christ and take him as Lord are “declared righteous” in the sight of God and “will be saved” (Rom. 3:21-24; 10:9). Romans 6:3-8 further explains that when a person becomes a Christian, they are “in union with Christ;” that is, they are part of the Body of Christ, and are identified with him. Christians died with Christ and were buried with Christ, and they will also be resurrected as Christ was.

When Romans 8:1 mentions “condemnation,” it is continuing the thought of the previous chapters and speaking of the “condemnation” mentioned in Romans 5, the sentence of death upon us that came from the sin of Adam. It says that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in union with Christ Jesus.” So those people who made Christ Lord and are now in union with him are no longer condemned and under a death sentence. There is “no condemnation” to them. No Christian will be condemned to the Lake of Fire.

Some Christian groups treat Romans 8:1 as if it were saying that when a person sins or makes a mistake, they should not feel any “condemnation,” that is, any guilt over it, and they should move on with their lives. That is not what Romans 8:1 is saying. Romans 8:1 is not about any feeling of self-condemnation or guilt over sin. Romans 8:1 is about the condemnation to death that people deserved because of the sin of Adam (Rom. 5:16, 18), and how that now, in union with Christ, there is no sentence of death to the Christian; Christians will live forever with Christ. While it is true that if a person sins, they should confess their sin and make restitution for it (cf. 1 John 1:9), that kind of personal sin and self-condemnation (or condemnation by others because one has sinned) is not what Romans 8:1 is speaking about. Romans 8:1 tells us there is no death sentence on a Christian: they are united with Christ and have everlasting life.

**“in *union with* Christ Jesus.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ. The wages of sin is death, but because the Christian is “in union with Christ,” when he died, it is as if we also died and paid that penalty.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

**[“who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit”].** There are two major variants to the accepted Greek text of Romans 8:1. One of those has not been accepted by any New Testament translators and thus does not appear in any English Bible. The other variant is translated as “who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit,” and it occurs in some later manuscripts and was accepted into the King James and New King James versions. Due to that fact, that variant reading has gotten wide exposure despite the fact that the older and better New Testament manuscripts—and the modern English versions—do not include it. The shorter reading “is strongly supported by early representatives of both the Alexandrian and the Western types of text.”[[119]](#footnote-27452) The variant phrase seems to have been a scribal addition to make Romans 8:1 agree more with Romans 8:4.

Rom 8:2

**“in Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life.”** The Greek word translated “law” is *nomos* (#3551 νόμος), and it has a very wide semantic range. Its meanings include the Mosaic Law; the entire Old Testament; a law, rule, regulation, principle, precept, or injunction; anything that is established in the culture, for example, an established custom; and, the moral instruction given by Christ. The exact meaning of *nomos* in any given context must be determined from that context. Here in Romans 8:2-3, Paul is using the word “law” in two different ways, something that would not be confusing to people who lived in the culture of the time and were familiar with the many meanings of “law.” In Romans 8:2, “law” (which occurs twice) refers to a principle or rule rather than the Mosaic Law. The principle or rule of the spirit of life has set us free from the principle of sin and death.

While it is true that the “law” (the “principle”) of sin and death was intertwined with the Mosaic Law and at work in it, the principle of sin and death was larger than just the Mosaic law and sin and death existed before the Mosaic Law. However, the law of sin and death can be clearly seen in the Law of Moses because although it guided people as to right and wrong, it also brought people’s sin to light (Rom. 4:15; 5:20; 7:7-10), and because no one could keep the Law, no one was ever saved by the Law (Gal. 2:16). In contrast, the new law, “the law of the spirit of life” came in connection with Christ Jesus and the work that he did to pay for the sins of humankind by his sacrificial death. So now people are saved by trust in Christ and not by striving to keep the Mosaic Law (Rom. 3:21-22, 28; 4:13-16, 23-25; 5:1-2; Gal. 3:11-14).

**“has set you free…”** The texts vary as to whether, “I,” “you,” or “we” have been set free, but “Impressed by the weight of the combination of Alexandrian and Western witnesses, a majority of the Committee preferred σε [you] as the earliest attainable text.”[[120]](#footnote-19555)

Rom 8:3

**“For what the Law was not able to do.”** The verb is passive, not active, and thus could also be translated, “It was impossible for the Law.” It was impossible for the Law to bring about righteousness for people because it only showed what sin was—actually it made everyone “guilty”—but what was impossible for the Law God did by sending His Son.

**“since.”** Not “because,” but “since.” The phrase *en hō* (ἐν ᾧ) sets the limits or defines the boundaries in which the Law is limited. The Law itself was not weak. But it was weak “since” it was limited in us, by our flesh. If we say, “the Law could not do something because it was weakened by our flesh,” it makes it seem like the Law was weak. It was not. We were weak, so there were things that the Law could not do in regard to us humans.

**“the likeness of sinful flesh.”** The Greek is *homoiōma* (#3667 ὁμοίωμα), and it means likeness or resemblance.

This phrase is one of the most helpful phrases in understanding what the point of the virgin birth was. Scripture never explicitly teaches in what exact way Jesus differs from the rest of humanity due to his being born of a virgin. For example, Scripture never says, ‘Jesus was born of a virgin so he is 50% man and 50% God’ or that he is ‘100% man and 100% God’ (which is what Trinitarians assert, and is a contradiction), or that he is ‘100% man’ because of the virgin birth. Ultimately, Scripture does not tell us how exactly the virgin birth affected Jesus’ genetics.

However, many clues throughout Scripture help us determine how the virgin birth helped Jesus fulfill his role as Messiah. First, the Scriptures consistently testify to Jesus being a “man” (1 Tim. 2:5; Acts 2:22; 17:31; John 8:40), but never describe him as a “God-man” or as “God.” Therefore, it can be deduced from the language of Scripture that the virgin birth did not make Jesus part God and part man, or fully God and fully man, or else simply referring to him as a “man” would be misleading.

Secondly, the Scriptures clearly present Jesus as being a sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15) human, and since he is the only human who was born of a virgin and conceived by the Holy Spirit, it is extremely likely that his being born of a virgin helped enable him to be sinless.

The last piece of the puzzle and final clue in helping us determine the effect of the virgin birth is found in two passages, Hebrews 2:14 and here in Romans 8:3. In these passages Jesus is said to be “like” or “similar to” humanity. The phrase Paul uses in Romans 8:3 is “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” Notice that Paul did not say that God sent Jesus ‘in sinful flesh’ but he specifies “in the *likeness of* sinful flesh.” Paul is clarifying that Jesus’ body was not made of “sinful flesh” but was very similar to it. Now, this does not mean that Jesus was not human, it just means that his flesh was not “sinful flesh.” One can fully be human without having sinful flesh. Adam was the first human and before the fall, he did not have “sinful flesh,” yet, after, he did (Gen. 3:7, 19). Therefore, Jesus could still be fully human and not have sinful flesh, there is no contradiction.

Likewise, James 3:9 says we humans are made in the likeness of God, but of course, there are huge differences between us and God, and just because Jesus was made in the likeness of sinful flesh does not mean he was sinful or had a sin nature. Paul’s teaching in Romans 8:3 helps us understand the way in which Jesus differs from the rest of humanity: Jesus’ flesh was similar to ours, but was not sinful.

Hebrews 2:14 also teaches that Jesus “shared the same” flesh and blood as the rest of humanity. So, we can conclude that Jesus shared the same body as the rest of humanity but the difference, which Paul clarifies in Romans 8:3, is that he does not have “sinful flesh” or what some scholars call a “sin nature.”

[For more on whether Jesus is called “God” see commentary on John 20:28. For more on Jesus not having a sin nature, see commentary on Heb. 2:14.]

In conclusion, the scriptural evidence suggests that the virgin birth of Jesus caused him to be born fully human, but without a sin nature like the rest of humanity. He was able to be the true Son of God by the virgin birth, just like Adam was a son of God when he was created without a sin nature. Jesus looked like a sinful human, but he was not one. Jesus was tempted like we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

**“*as an offering* for sin.”** Jesus was given as an offering for sin, the antitype of all the sacrifices for sin, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden, in which God clothed Adam and Eve with animal (probably sheep) skins.

**“He condemned sin in the flesh.”** This is saying that God “condemned” sin in the sense that He both sentenced it to “death” or “destruction,” and that He also destroyed sin “for those who are in union with Christ Jesus,” i.e., for those people who have confessed Christ as Lord and become born again (Rom. 8:1). John Murray writes: “The word ‘condemn’ is used in the New Testament in the sense of consigning to destruction as well as of pronouncing the sentence of condemnation (cf. 1 Cor. 11:32; 2 Pet. 2:6). That is to say, condemnation may be viewed as not only the sentence but the putting of the sentence and execution.”[[121]](#footnote-14832) In other words, God both sentenced sin to death and then killed it.

This statement that God “condemned” sin, and thus destroyed its power, explains Romans 8:1, that there is now no “condemnation” (that is condemnation to destruction in the Lake of Fire) for those people who are saved. Since everyone sins, and since the wages of sin is “death” (i.e., “destruction”; Rom. 6:23) something had to be destroyed—either the sinner or the sin. So, God acted and condemned sin to death for the believer through the work of Jesus Christ, so the Christian believer now no longer has to have a fear of death in the Lake of Fire.

But what does the statement that God condemned sin “in the flesh” mean? Colin Kruse writes, “It is unlikely that sin ‘in the flesh’ designates the type of sin condemned, that is, human sin, because there is no other type of sin in view. Therefore, ‘in the flesh’ is better taken to designate the place where sin was condemned. And because the apostle had just said that God sent his son ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering,’ it is best to think of sin being condemned in the ‘flesh’ of Jesus Christ, that is, when God presented his son as a sin offering….”[[122]](#footnote-20367) Kruse goes on to make the point that the sin offering of Christ paid for the sins of humankind, and thus “absorbed” humanity’s sin and thus also the penalty for it. So, God condemned sin by means of the flesh sin offering of Jesus Christ, and then by extension God “condemned sin in the flesh” for all those people who get born again and become part of the Body of Christ, which is why Christians are “dead to sin” (Rom. 6:3-11).

Rom 8:4

**“so that.”** God sent his Son and condemned sin in the flesh both for the purpose of the law being fulfilled in us, and resulting in the law being fulfilled in us. This is a purpose-result clause.

[For more information, see Word Study: “Hina.”]

Rom 8:5

**“For those who are living according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.”** The Greek is very clear. Those who are of the flesh, who do not have spirit, set their minds on the things of the flesh. It is wrong to translate this verse as “Those who live…” or “Those who walk….” This verse is saying behavior follows nature.

Rom 8:6

**“life.”** Not everlasting life. Setting your mind on spiritual things does not keep you saved. This is the use of “life” that is life to the full, the enjoyment of life (cf. 1 Thess. 3:8.) “The ‘life’ he offers speaks of full satisfaction and the exercise of one’s total abilities. Oh, to live life at its fullest and best! Many people think they are really living today, but it is a shoddy substitute for the life God wants to provide.”[[123]](#footnote-27572)

Rom 8:7

**“because”** (*dioti*) means “because” in this context.[[124]](#footnote-25778)

Rom 8:9

**“in the spirit.”** There is no definite article “the” in the Greek text but it is supplied in the REV because the verse makes more sense in English that way. In the Greek text, the definite article “the” is not supplied before “holy spirit” because a preposition (in this verse, the preposition *en*) can make *pneuma* (spirit) definite without the article. In Greek, if a preposition governs a noun (generally by coming right before the noun), it is the context that determines whether the noun is definite or not, and therefore whether there should be a “the” in the English translation. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.”[[125]](#footnote-16188) A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use the preposition *ek.*[[126]](#footnote-30083)

**“if in fact the spirit of God lives.”** The *eiper*, “if,” “does not question the fact expressed (as if some of the Romans were remiss) but emphasizes it….”[[127]](#footnote-20399) The NRSV says “since,” (as does the interlinear by Brown and Comfort[[128]](#footnote-16810)). The phrase “of God” is a genitive of origin; it is the spirit *from* God.

**“spirit of Christ.”** This is not a different spirit than the gift of holy spirit from God in the first part of the verse. Rather, it is a different name for holy spirit. The genitive “of Christ” places the emphasis in a couple of different ways.[[129]](#footnote-22025) First, since his ascension, it has been Jesus Christ who has given the holy spirit; so it is a genitive of origin: “spirit from Christ.” Also, holy spirit allows us to relate to Christ: to better understand the aspects of the Christ and also to be like him. Thus, “spirit of Christ” is also a genitive of relation. Second, very accurately, anyone without “spirit of Christ,” i.e., holy spirit, “this one is not his.” A Christian is one who has the seed of God born and sealed within him, and thus is a partaker of the divine nature. A person without holy spirit is not a Christian.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

Rom 8:10

**“life.”** Not just “alive,” but “life.” The gift of holy spirit in each believer is our true life now, and our guarantee of everlasting life later.

Rom 8:11

**“he who raised Christ.”** Although there are some Greek manuscripts that read “Christ Jesus,” that seems to be the result of what scholars refer to as “the expansion of piety,” where things such as titles of Christ get expanded due to reverence. The majority of modern translations simply read “Christ,” although many say “Christ Jesus.”

**“from among the dead.”**[[130]](#footnote-26596) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Rom 8:12

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

Rom 8:13

**“live.”** The Greek is *zaō* (#2198 ζάω) which means “live,” but the verb is in the present tense, active voice, indicating an ongoing action. While clearly expressing the present active form of the Greek does not make a dramatic difference in English in some places, it often makes a big difference. A very clear example of that occurs in the Sermon on the Mount. Although most English Bibles just say, “ask...seek...knock,” the present active form of the verb makes the following a much better translation and one that is open to much less confusion: “Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and *the door* will be opened to you! For everyone who keeps asking receives, and the one who keeps seeking finds, and to the one who keeps knocking *the door* will be opened” (Matt. 7:7-8). Similarly, what Jesus was asking the disciples to do is much clearer in John 14:11 when the tense and voice of the verb are openly brought into English: “Keep on believing me....” In the Epistle of 1 John, the present tense, active voice can make the text much more emphatic: “If we say that we have fellowship with him but continue to walk in the darkness, we are lying and are not obeying the truth. *But* if we continue to walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:6-7). Here in Romans 8:13, those who continue to live in the flesh are about to die.

**“will certainly die.”** The Greek word *mellō* (#3195 μέλλω) means “to be about to; to intend to; to occur at a point in the future subsequent to another event and to be closely related to that event; to delay.”[[131]](#footnote-25311) Here *mellō* refers to an outcome that is going to occur in the future. It refers to the certainty of an outcome and not merely a possibility, and thus the translation “will certainly” helps to convey that idea rather than “about to” because “about to” carries the implication of something taking place sooner rather than later and doesn’t emphasize the definitiveness of it.

This verse is not contrasting non-Christians and Christians, but Christians with other Christians. To fully grasp this, we need to look back at the context of Romans 7:14-8:18. In Romans 7:14-25, Paul begins by informing us of his own inner struggles with his flesh. He says things such as “…I am of the flesh, having been sold *into slavery* under *the power of* sin;” “…I am not practicing what I *truly* want, but I am doing the very thing I hate;” “…the desire *to do what is* good is present in me, but the ability *to do it* is not;” “…I do not do the good that I *truly* want *to do*, but I practice the *very* evil that I do not want.” Paul continues by informing us that he fights against the law of sin that is still inside him, and God is the only means of victory over the law of sin.

In Romans 8:1-18, Paul continues the thought about the battle we face in the flesh and informs the Romans that they will go through the same struggle with their sinful nature. He tells them of the two different ways in which a Christian can live, from the spirit or from the flesh, and what each choice brings. Paul informs the Romans that the only way to stand strong is through the spirit. Romans 8:13 is part of the overall context and is addressed to Christians. It is not suddenly contrasting Christians, who walk by the spirit, with non-Christians who do not and will eternally die.

Most of the commentators say that this verse refers to a Christian losing his salvation by not walking in the spirit, however, this belief conflicts with the salvation picture painted by the Epistles (see the third point in the commentary on Eph. 1:13); especially when 2 Corinthians 5:5 says that salvation is guaranteed for us. The verse does not say, “you will lose your salvation,” it simply says, “if you live according to the flesh, you are about to die.” The question is: what will die if you live in the flesh? The answer is that Christians will lose their “life,” their enthusiasm, joy, peace, and feeling of connection with God, if they live according to their fleshly desires. J. Vernon McGee writes about the “death” in this verse, stating that it relates to a person’s fellowship with God, not to his physical or eternal death: “Die to God. That is, you have no fellowship with Him. I am not talking about a theory. If you are a child of God, you know this from experience.”[[132]](#footnote-30472) In *Absolutely Free*, Hodges also hits upon this point by saying, “Pursue sin, warns Paul, and your existence will be an experience that accords with the deadness of your physical body.”[[133]](#footnote-27270) In verse 6, Paul contrasted death with “life and peace.” Throughout Romans, the phrase “life and peace” is used to mean abundant life, so it is logical that “death” must refer to the opposite of life and peace, which would be a loss of enthusiasm, peace, and the feeling of connection to God (see commentary on Rom. 8:6).

Throughout the Bible, *apothnēskō* (#599 ἀποθνῄσκω), “die,” is used both metaphorically and literally. It is used to mean the death of a person (John 6:49), to represent eternal death (John 6:50), and the death of a principle (Rom. 6:2); however, it is also used to represent a mental death. In 1 Corinthians 15:31, Paul says that he dies every day; however, he is not literally dying every day. He was mentally stressed and beaten down by all the persecution he was going through. Another use of death being in the category of the mind is Romans 7:9-10 which says, “And I was alive apart from the law once, but when the commandment came, sin came alive, and I died.” Thayer’s lexicon points out that Paul is talking about being deprived of real life and sinking into spiritual torpor because of the Law. *Apothnēskō* is not the only word translated death; *thanatos* (#2288 θάνατος) is another Greek word meaning death, and it is also used in a metaphorical sense. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says that godly sorrow brings salvation, but worldly sorrow brings death. Worldly sorrow brings about depression, a lack of enthusiasm, and disconnectedness; thus, it makes your spiritual life “dead.” Thus, death is not always used to mean a literal or eternal death, and it is not used of everlasting death in this section of Romans.

**“by the spirit.”** This refers to the gift of holy spirit born inside each Christian. It has no article “the” in the Greek text. The gift of holy spirit is contrasted with the flesh. If a person lives according to (by the standards set by) the flesh, he will die, but if he lives by holy spirit he will live life to the full. This is the use of “live” that is “really live,” or “live life to the full” (cf. 1 Thess. 3:8). “By spirit” is the dative; here it is an instrumental dative, there is no separate word for “by.” We can do our best to not live in the flesh by the power of our flesh, and we will fail. We would be no better off than the Israelites, who could not keep the Law. It takes our willpower, plus the power of holy spirit, to live by the spirit.

**“live.”** The Greek word is *zaō* (#2198 ζάω), and it is used in the Bible of literal physical life as well as mental, emotional, and spiritual life. Here it is being used of the fullness of emotional life. For example, 1 Thessalonians 3:8 says, “For now we *really* live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.” Paul is certainly not saying that he will somehow physically die if the believers in Thessalonica walk away from the Lord. He is using “live” for the fullness of life. Paul will be excited, happy, and energized if the believers in Thessalonica are faithful. Proverbs 3:21-22 (NIV) says that sound wisdom and discretion will be life for the soul. It is saying that wisdom and discretion will bring the fullness of life to the person, and the idea of everlasting life is included as well, but as an undertone, not a primary meaning. In Romans 8:6, “life” is connected with “peace,” so it means a life of joy and completeness.

Rom 8:15

**“adoption.”** In the Greco-Roman culture of the first century, when a person (almost always a male) was formally adopted into a new family, that man left his old family and identity behind and became a full member in good standing in his new family. As unsaved people, we were children of the world and not children of God. We could not cry out “Abba Father” because we were not God’s children. When we accepted Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9) we became part of God’s family. This is expressed in different ways in the New Testament Epistles. We are “born again” as a child in God’s family (1 Pet. 1:3, 23), and we are “adopted” into God’s family (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). So, the born-again Christian is a child of God (cf. 1 John 3:1-2) according to both these ways described in the NT, and so we can now cry out, “Abba Father.”

[For more on adoption, see commentary on Eph. 1:5.]

**“by which.”** The Greek word *en* often denotes a relationship, and that is the case here (see commentary on Rom. 3:24 for more on *en*). We are children of God. We were fathered by God when He placed in us His gift of holy spirit, and thus it is in connection with that holy spirit we can call Him “Abba,” the Aramaic for “father.” The Trinitarian theology of most theologians shapes their understanding of this verse, and thus many versions read something such as, “by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (ESV). However, the Christian does not cry “Father” by way of the Third Person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. It is unclear what that would even mean. We Christians cry “Father” out of our hearts, speaking directly to God, coming boldly before His throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). Furthermore, this verse is not using *en* in the instrumental sense, as if we called God “Father” by way of holy spirit (NIRV). Christians can speak by the spirit of God, which is speaking in tongues and other spiritual utterances such as prophecy (1 Cor. 14:2-3). However, there is no reason to assume that Christians can only say “Father” by the spirit of God. We say “Father” from our hearts because God is our Father, and we became His children when we were “born” of God. That happened when we got His spiritual seed placed in us and were “born again” (1 Pet. 1:23), which happened when we confessed Jesus as our Lord and believed God raised him from among the dead (Rom. 10:9). Thus, in connection with the gift of holy spirit we received as children of God, we can say, “Father.”

**“‘Abba! Father!’”** The Aramaic is *abba*, its translation is “father,” in this context, “Father” because it is referring to God. This is similar to Mark 5:41 and Galatians 4:6 where the Aramaic is given, then its translation. (In Mark 5:41, the NIV and many other versions put the translation of “Talitha koum” in parentheses.) The phrase “Abba! Father!” is used in Mark 14:36, Romans 8:15, and Galatians 4:6.

[For more on “Abba! Father!” see commentary on Gal. 4:6.]

**“Father.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God did something new: He gave spiritual birth to children for the first time. Christians are born into His family. That is why God calls Himself “Father” more than 70 times from Acts to Jude. It also explains why there is so much family terminology in the Epistles to the Christian Church. Individual Christians are God’s “children,” and “sons” (a term inclusive of women). Christians are also “brothers and sisters” of Jesus; “heirs of God;” recipients of God’s “seed;” partakers of God’s divine “nature;” “born” and “adopted” into God’s family; able to call God “Abba” (“Father”), and so forth.

It is common today to hear people say that God is the “Father” of everyone. However, that is not true in the New Testament sense, the way that “Father” is used in the Epistles to the Christian Church. Once the Church started on the Day of Pentecost, God is only the Father of those people He has fathered, those people who have been born again.

One reason that “Father” does not seem unique to the Epistles to the Church (Acts-Jude) is that Jesus instructed his apostles to pray using “Father” in the Gospels, before the start of the Christian Church. That fits perfectly with one of the ways that “father” was used in the biblical culture. In Eastern culture, “Father” was a term that was used in a variety of ways.

* In the literal and common way it is used today (Gen. 22:7).
* Of a grandfather (Gen. 28:13. The Hebrew language has no word “grandfather”).
* Of a male ancestor (Josh. 24:3).
* Of the originator of something. Thus, Jabal was the “father” of tent dwellers (Gen. 4:20), Jubal was the “father” of those who play the harp and flute (Gen. 4:21), and Abraham was the “the father of all who believe” (Rom. 4:11).
* Of someone who provided protection and help (Job 29:16).
* Of someone who could counsel and give advice. Joseph was made a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8); Micah asked the wandering Levite to be a “father” to him, but the Danites wanted him to be a “father” to them (Judg. 17:10; 18:19).
* Of someone worthy of honor and respect. Elisha called Elijah “father” (2 Kings 2:12), Naaman’s servants called him “father” (2 Kings 5:13); the king of Israel called Elisha “father” (2 Kings 6:21).

The point is that the term “father” in Eastern culture did not have to refer to a birth father. In the Old Testament, people thought of God as a Lord to be feared and obeyed. Jesus changed people’s perception of God from that distant relationship to a more intimate relationship that allowed God to be referred to as “Father.”

On the Day of Pentecost when the Christian Church started, God “fathered” spiritual children where he gave His very nature, the gift of holy spirit, to all who believe, and they became “born again.” The New Birth is real, not just a nice description, and God uses three different words for it, all of which mean birth and all of which are only used of an individual being born of God during the Church Age. The three words are:

1. *Anagennaō* (#313 ἀναγεννάω; from the Greek prefix *ana*, “again” or “up,” and *gennaō*, “to give birth.” It means to be given birth to again, or to be born again, and it occurs in 1 Peter 1:3, 23).
2. *Palingenesia* (#3824 παλιγγενεσία; from *palin*, “again” and *genesis*, “genesis” or “origin.” It means to have an origin again, a new genesis, and it occurs in Titus 3:5).
3. *Apokueō* (#616 ἀποκυέω; from the Greek prefix *apo*, “away from,” and *kueō*, “to be pregnant.” It means “to give birth to,” and it occurs in James 1:18).

[For more information, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

Rom 8:16

**“The spirit.”** This is a reference to Jesus Christ (see commentaries on Rev. 2:7 and Rom. 8:26).

**“bears witness to.”** Both Jesus Christ and the holy spirit within us bear witness that we are the children of God. Our holy spirit testifies conclusively by empowering us to speak in tongues and to operate other manifestations of the gift of holy spirit. Jesus bears witness in many ways, if we will walk with him daily and commit our lives to him and his Father. Thus, both our gift of holy spirit and “the Spirit,” Jesus, bear witness that we are children of God. Lenski has, “testifies together with,” in his translation.[[134]](#footnote-20139)

Rom 8:17

**“glorified with him.”** The verb for “will be glorified” in the phrase “we will also be glorified with him” is part of a purpose-result clause in the subjunctive mood. Since the subjunctive mood frequently expresses uncertainty, the word “will” is often translated as “may.” However, the subjunctive mood, from which the “may” translation comes, does not always express uncertainty, particularly in result clauses. Here, the subjunctive is due to the purpose-result clause, and hence does not necessarily express any doubt that we will be glorified with Christ. As Wallace writes, “Sometimes the subjunctive acts like a future indicative… When used in result clauses, for example, the subjunctive cannot be said to express “probability.”[[135]](#footnote-14354) Seeing this is the case, we have rendered the verb with the future “will” to avoid mistakenly inferring doubt from the subjunctive, which grammatically is not intended here.

[For more on purpose-result clauses, see Word Study: “Hina.”]

Rom 8:18

**“compared with.”** The Greek preposition *pros* can mean “in accordance with” or “compared to.”[[136]](#footnote-13821)

Rom 8:19

**“creation waits with eager anticipation.”** This eye-catching phrase is an attributed genitive.[[137]](#footnote-26799) Tholuck rightly argues that the attributive genitive here has the effect of the figure of speech personification.[[138]](#footnote-23875) The coming revelation will be so great that even the expectation itself becomes a character, a “person,” if you will, who is expecting. The sentence grabs our attention because we would expect it to say the “creation” is waiting expectantly, but instead, it says it is the “eager anticipation” that is waiting expectantly. The creation itself is so excited about the future that God has in store for believers that even the anticipation of the creation is waiting in excitement.

Rom 8:20

**“(not willingly, but because of the one who subjected it).”** As we will see below, the ultimate (most remote) cause of the subjugation of creation was God, but the immediate (most directly involved) cause of the world being subjected to frustration is the Devil. The Devil had the choice to act in the world how he wanted. In the beginning, God gave the dominion of the earth to Adam (Gen. 1:26-28). However, Adam and Eve believed the Devil instead of God, which somehow resulted in the dominion over the earth being transferred to the Devil. The Devil is now the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), “the ruler of the domain of the air” (Eph. 2:2), and “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), and he controls much of what happens on earth (1 John 5:19).

Before the Devil became “the ruler of this world,” the earth was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). After the Devil took control, the ground was cursed and it took hard work to get food, the plants developed thorns (Gen. 3:17-19), and many animals became dangerous. Also, the earth became plagued with disease, death, famines, earthquakes, floods, and more. In short, after Adam and Eve sinned, the Devil gained a lot of control over the earth and it took on the nature of the Devil, an evil nature that it still has today.

Romans 8:20 speaks of the subjugation of the world. It is in the center of a three-verse sentence. The full sentence is: 19“For creation waits with eager anticipation for the children of God to be revealed, 20for the creation was subjected to frustration (not willingly, but because of the one who subjected it) in the hope 21that the creation itself will also be freed from its slavery to corruption *and delivered* into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

There is a debate among Christians as to who subjected the world to frustration. Many scholars, especially those with Calvinist leanings but also those who assert that “God is in control of the earth,” say that it had to be God who actively subjected the world to frustration. But the character of God and the character of the Devil militate against that interpretation. The Bible consistently speaks of how good God is and how evil the Devil is. Furthermore, the Bible says that God gave the dominion of the world to Adam, and the Gospel of Luke says that dominion was “handed over” to the Devil; in fact, the Devil offered that dominion to Jesus. Since the Devil is the ruler of the world and has dominion over it, and since the world reflects the nature of the Devil, and since when God had active dominion over the world it was “very good,” we can conclude that the one who acted to subject the world to frustration was the Devil.

There is some debate as to how the phrase “in the hope” fits in the sentence. As it is often punctuated, “in the hope” goes with “was subjected to frustration,” such that without the center phrase the verse reads, “was subjected to frustration…in the hope that the creation itself will be freed.” However, if we read that at face value it makes no sense; Romans 8:20 is a verse we have to read with some understanding of the scope of Scripture. The Devil did not subject the world to his evil in the hope it would one day be freed. But did God? Absolutely not. At least not in the sense that God actively wanted to subject the world to frustration. God makes it clear that people are not to “do evil so that good will come” (Rom. 3:8), and He does not do that either. God would never subject the people He created and loves to what has now been 6,000 years of evil just so that He could one day free us from that frustration. Furthermore, God had already given the dominion of the world to Adam before Adam sinned, so how could God have then actively subjected the world to frustration?

Many commentators say that subjecting the world to frustration was part of God’s plan so He is ultimately responsible, but that is theology, not the Bible. The Bible never says that God’s plan was to make humankind miserable for thousands of years and destroy the majority of them in the Lake of Fire (Matt. 7:13-14; Luke 13:24), just so He could redeem a few. Again, that goes against God’s good and righteous nature and against what the Bible actually says about God.

Some people support the view that God is the one who subjected the world to frustration because they say He was the One who cursed the people and the earth in Genesis (Gen. 3:16-19). But that does not have to be what happened. There are mitigating factors. A major one is the goodness of God. God was the One who said, “The son is not to bear the iniquity of the father, nor is the father to bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous person will be on himself, and the wickedness of the wicked person will be on himself” (Ezek. 18:20). Could He then ignore His own principles and actively punish all humankind for the sin of Adam and Eve? That is not like God. The solution to the difficulty is that the text is using the “idiom of permission.”

In the idiom of permission, God is said to do things that He did not actually do, but that happened because of the various laws and factors that God had put in place. A classic example of that is when God told Moses, “I will harden his [Pharaoh’s] heart” (Exod. 4:21). But God did not actually harden Pharaoh’s heart. God asked Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, and then Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God’s request (see commentary on Exod. 4:21). In Genesis, God said humankind would die if Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). But God never said He would kill them; it was simply part of the way God created the universe. God set human life up such that certain actions had harmful consequences. So in Genesis 3:16-19, God uses the idiom of permission to obviate what would happen to humankind because they gave the dominion of the world to the Devil. God did not actively curse people, but they were cursed because of what they themselves did.

It is worth noting that it is possible that in Romans 8:20, Paul is making Adam the one ultimately responsible for the world being subject to frustration. Brendan Byrne writes: “But linguistic considerations (see Note) and the presentation of Adam in the wider Jewish tradition as the one to whom the rest of creation was subjected (cf. esp. Ps. 8:6) make it more likely that Paul has Adam in mind. …by far the most normal sense of the preposition *dia* followed by the accusative is to indicate the cause or grounds for something—here to indicate whose fault caused the ‘subjection’; on such an interpretation the subject cannot be God. Moreover, Paul does use the verb *hypotassein* with the risen Christ—the ‘Last Adam’—as subject (Phil. 3:21). Such considerations support the longstanding alternative (Chrysostom; S. Lyonnet; H. Blaz. …In any case, a reference to the sin of Adam is at least implicit, by way of contrast to the ‘involuntary’ fall of creation.”[[139]](#footnote-26083)

Some scholars see God as being the One who Paul is saying subjected the world to frustration, but they do not see God as the immediate cause but as the ultimate cause. That seems to be the case. In fact, that there was an ultimate cause (God), a more immediate cause (Adam), and an immediate cause (the Devil) may well be why Romans does not specify exactly who subjected the creation to frustration. R. C. H. Lenski understands Romans that way. He writes: “So it is man’s sin [Adam’s sin] that caused this entire frustration of and derangement in nature, but it was not the ultimate cause.”[[140]](#footnote-10772) Lenski says God was the ultimate cause. So God set up the world in such a way such that certain actions have harmful consequences, so God is the ultimate cause of the world being subject to frustration. That explains how the world could be subject to frustration “in hope.” When God created the world and put the principle of action-consequences in place, He also had the intent to redeem those who sinned. God set earthly life up such that there would be consequences for actions, but He always thought through how to redeem the situation and thus bring Hope into the situation.

So, in conclusion, we see that God was the ultimate cause of the frustration of creation because He designed life such that some actions had bad consequences. Adam was a more immediate cause of the creation being subject to frustration than God was because God gave the dominion of the world to Adam, and Adam handed that dominion over to the Devil. Nevertheless, the Devil was the most immediate cause of the world being subject to frustration. He was the ruler of the world, and it was within his power to try to make the world as good as it had been when God made it, or make the world into his evil image. The Devil made the world into his evil image, and that is the way it is to this day.

[For more on the Devil being in control of much of what happens on earth and on the war between God and the Devil, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“frustration.”** The Greek word is *mataiotēs* (#3153, ματαιότης) and BDAG defines it as the “state of being without use or value.” However, the difficulty lies in the fact that the creation is not completely without use or value, Paul seemed to see great value in wanting to stay alive and preach Christ rather than to die a martyr’s death (Phil. 1:21-26), but its value and purpose has been frustrated and ruined, diminished by sin. So, “frustration” is one of the most clear words, although not totally sufficient, to capture this idea that the true intent and design of God’s creation has been tainted, ruined, and frustrated.

**“in the hope.”** This is a good example of a place where the word “hope” refers to a confident expectation of something that will absolutely happen. Often, especially in vernacular English, “hope” refers to something you want to happen, but are not really sure if it will happen (e.g., “I hope it doesn’t rain today,” or “I hope the plumber comes when he said he would”). However, there is a biblical use of “hope” that expresses a confident expectation of something that will happen because God says it will happen. For example, Colossians 1:27 has the phrase, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” That Christians have a “hope” of glory is not “just a possibility,” it is assured because God promised it.

Rom 8:21

**“the glorious freedom of the children of God.”** The Greek text is more literally the “freedom of the glory” of the children of God, but the phrase means “glorious freedom.”

Rom 8:22

**“up to the present time.”** Cf. NIV. Most versions read, “until now,” but this translation can be confused to mean, “not anymore,” which is not the case. The creation is *still* groaning today and will continue to do so until the new creation.

Rom 8:23

**“firstfruits of the spirit.”** Here in Romans 8:23, the holy spirit that God gave to Jesus who then gave it to believers on the Day of Pentecost is called the “firstfruits of the spirit.” This is more evidence that the gift of holy spirit that came on the Day of Pentecost was new and different from the gift of holy spirit that God put upon believers in the Old Testament and Gospels. This new gift of holy spirit gives believers spiritual abilities that were not available with the holy spirit that God gave before the Day of Pentecost, and is why, for example, Christians can speak in tongues but Old Testament prophets who had holy spirit upon them could not. God’s gift of holy spirit was “upon” people before the Day of Pentecost, and God could take it from the person, but after Pentecost, it would remain in a person. Jesus talked about this difference in John 14:17 when he told the apostles that the holy spirit was “with” them but would be “in” them. Jesus said to his disciples that when they received holy spirit they would receive power, and the gift of holy spirit does give each believer spirit power (Acts 1:8).

[For more on this new kind of holy spirit, see commentary on John 7:39.]

**“eagerly waiting for *our* adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”** The Church Epistles teach that we have already been adopted into God’s family (Rom. 8:15, Eph. 1:5), so why would Romans 8:23 say we are waiting for our adoption? The answer is that what we have now is a promise of our adoption. We are God’s children, but we are not yet in full possession of all the things that are promised us as God’s children, such as new bodies that are like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21), or having rewards in Christ’s kingdom based on our service to God.

What we have now is the “hope” of an adoption that will be fully realized in the future. That is why Romans 8:23 is followed immediately by Romans 8:24: “...we are also groaning within ourselves, eagerly waiting for *our* adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24For in hope *of this* we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he *already* sees?” We believed in Christ and we were “in hope” of our future adoption, and thus the text can say, “in hope *of this [adoption]* we were saved.”

[For more on adoption, see commentary on Eph. 1:5.]

Rom 8:24

**“saved.”** The Greek word “saved” is *sōzō* (#4982 σώζω), which has a broad range of meaning but in this context means saved from death and thus given everlasting life. It is in the aorist tense, indicating the one-time action in the past that then gave us the hope.[[141]](#footnote-27040) “Hope” is in the dative case and has the definite article. It is not the dative of means, for we were not saved by hope, we were saved by trusting in God. The entire context of the chapter is pointing to the future, when the world, which was “subjected to frustration…because of the one [the Devil] who subjected it” (Rom. 8:20), is “freed from its slavery to corruption” (Rom. 8:21). Even Christians, “who have the firstfruits of the spirit…are also groaning within ourselves, eagerly waiting for *our* adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23). God saved us, not to live in this fallen world, but to live in Paradise.

The key to understanding Romans 8:24 is knowing that we are not “saved” yet. We have a promise of salvation, but we are not actually “saved” yet. However, we were “in hope,” when we believed and were saved. Now we continue to hope for what is promised to us. Our New Birth and down payment of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14) is so strong that the Bible can say we are already saved “in the Hope.” God saved us “in the hope” of a glorious future, when “the whole creation [which] has been groaning together and suffering birth pains” (Rom. 8:22) will be liberated.

When it comes to salvation, the New Testament can be quite confusing for the average reader. That is due to the fact that some verses say we have already been saved (Eph. 2:8), some verses say we are being saved now (1 Cor. 1:18), and some say our salvation is future (Rom. 13:11). The word *sōzō* has a large semantic range and it does not have to refer to the future salvation of the Christian. That range of meaning explains some of the variations in the use of “saved.” However, when it comes to *sōzō* meaning having everlasting life, we must understand the Bible has an idiomatic use of verbs in which a past tense verb is used to indicate the certainty of a future action. If something is absolutely going to happen in the future, the Bible often refers to that as if it had already occurred. A good example of this is Jude 1:14, which in the Greek text says the Lord Jesus “came” with his holy ones. Of course, that has not happened yet, but the fact that it will happen is so certain that God can put it in the past tense. For more information, see commentary on Ephesians 2:6.

**“But hope that is seen is not hope.”** What we “hope” for is future. Christian salvation is a future event, and will happen when Christ comes back. What Christians have now is a promise of future salvation, and we hope for that (1 Thess. 5:8).

**“what he *already* sees.”** This is a Greek idiom where “see” is put for “has” or “have.” We have a similar idiom in English and say, “Let me see it,” when we mean, “Let me have it.” Cf. NIV: “Who hopes for what they already have?”

Rom 8:26

**“In the same way.”** In the same way as what? This explains what the “groans” are. The creation groans (Rom. 8:22), we groan (Rom. 8:23) and in the same way, the Spirit, Jesus groans. Nothing in God’s creation is free from the horrific consequences of sin. As our fellow brother, and as one who loves God’s creation, Jesus groans too. This is a case where the orthodox belief in the Trinity and that God is unchanging and all-controlling causes the verse to be misunderstood. For example, Lenski wrongly writes, “…the Holy Spirit does not and cannot groan….” The truth is that God can groan, and has a myriad of other emotions as well. So does Jesus. Like Hebrews, which says that Jesus is touched with the feelings of our infirmity (Heb. 4:15), this verse tells us that Jesus, like the rest of creation, is groaning in distress about what is happening in God’s creation.

**“the Spirit”** in this verse is Jesus, just as he is “the Spirit” who speaks in Revelation 2. When Jesus was resurrected, his body was still flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), but it was spiritually empowered. 1 Corinthians 15:44-46 says Jesus was raised “a spiritual body.” When he first appeared to his disciples, they thought he was a spirit (*pneuma*), an incorporeal being (Luke 24:37). But Jesus told them he was not a spirit or spirit body, and had them touch his body to feel his flesh. However, because Jesus’ new body is spiritually empowered, the New Testament refers to Jesus as “the Spirit” in many different places. These include Acts 2:4; 10:19; Romans 8:16, 26, 27; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17. (see commentaries on Rev. 2:7 and 1 Cor. 15:44).[[142]](#footnote-32150) Also, the people of Rome would have known that Jesus Christ was called “the Spirit” because he is in 2 Corinthians 3, and Romans was likely penned about a year and a half later. The brisk traffic between Corinth and Rome likely ensured that the believers of Rome had read Corinthians.

Here in Romans 8, the word “Spirit” is not referring to the gift of holy spirit. The gift of holy spirit that is born inside Christians does not have a mind as this “Spirit” does (Rom. 8:27). Neither does our holy spirit intercede for us, as if it had a mind of its own. The one the New Testament says intercedes for us is Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:25). While it is true that we pray for others via our holy spirit, that is not what this verse is saying.

Those who say that the “Spirit” in this verse is the gift of holy spirit usually also say that the groans mentioned in the verse are speaking in tongues. However, it is the Christian who speaks in tongues, not the gift of holy spirit, but this verse clearly says that it is the “Spirit” that groans. The context makes it clear that the world is groaning (Rom. 8:22), we are groaning (Rom. 8:23) and Jesus, who loves us, is groaning. Even today Jesus is feeling the awful effects of the fallen world, and he groans because of the fallen and painful state of the world and of the pain and groaning of his Body, the Church.

**“joins in to help.”** The word *sunantilambanomai* (συναντιλαμβάνομαι) means, to ‘take part with,’ generally, to come to the aid of, be of assistance to, *help*.[[143]](#footnote-26630) The prefix “*sun*” means “together with.” The Spirit, Jesus, “helps” us, but he does not do it all. We also must pray if we are going to have God’s power fully manifested in our lives.

**“intercedes for *us.*”** The Greek verb is in the present tense, active voice, indicating Jesus’ ongoing prayer for us. Jesus prays for us to the Father now, just as he did when he was training his apostles on earth (Luke 22:32). Although the Greek uses the word *huperentugchanō* (#5241 ὑπερεντυγχάνω), which has the prefix *huper*, in this case it does not mean “super-intercedes, but rather is an intensifier.”[[144]](#footnote-22436)

**“along with groaning”** Jesus prays for us, and he also groans about the fallen state of the world (there is no separate word for “with” in the phrase, “with groaning,” groaning is in the dative case). This verse is not saying that Jesus prays “with groans,” i.e., that he prays by using groans. That misses the point and the context. The verse is saying that Jesus is praying and groaning at the same time. This often happens to any Christian that truly feels the pain of those he or she is praying for. The world groans, we groan, and Jesus groans, all of us groaning because of the fallen state of the world.

**“that cannot be expressed in words.”***Friberg’s Lexicon* has a clear definition of the Greek word: “of something that arouses such strong emotions one cannot find words to speak of it.”[[145]](#footnote-26366) This definition is reflected in many modern translations. The groans over the ruined and enslaved state of creation are too deep to express in words.

The “groans too deep for words” are not speaking in tongues in this verse any more than the groans in Rom. 8:22-23 are speaking in tongues. Besides, if it were speaking in tongues, the verse would be saying that Jesus makes intercession for us by speaking in tongues, but there is no reason to think that is how Jesus prays to the Father.

Rom 8:27

**“And He who searches our hearts knows what is the mind of the spirit, because it makes intercession for the holy ones according to *the will of* God.”** It is important that we understand who this verse is speaking about, so we have clarified that in brackets in this commentary. “And he [God] who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit [Jesus], because he [Jesus] makes intercession for the holy ones [Christians] according to *the will of* God.”

**“The Spirit.”** The gift of holy spirit has no “mind,” so from this and from the context the evidence is that “the Spirit” is Jesus (see commentaries on Rom. 8:26 and Rev. 2:7).

The one who searches the hearts is God (cf. 1 Chron. 28:9, Ps. 7:9; 139:23; Jer. 17:10). Although Jesus is also said to search the heart (cf. Rev. 2:23), historically, the great “Searcher of hearts” was God, which also fits in the flow of the verse. The “mind of the Spirit” does not refer to the “spiritual mind” of a Christian, but rather the mind of Jesus Christ, who is the one who makes intercession for us (Heb. 7:25).

**“according to *the will of* God.”** Jesus always does the will of God. He did while he was alive on earth, and he continues to do so.

Rom 8:28

**“in all things God works for the good of those who love him**.” This verse shows us that no matter how difficult a situation is, God is always trying to do His best for His people. However, historically, this verse has been used to teach that every situation, no matter how terrible, will turn out “good” if a person loves God. A major reason for that is the way Romans 8:28 has been translated in many versions, such as the KJV and ESV.

Grammatically, the Greek text can be translated in two different ways, with two completely different meanings. In the Greek, the phrase “all things” can be nominative (the subject) or accusative (the direct object, or used adverbially). If it is nominative, then the verse should be translated as it is in many versions, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God…” (KJV). This particular translation has a lot of defenders. That is in part because, since the time of Augustine (AD 354-430), the majority of the Christian theologians have been Augustinian/Roman Catholic/Calvinist/Reformed or of that theological persuasion. They believe that everything that happens, good or bad, is God’s will, and they translate the Greek in a way that supports that belief. R.C. H. Lenski provides a good example. When it comes to the “all things” of this verse, he comments: “all of them without exception operate together to produce ‘good’ in the sense of what is beneficial for God’s lovers. This includes every kind of painful experience in Christian lives,…”[[146]](#footnote-27652)

The problem with this interpretation is that it seems very clear from both the Bible and life itself that everything does not work for good for those who love God. In fact, everything does not even work for good for God Himself. God wants everyone to be saved, but they will not all be; He wants people to come to a knowledge of the truth, but they all do not; He wants people to obey and love Him, but they do not. So if all things do not work together for good for God Himself, how can all things work together for God’s people? The simple fact is that all things do not work together for good just because a person loves God. Many evil things happen to those who love God. The earth is a war zone, with the forces of good fighting the forces of evil. Sometimes the Devil can hinder God’s purposes. This point is discussed at length in *Don’t Blame God*.[[147]](#footnote-12044)

As was stated above, instead of being in the nominative case, “all things” can be accusative. If that is so, it can either be the direct object (“he works all things”) or it could be understood as being adverbial (thus, “he works in everything”). Of those two choices, the adverbial use best fits the scope of Scripture: not everything that happens is God’s will, but in everything that happens God is working for the good of those who love Him. F. F. Bruce prefers the adverbial,[[148]](#footnote-30149) as do a number of English translations (New English Bible, NIV, REV, and RSV; cf. Moffatt’s translation and *Aramaic Peshitta New Testament Translation*[[149]](#footnote-22383)).

There is every reason to believe that God works for the good of His people in every situation. That is in accordance with His nature, and also with the fact that He is not in control of all things. God cannot make everything good, but in every situation, He can work for the good of those who love Him. It needs to be stated that F. F. Bruce has pointed out a possible interpretation that, while long known about, does not get much attention in commentaries or versions (although the NEB is an exception). In this interpretation, the subject of “works together” (which is one word in the Greek) is “the Spirit” from the previous clause. Since the original text had no punctuation or breaks between sentences, the last phrase of Rom. 8:27 and the first part of Rom. 8:28 could be together, and the verse would read, “And he who searches the hearts [God] knows what is the mind of the Spirit [Jesus Christ], because he [Jesus] makes intercession for the holy ones according to *the will of* God. Now we know that in everything, he [the Spirit—Jesus Christ] cooperates for good with those who love God….” This translation very accurately represents the meaning of the word *sunergeō* (#4903 συνεργέω), which means “to engage in cooperative endeavor, work together with, assist, help.”[[150]](#footnote-14393)

There are some theologians who believe the translation “all things work together for good” is correct, yet realize how clear it is that, indeed, all things do not work together for good for those who love God. Thus, they suggest that the phrase “all things” is using “all” in its limited sense and refers to less than “all” things. However, as we will see, this weakens the statement so much it becomes almost pointless. Certainly, there are times when “all” can mean “some.” This happens in two ways. The first way is by seeing “all” as a synecdoche of the whole for the part,[[151]](#footnote-27559) and the second way is that the context of the verse limits the meaning of all to the “all” in the context, or “some” overall. The problem with “all things” being a synecdoche is that there is nothing in the context that demands it, and no apparent reason for the figure of speech. Usually, when “all” is used for the greater part (i.e., “most things”), the synecdoche is obvious, and the greater part can justify the use of “all.” That does not seem to be the case here. In the lives of many Christians, especially in the early years of the Church in the Roman Empire, it is likely that very many things did not work out for the good of the Christian. The same problem exists when we try to make “all” mean “some” by the context. It just does not seem to be reasonable here. The context of Rom. 8:28 is the fallen world, and that the entire world is subject to the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:21). This bondage is so widespread the whole world is groaning in pain (Rom. 8:22), we groan in pain (Rom. 8:23) and even Jesus, the Spirit, groans in pain (Rom. 8:26). The groaning in this context is worldwide and seems to cover the creation itself, so there is no reason to conclude that “all” is being limited here to “some” or even “most” in this section.

It seems clear that if the “all” in Rom. 8:28 actually means “some,” then the verse is saying that “some” things work together for good for those who love God, which is not really saying anything at all. After all, it is obvious that “some” things work together for good, but that is not helpful in the difficult situation in Romans 8. When people are groaning in pain (Rom. 8:23), it is not helpful to try to cheer them up by saying “Not everything is wrong, some things are good.” If a child is in pain with a stomach ache, it does not really help to say that “some” things on the child’s body do not hurt.

The truth is that the earth is a war zone, God is a warrior (Exod. 15:3), and the battle is raging between God and the Devil. In this war, people are experiencing great evil and harm. The comfort of the Word is that no matter what we are going through, we can be sure of this: God is working for the good of those who love Him.

[For more on the earth being a war zone and there being an ongoing war between God and the Devil, and the Devil being responsible for the evil in the world, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“the called ones.”** The Greek word translated “called ones” is *klētos* (#2822 κλητός, pronounced clay-'toss), and it means “called.” In this sentence, “called” is an adjective used as a noun, which grammatically is referred to as a “substantive.” Furthermore, *klētos* is referred to as a “verbal” because even though it is an adjective, it always implies an action; it is impossible to “call” or “be called” without an action having taken place.

[For more on substantives, see commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

Although most English versions translate *klētos* as a verb, that is not accurate. In the New Testament Epistles, the substantive *klētos* refers, not to those who have only been called, but to those who have accepted the call. Thus, it could actually be loosely translated, “the ones who have accepted the call.” R. C. H. Lenski writes:

“[“called”]…it is a designation like *agioi* [holy *ones*], *pistoi* [faithful *ones*] (these two occur in that order in Eph. 1:1), *agapētoi* [beloved *ones*], *eklektoi* [chosen ones], etc. We have already noted that, while in Matt. 20:16 [in some ancient manuscripts]; Matt. 22:14, *klētoi* is used with reference to those who simply hear God’s gospel call irrespective of whether they accept it or not, in the epistles the term is used in the pregnant sense and includes the acceptance; compare 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Pet. 2:9.”[[152]](#footnote-14502)

Lenski uses the phrase “pregnant sense” to refer to the fact that the call is no longer just an invitation, it has “conceived” and been accepted: the person has accepted the call and become saved. Meyer concurs with Lenski, and writes: “Therefore, when Paul terms the Christians *klētoi*, it is self-evident that in their case the call has met *with success* (1 Cor. 1:24)….”[[153]](#footnote-16726) Albert Barnes writes:

“The word (*klētos*) is sometimes used to denote an external invitation, offer, or calling; Matt. 20:16 [in some ancient manuscripts]; Matt. 22:14. But excepting in these places, it is used in the New Testament to denote those who had *accepted* the call, and were true Christians; Rom. 1:6, 7; 1 Cor. 1:2, 24; Rev. 17:14. It is evidently used in this sense here—to denote those who were true Christians. The connection as well as the usual meaning of the word, requires us thus to understand it.”[[154]](#footnote-11916)

Richard Bauckham correctly identifies the phrase “the called” as “a technical term for Christians,” which it is.[[155]](#footnote-14265) It is important for us to understand why, since the word “called” is effectively the noun “called ones,” and that almost every major version of the Bible translates it as a verb: “those who are called.” The reason is Calvinistic theology and the belief that God only calls those people whom He wants to be saved, and everyone that He calls will answer and get saved (the doctrine of irresistible grace). Thus, to many translators, since the “call” is irresistible, there is effectively no difference between the call and the “called ones” who accept the call: they are the same. The “call” is the guarantee that the call will be accepted; so not only does every “called one” get saved, but only the “called ones” get saved.

We wholeheartedly disagree with that Calvinist viewpoint. We believe that God actually wants “all people to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4) and has therefore called, or invited, everyone. However, not everyone chooses to answer the call and be saved. So in the New Testament Epistles, when “the called ones” refers to those people who have accepted God’s call and become saved, we should be aware that the “called ones” are saved because they made the free will decision to answer God’s call and get saved. Romans 8:28 is an encouraging verse for every Christian: we have accepted God’s call, and God is at work on our behalf in every situation we face.

[For more on “called,” see commentary on Rom. 1:1.]

Rom 8:29

**“foreknew.”** Here in Romans 8:29, the Bible is saying that God planned ahead of time that those people whom He loved and loved Him back and believed in and obeyed Him would be conformed to the image of His Son. The Greek word is *proginōskō* (#4267 προγινώσκω) and it literally means “to know beforehand,” but it was also used idiomatically. We know that “foreknow” is being used in an idiomatic way in this verse just by reading it. If God has perfect foreknowledge, as is commonly taught, then He “foreknew” everyone, and since “those He foreknew” He predestined to be saved, that would mean that every person is going to be saved. But that is clearly not the teaching of Scripture, so what is the verse saying?

The idea of “knowledge of someone” is often used idiomatically to mean love and special attention. In fact, “foreknew” is being used in an idiomatic or pregnant way a few chapters later, in Romans 11:2, which says, “God did not reject his people [the Jews] whom he foreknew.” This verse is not saying that God simply knew about the Jews ahead of time. It is saying God “loved” or “paid special attention to” the Jews.

[For more information on words being used with an idiomatic or pregnant sense, see commentary on Luke 23:42, “remember me.”]

**“decided in advance.”** The Greek word is *proorizō* (#4309 προορίζω). The basic meaning of the word is to “decide upon beforehand,” or to decide in advance. Bratcher and Nida have, “having decided ahead of time.”[[156]](#footnote-31907) Ages ago God decided that the people He loved and who had responded to His love would be conformed to the image of His Son. These were the people who responded to His call.

[For more information on “decided in advance,” see commentaries on Eph. 1:5 and 1 Cor. 2:7. For more information on Calvinism and Predestination, see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

**“so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”** This phrase can be confusing because it can be read as if the emphasis is on “firstborn.” God did not foreknow and mark out believers so that Jesus could be the “firstborn.” Jesus was the “firstborn” because he was the first to get up from the dead. The emphasis of the phrase is “among many brothers *and sisters*.” God foreknew and marked out people to be conformed to the image of His Son so there would be “many brothers,” many believers. If people did not believe, Christ would have been raised from the dead, but not many others would be, so Christ would have been the firstborn, but only among “a few brothers.” Thankfully, God acted in such a way that Christ will be the firstborn among many people.

Rom 8:30

**“and those whom he decided in advance.”** This verse contains the figure of speech, “climax,” although it actually begins in Romans 8:29. “Those he foreknew…he decided in advance…those he decided in advance…he called. Those he called…he declared righteous. Those he declared righteous…he glorified. Reading the verse is like climbing a set of stairs, each step getting higher until the climax, that we are glorified.”[[157]](#footnote-10347) For “decided in advance,” see commentary on Romans 8:29.

**“called.”** This is the idiomatic sense of “called,” which refers to the person not just being called, but accepting the call. We know that this is the pregnant sense of “called,” and not just that “called” means “invited,” because God has invited everyone, but not everyone will be declared righteous and glorified. Only those people who have accepted the call will be saved. See commentary on Romans 8:28.

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter (see commentary on Rom. 3:20).

**“glorified.”** We have not been glorified yet in the sense in which it is meant in this verse, that we will have new, glorious bodies and will live with Christ forever. This is an example of the prophetic perfect idiom. That is true even though the verb “glorified” is in the aorist tense, not the perfect tense, because the basic meaning of the prophetic perfect idiom is the same whether the Greek verb is in the aorist or perfect tense. The idiom means that we will be glorified in the future.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Romans 8:29-30 is one of the wonderful sections of Scripture that shows that when a Christian is saved (“born again”), their salvation is never in doubt—they will live forever with Christ. It says that the people who accepted God’s call were declared righteous by God, and because they are declared righteous they will live forever with the Lord, and so in God’s eyes, they are already glorified. Christians can never lose their salvation and become unsaved. If that were possible, then in God’s eyes we would not already be glorified because our future glorification would be in doubt.

Christians became saved as a one-time event when we confessed Christ as Lord and believed God raised him from the dead, and when we did that the Bible promised that we “will be saved” (see commentary on Rom. 10:9). When we confessed and believed, we were immediately “born again” of God’s holy spirit and with “incorruptible seed” (1 Pet. 1:23). We became children of God (1 John 3:1-2) with a new, holy nature (2 Pet. 1:4) that was created in us, making us “new creations” (2 Cor. 5:17). We also instantly became part of “the Body of Christ” (Eph. 1:22-23), and as such we were spiritually unified with Christ and thus we were circumcised with him, baptized with him, crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, raised from the dead with him, and now in God’s eyes we are seated in heaven with Christ (Rom. 6:1-10; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:10-13). We were sealed with holy spirit until our future redemption (Eph. 1:13-14), and we were “guaranteed” a future inheritance (Eph. 1:14). Furthermore, as Romans 8:30 says, in God’s eyes we are already glorified. Our salvation is so secure that we can say we “know” that we will be like Christ in the future (1 John 3:2).

[For more information on the New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3, “new birth.” For more information on salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

Rom 8:32

**“for us all.”** From the Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ). See commentary on Romans 5:6, “in place of the ungodly…in place of…in our place.”

**“also.”** The Greek word is *sun* (#4862 σύν, pronounced “soon”). Although it usually means “with” or “along with,” in some contexts, it is better understood as “in addition to” (“also”) and that is the case here.[[158]](#footnote-13455) This verse is very important for our faith in God. Many people realize that God gave Jesus Christ so they could live forever, but then act as if God will not give them anything else and even withholds His blessings from them. This verse shatters that concept. How could it be that God, who gave His only Son, will not in addition to the gift of Christ, also give us everything else we need?

Rom 8:33

**“Who can bring a charge against.”** The word “charge” here in Romans 8:33 is the Greek verb *egkaleō* (#1458 ἐγκαλέω), and it means to bring a charge in a court of law, before a judge. The verb *egkaleō* is in the future tense in the Greek, which points to the Day of Judgment in the future. However, although the future Day of Judgment is a primary meaning in the verse, the scope of Scripture and experiences in life show us that even now demons and people bring charges against God’s chosen. But it can be seen from the context and scope of Scripture that the phrase, “Who will bring a charge against God’s chosen” is not a question meant to elicit a list of names of those who have issues with God’s people, although they are certainly many, rather it is a rhetorical question meant to emphasize the answer: that God is the Judge and He is the One who has already passed judgment on His chosen and declared them righteous. Thus, the meaning of the rhetorical question is more like, “Who can *successfully* bring a charge against God’s chosen?” The answer is “No one. God is the Judge, and He has declared them righteous.” In the words of R. C. H. Lenski, “No one will ever be successfully against us, will ever successfully accuse us.”[[159]](#footnote-30684)

Romans 8:33 itself shows the futility of bringing charges against God’s people because the very sentence that mentions bringing a charge also says the accused are “God’s chosen.” In the Church Epistles, the “chosen” are the ones who responded to God’s call, and thus are God’s chosen because they chose Him. Furthermore, they are not only God’s chosen ones, in God’s eyes they have already been judged righteous and are even already glorified (Rom. 8:30). The believer’s salvation is not in doubt—in fact, they are already glorified and seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6). As Romans 8:31 had stated two verses earlier, “If God is for us, who *can be* against us?”

Rom 8:34

**“Who is the one who condemns us?”** Like Romans 8:33, the question here in Romans 8:34 is a rhetorical question and is to be understood as, “Who is the one who will *successfully* condemn?” While demons and some people might try to condemn believers, they can only give their personal opinion; they have no power to actually condemn anyone. No human or demon is the Judge in the actual court of decision, God is, and the only decision that matters is His. Therefore, the answer to the question is “No one,” and the reason for that answer is that Jesus died for people, and furthermore was raised from the dead, was seated at God’s right hand, and now is praying for God’s people. (see commentary on Rom. 8:33).

When a person takes Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9), that person becomes a “born-again” Christian and comes into a spiritual unity with Christ as part of his Body (Eph. 1:22-23)—the person comes “into union” with Christ. As part of the very Body of Christ, the Christian is so totally identified with Christ that the Bible says Christians are circumcised with Christ, baptized with him, crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, raised from the dead with him, and seated in heaven with him (Rom. 6:1-10; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:10-13). That is why Romans 8:1 can say, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in *union with* Christ Jesus.” Thus, Romans 8:34 is restating in a different way what Romans 8:1 already said, no one can condemn the Christian, and God and Christ, who declared the believer righteous, will not condemn them.

The word “condemn” in Romans 8 is referring to being condemned to die. It is not speaking of rewards in the future kingdom, but rather about whether Christians who trust in Christ have everlasting life, and they do. Christians have passed from death to life because of the work of Christ; they will not be condemned to die on the Day of Judgment.

[For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on rewards in the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

**“*from among the dead.*”** The text says only, “who was raised,” but the Greek makes it clear that it is referring to Jesus’ being raised from the dead and not his ascension into heaven, so the phrase “from among the dead” was added for clarity. We see the full phrase in verses such as John 12:1 (referring to Lazarus); Acts 3:15; 4:10; Rom. 6:9; 10:9; and a similar Greek phrase in verses such as Acts 13:30 and Romans 6:4.

Rom 8:35

**“What.”** The Greek is *tis* (#5101 τίς), and it is the opening word in both Rom. 8:33 (“Who can bring…”) and Rom. 8:34 (“Who is the one…”). It is most properly “who” in the Greek because all the nouns in the list, “tribulation, distress, persecution,” etc., are all masculine or feminine nouns. Because the nouns are masculine and feminine, saying “who” in Greek does not seem strange, but it seems very strange and can be confusing in English, which does not assign a gender to nouns. In the Greek text, Paul is making his point about God’s love for us having more impact by the repetition, *tis…tis…tis*, starting Romans 8:33, 34, and 8:35. This works well in Greek but does not make sense in English. We cannot translate the word *tis* as “who” in Romans 8:35 because it would be confusing to the English reader. Tribulation, distress, persecution, and such concepts are not a “who” in English but a “what.” Therefore, translators use “what” in English because it is proper grammar even though the uses of *tis* in Romans 8:33 and 8:34 are translated “who.”

**“love of Christ.”** This is a subjective genitive phrase and means the love Christ has for us.

**“affliction, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or sword.”** This verse should be a great comfort to Christians because the world is a harsh and dangerous place, and many Christians live in very difficult circumstances in which they struggle to trust God. Christians can be assured that nothing external in our world can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Not one created thing has the power to nullify God’s love for us and cancel His promises to us. Our God is faithful, and will faithfully do what He has promised.

Although this verse has often been used to teach that Christians cannot lose their salvation, is that really what the verse is saying?

We must pay careful attention to what the verse does and does not say. Paul lists out six scenarios and says that none of these things can separate the Christian from “the love of Christ” or from being in union with Christ and a part of his Body (Rom. 6:3; Eph. 1:22-23). Neither “affliction, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or sword,” (Rom. 8:35) can separate us from Christ’s love. Yet, notice what is not in this list: disbelief or rejecting Christ. So, Paul is not addressing if one can forfeit their salvation by turning away from God, rather he is addressing if anything external to the believer can cause a believer to lose their salvation. Paul’s rhetorical answer is no, nothing outside of the believer can cause someone to lose their salvation. If a Christian is persecuted, and even killed, did they lose their salvation? No, scripture is clear that every godly Christian will suffer (Acts 14:22; Rom. 8:18; 2 Tim. 3:12), so suffering does not separate a person from Christ. If they go hungry and it seems like God is not providing, does that mean they have lost their salvation? No.

Yet, it is important to recognize that this truth and assurance that nothing external to us can separate us from the love of Christ is affirmed by both parties, those who believe you can forfeit your salvation and those who believe you cannot forfeit your salvation. Therefore, the verse is not really even addressing the primary question of the debate, and should not be used to support either side.

In this entire list of things in Romans 8:35-39 the believer themselves is not mentioned once: affliction, distress, persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger, sword, death, life, angels, rulers, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth, nor any other created thing. Can the believer separate themselves from the love of Christ? This passage does not answer that question, but that is not the point. The entire passage is introduced in verse 31 which says, “What, then are we to say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us” (Rom. 8:31). The rhetorical point Paul is making in this passage is that it does not matter what else in creation is against you, if God is for you, that is all that matters. No one or nothing has the power or strength to separate you from God (Rom. 8:35, 39).

We see this point reiterated, that nothing external can separate us from God’s love in Romans 8:33-34 when it asks, who will bring a charge against God’s chosen ones; who will condemn a Christian? Paul affirms that God is the one who declares all Christians to be righteous. In other words, the Devil or anyone who may attack us or make us feel condemned, really does not have the power to do so (Rom. 8:1, 34). God is the only one who holds that power, and he is going to declare Christians righteous. Therefore, we do not need to worry about any external force or adversary separating us from the love of God.

Paul’s quotation of Psalm 44:22 in Romans 8:36 reiterates this point even further. It says, “For your sake we are being put to death all day long, we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered” (Rom. 8:36). Does this have anything to do with a believer's ability to reject Christ? No. It is about how God’s people suffer persecution external to them. Yet, God and Jesus will not allow anything to separate them from us. Surely that is why in all those horrible circumstances “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

Although it is a possibility that in Romans 8:38 when it says, “nor things to come” it is teaching that even rejecting Christ “in the future” would not separate you from God, but this is not explicitly clear. Since the entire passage only lists things external to the believer, it would not be the best exegetical method to understand the phrase “nor things to come” to include “internal things” such as a person’s potential future denial of trust in Christ. Although this could be a possible interpretation, it just does not fit the context as well as understanding the phrase “nor things to come,” to be referring to only unforeseen circumstances or adversaries apart from the believer that may arise in the future.

So, in the end, this passage is consistent in teaching that nothing external in our world can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord. There is not one created thing that has power over God and can nullify His promises to us. And that is what every believer can trust in and be assured of. Our God is faithful, and will faithfully do what He has promised.

[For more information on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on our New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3. For more on our new divine nature, see commentary on 2 Pet. 1:4.]

Rom 8:36

**“sheep to be slaughtered.”** Literally, “sheep of slaughter.” A genitive of relation. The translation “sheep to be slaughtered” captures the meaning.

Rom 8:37

**“No.”** The Greek word *alla*, (“but”) is occasionally used as an adversative, “no.” This is the case here. The commentators are divided between those who see this as a “no,” and those who see it as a “but.” If you see it as a “but,” you are saying that we are considered sheep, “but” we conquer in our adversities. There is a problem with that. People in the OT could conquer in adversities too. So then, why the “but?”

In actuality there is a clean break between the Old Testament, in which a person could lose his salvation, and the Christian Church, when a born-again Christian cannot lose their salvation. This is what is being conveyed here. The idea brought from Romans 8:35 is “Who will separate us from the love of Christ.” Then there is a list of difficulties and hardships that have caused people to turn from God. The people of God even thought God would stand against them and consider them sheep to be slaughtered. That idea, and the idea that any Christian can be separated from salvation and the love of Christ, is shattered with a resounding “No!” Unlike what has been in the past Administrations, nothing will separate us from Christ’s love. The Christian’s salvation is secure. Some have said, “But the Christian can renounce his love for God and then lose his salvation.” That is clearly not what these verses say. They teach that “nothing” shall be able to separate a saved person from God. When a person is saved, his very nature is changed. He becomes a “new creation.” No person can undo that by a simple act of the will.

[For more information on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on our New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3. For more on our new divine nature, see commentary on 2 Pet. 1:4.]

Rom 8:38

**“am convinced.”** The Greek is *peithō* (#3982 πείθω, pronounced pay-thō), and it means “to be persuaded” or “convinced.” The verb is in the perfect tense, which normally would be translated as a past tense, but in this case, the perfect tense has the sense of the present. It is an action that started in the past but is still true in the present, so “am convinced” is the best translation. If we say, “I have been convinced,” it could mean in English that Paul was convinced in the past, but may not be at this present time, which is certainly not the case.

Although many versions read “am convinced” (NASB, NET, NIV, NRSV), “being convinced” is the end result of allowing oneself to be persuaded. It is important to recognize that each of us must allow himself to be persuaded by God. It is not simply the fact that the evidence is there that persuades a person and convinces them. Jesus Christ did miracles that convinced some people but not others, but the miracles (evidence) were the same. The Egyptians saw the miracles that God did in Egypt, and some of them believed and even followed the Israelites out of Egypt (Exod. 12:38), while others, including Pharaoh, would not allow themselves to be persuaded by those same miracles. If the evidence does not convince people, what allows them to be persuaded? It all starts in the soil of the heart, and an honest person constantly seeks for truth, and holds that in the highest esteem. Then, if there is evidence that something he believes or is doing is not actually correct, he will leave his old ways behind and change. No wonder God exhorts us all to examine ourselves.

Rom 8:39

**“the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** The fullness of God’s love is “in” Christ Jesus. In this case, “in” expresses a fullness and connection that one must ponder to grasp. Romans 5:5 and 5:8 speak of the love of God, while Romans 8:35 speaks of the love of Christ. This is the love of God that is “in Christ.” It is in Christ in the sense that it is connected in every way with Christ. The true love of God for mankind is expressed in Christ. It is impossible to fully grasp the love of God without grasping what God did in, and in connection with, Jesus Christ. The word “in” means “in connection with” Christ (see commentary on Rom. 3:24), but in this context it also means more than just that, for God worked “in” Christ to manifest His love to the world. In Romans 5:5 we see the love of God, in Romans 8:35 we see the love of Jesus Christ, and now here in Romans 8:39, we see that the love of God is expressed in and through Jesus Christ. God is the great fountain and source of love, and as well as coming directly from Him, it also flows freely through Jesus Christ.

**Romans Chapter 9**

Rom 9:1

Romans chapters 9-11 are considered the most difficult in the book of Romans. However, they do not lose sight of the central theme of Romans. For example, there are a dozen or so references to righteousness in just these three chapters, and the statement that Christ is the fulfillment of the Law for everyone who believes is in the heart of the section (Rom. 10:4). These three chapters are the castle of Calvinism in the sense that without them, Calvinism and the idea of predestination do not have a powerful central presentation. And yet these chapters are misunderstood by Calvinists and indeed, by most other Christians. Part of the reason for that is they represent the “perfect storm” of what it takes to make something difficult to interpret: biblical idioms that must be understood and articulated; Old Testament references that must be understood both as to time and meaning of the original statement; Old Testament characters that must be understood; words that are difficult to translate; and arguments that interweave and can be hard to follow.

**“in *connection with* Christ.”** Paul is speaking the truth “in Christ,” i.e., in his connection with Jesus Christ.

[For more on “in Christ” meaning “in connection with” Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:3 and Eph. 1:3.]

**“in *connection with* the holy spirit.”** Paul’s conscience (and love) toward the Jews had been built throughout his childhood and was in agreement with what the Lord would communicate to him via the gift of holy spirit. He hurt for the Jews, even as badly as he had been treated by them. In fact, one speaking offhand might think that Paul would be hardened toward the Jews by the mistreatment he had received from them, but his heart was soft toward them.

**“holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Rom 9:2

**“grief.”** The Greek word *odunē* (ὀδύνη #3601) can mean “pain, grief, distress.”[[160]](#footnote-28174) Paul is experiencing “sorrow” and emotional distress, which is pain in his heart. Thus, the idea of “grief” seems to be the best connotation to describe that. Cf. 1 Tim. 6:10.

Rom 9:3

**“Indeed.”** The Greek is *gar* (#1063 γάρ), and is usually translated “for” and understood to communicate a reason for something. However, that use of *gar* does not fit this verse, because Paul does not have continual sorrow in his heart for Israel “because” he could wish that he could be accursed in place of them. Rather, this is what some scholars refer to as the “confirmatory gar” which confirms and clarifies what has already been stated. See commentaries on Mark 11:13; Galatians 5:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; James 1:7.

**“could wish.”** The Greek is *euchomai* (#2172 εὔχομαι), a verb, and the noun related to it, *euchē* (#2171 εὐχή), means prayer in the general sense. The verb *euchomai* is used 7 times, and the noun *euchē* 3 times. The semantic range of these words includes both prayer to God and prayer in the general sense, and it can include the idea of wishing, i.e., to wish. The noun *euchē* can also mean a vow, and of its three uses, twice it is used to mean vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23) and once to mean prayer (James 5:15). Here in Romans 9:3 *euchomai* more clearly means “wish,” although the idea of prayer is not totally excluded, simply because we sometimes pray for things we wish for.

It is important to realize that here in Romans 9:3, the word *euchomai* is in the imperfect tense, which can be used as a tendential imperfect. This usage indicates an attempt that was “almost desired to be made,”[[161]](#footnote-21883) which in this case would be translated as “could wish.” This is the most likely use here because neither the typical imperfect “I was wishing” nor the normal past tense “I wished” fits this context. Paul did not actually wish to be accursed, but is saying that hypothetically, if he could and if it would save them, then he would be accursed. Paul “could wish” to be accursed in place of his people, but he knows that is not possible, and so he does not actually ask God for that. The “could wish” expresses the willing condition of the heart, not something that is actually available to do. God gives each person free will, and people make their own choices. God honors those choices, and so must we, even when the bad choices others make cause us much pain. Christ died for everyone, and anyone who wants to can be saved through Christ. If people decide on death rather than life (cf. Deut. 30:19), although we may have great pain and may even get to the point that we “could wish” to die in the place of others, we do not act on our wish.

**“were.”** “Were” is both the singular and plural past subjunctive, and since it is controlled by “could wish,” “were” makes sense, which is why almost all versions use it. (Here, the imperfect verb is used to show the impossibility of this wish being fulfilled, and also to note the fact that Paul did not actually wish that he would be accursed for Israel.)[[162]](#footnote-12798) Perhaps a more literal translation would follow Young’s Literal, and say, “For I could wish, I myself, to be accursed….” However, that makes it seem like Paul was not clearly wishing that he would be accursed, but rather that he was emphasizing that he himself was the one doing the wishing.

**“in place of.”** The Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ) is typical of prepositions in that it has many different meanings and nuances, which are determined by the context. In this case, it means “in place of” or “instead of.” Wallace concurs that in Romans 9:3 *huper* “is used in a substitutionary sense.”[[163]](#footnote-31526) Paul, in a fashion similar to Moses many years before him (Exod. 32:32), would trade places with his people if he could. This is not boasting or wishful thinking on Paul’s part, or Moses’ part. These great men of God had intense passion and love for their people, and that gave them the strength and vision to endure and go forward day after day. If anything, this verse shows us that it is possible to love others more than we love ourselves, and we can give our lives in service to others. The ultimate expression of being accursed “in place of others” is the Lord Jesus Christ, who did in fact love us so much that he took our place. He became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13) and died in our place. Ministers must draw strength from God and from their love for people. If they do not, the daily fight will eventually become too much, and they will become embittered, quit, or do both. While the work of the Lord can be fun at times, it is a daily fight due to the spiritual battle and to human nature. We must love in order to endure.

**“fellow Jews.”** The Greek word is *sungenēs* (#4773 συγγενής), and in the New Testament it is only used to either refer to a relative or, in a wider sense, to someone who is of the same ethnicity. It is used 11 times in the NT, and only occurs in the Four Gospels, Acts, and Romans. In the Gospels and Acts, it is used in the literal sense of a blood relative. In contrast, the four times it is used in Romans all are in the wider sense of the word and refer to those who are fellow Jews along with Paul.

Rom 9:4

**“adoption.”** The initial recipients of God’s grace were the Israelites. The word “adoption” refers to, and in the culture can mean, “sonship.” The nation of Israel was the original “son” of God (Exod. 4:22-23; Hos. 11:1).

**“the glory.”** God’s glory was with Israel even when they were disobedient in the wilderness after coming out of Egypt, and it filled the Tabernacle and then the Temple (Exod. 24:16-17; 40:34-35; Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10; 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chron. 5:14).

**“the covenants.”** The word “covenants” is plural. The covenants that favored Israel included the covenants that God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give Israel the Promised Land, and what is commonly called “the Old Covenant” that God made with Israel on Mount Sinai (Exod. 24).

**“the *Temple* service *to God*.”** The Tabernacle and the Temple, the “houses” where God lived on earth were entrusted to Israel and they were responsible for offering the sacrifices and offerings in worship of Him. God could be worshiped by Gentiles, but not in the direct and intimate way that God chose Israel to worship Him. The priests and Levites in Israel took care of the Tabernacle, then the Temple, and offered the sacrifices and offerings that He required. Given that there is only one true God and that He chose Israel to worship Him according to His commands, that was a tremendous privilege and responsibility.

Rom 9:5

**“the Fathers.”** Here the word “Fathers” is being used in the specific sense of the rootstock of Israel, mainly Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. Exod. 3:15; Acts 7:32). That is the reason that some versions nuance the text to “Patriarchs” (CJB, ESV, NAB, NET, NIV), but given the several different ways that “fathers” is used in the text, it is likely best to learn the different uses; the readers of the original Greek certainly had to do that.

**“according to the flesh.”** This is a simple statement of fact, showing Christ was a true descendant of the patriarchs. It is the same phrase Paul uses two verses earlier to describe his genetic relationship to the Jews: “My brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3). The Jews were Paul’s kinsmen “according to the flesh,” as opposed to his Christian brothers in the spirit.[[164]](#footnote-10466) Likewise, Christ came “from” (*ek*) the patriarchs according to the flesh—that is, as a direct human descendant through his mother Mary—but ultimately was “born from (*ek*) the holy spirit” (Matt. 1:20: γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου). Hence, Paul here is focusing on Christ’s physical line from Abraham, given to him by his mother, rather than his fathering by God.

**“(God, who is over all, be blessed forever. Amen.).”** This last phrase in Romans 9:5 can grammatically be, and has been, translated in two primary ways:

“Christ. God who is above all be blessed forever.” (CEV, ASV, ERV, Good News Translation, Webster’s)

or

“Christ, who is God above all be blessed forever.” (NIV, ESV, NASB, CSB, NET)

Now, as you can see, the issue is whether the word “Christ” goes with what comes before and finishes a sentence, or whether “Christ” is intended to go with what comes after, and essentially, Christ would be directly called “God.”

There are quite a few reasons why the first translation option is preferable, in other words, that this verse is not intending to call Jesus God.

Firstly, Paul is extremely consistent in differentiating between God and Jesus in his letters. He clearly sees them as two different “persons.” In every single one of Paul’s opening greetings in his letters he makes a distinction between God and Jesus saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” (Rom. 1:7) and “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:3, cf. Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; etc.). So, if Paul meant to call Jesus God in Romans 9:5, that would be quite uncharacteristic and create confusion. In Pauline literature, these are two distinct characters.

It would be as if a novel writer had two different characters, Steve and Rob, but then in one place it seems as if Steve may be the same person as Rob. Would it be wise to immediately conclude that Steve and Rob are the same person? No. A good reader takes the whole book and context into account, not one difficult passage. The same interpretive strategy is true when reading the Bible. One unclear verse should not be the guiding force which completely transforms our understanding of the more clear and consistent patterns in scripture. This is a significant reason why the first translation is preferable.

Secondly, the expression “Be blessed,” *eulogētos* (#2128 εὐλογητὸς), is only used of God (the Father) throughout Paul’s letters, it is never used of Jesus (Rom. 1:25; 2 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 11:31). Therefore, again, it would be uncharacteristic of Paul to apply this phrase to Jesus here in Romans 9:5.

Thirdly, the phrase “above all” (*epi pantōn*, ἐπὶ πάντων) is used of God in Ephesians 4:6, “one God and Father of all, who is over all (*epi pantōn*)...” but is never used of Jesus in this universal kind of way. For all of these reasons, the biblical evidence strongly supports the first translation option. Thus, Paul is not calling Jesus God in Romans 9:5.

So, what is the point of this parenthetical statement by Paul? It is a separate doxology to God, praising Him for all the great things He has done. It is a separate addition in this context, but is present because of how great God is. We thought the way the Revised Standard Version translated it hits the mark: “God, who is over all, be blessed forever. Amen.” The parenthesis is the figure of speech parembole—a parenthesis that is thrown in for emphasis but is a complete thought in itself.[[165]](#footnote-31721)

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Rom 9:6

**“the word of God.”** In this context “the word of God” is the message of God that God spoke to Abraham. That did not fail. In its more universal use, the “Word of God” does not fail either.

**“failed.”** It could seem as if the Word of God had failed, because so many Israelites rejected the Messiah. However, we learn that not all “Israel,” (believers) come from “Israel” (the nation). Here we have Israel used two different ways, one to refer to those who have faith in God, and one to refer to the nation of Israel.

**“For not all *who have descended* from Israel are *truly* Israel.”** The meaning of this sentence is that not every Israelite by birth is a part of the true believers of Israel who will be part of the Resurrection of the Righteous and receive everlasting life. A person born an Israelite was not automatically saved, but had to have trust in God to get everlasting life. This is an example of the figure of speech antanaclasis, “word clashing,” where the same word—in this case, “Israel”—is used in close proximity but with different meanings to catch the reader’s attention and emphasize the point.

[For more on antanaclasis, see commentary on 1 Sam. 1:24.]

[Also, see Word Study: “Antanaclasis.”]

Rom 9:7

**“children.”** This is an idiomatic use of the word “children,” and it means “descendants.” Just as “father” can mean more in biblical language than just a biological father, and can also mean “ancestor,” “originator,” “mentor,” etc., so “children” does not mean biological children in this context, but descendant, as “the children of Israel” are the descendants of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel.

Although the Jews thought of themselves very highly just by virtue of the fact they were descendants of Abraham (cf. Matt. 3:9; John 8:39), if they would admit it, Abraham had eight children by three different women, so many other people shared the distinction of being physically “the children of Abraham.”

Rom 9:12

**“The older will serve the younger.”** This prophecy is not about the individual people, Esau and Jacob. The prophecy refers to the countries they fathered, Jacob fathering Israel and Esau fathering the country of Edom. The prophecy is saying that Edom would serve Israel, and actually, ultimately, that people (“Esau”) would serve the Christ (“Jacob”). The prophecy is speaking of the descendants of Esau and Jacob many years after the men themselves lived.

Although most translations of Romans 9:10-12 make the “older” and “younger” out to be the individuals Jacob and Esau, we must be careful not to read that into the text, because neither Romans nor Genesis says that. For example, the HCSB reads, “though her sons had not been born.” The NASB reads, “though *the twins* were not yet born” (cf. NIV). The KJV reads, “the children being not yet born” (cf. NJB). All these translations make the verse to be speaking of the individual children of Rebekah, i.e., Esau and Jacob. But Adam Clarke correctly makes the point that adding a reference to the individual children is unwarranted. He writes:

As the word *children* is not in the text, the word *nations* would be more proper; for it is of *nations* that the apostle speaks, as the following verses show, as well as the history to which he refers.

*Neither having done any good*. To merit the distinction of being made the peculiar people of God; *nor evil*, to deserve to be left out of the covenant, and the distinguishing national blessings which it conferred; that the purpose of God according to election might stand—that such distinctions might appear to depend on nothing but God’s free choice, not *of works*, or any desert in the *people* or *nations* thus chosen; but of the mere purpose *of him who calleth* any people he pleases, to make them the depositories of his especial blessings, and thus to distinguish them from all others.[[166]](#footnote-20458)

When we look at the phrase this verse is quoting from Genesis in its context there, we can see that Clarke is correct even from that standpoint. The prophecy to Rebekah that is recorded in Genesis is not about the two men, Esau and Jacob, but about the nations that would come from them. When Rebekah became pregnant, the twins inside her were so violent she sought Yahweh (the LORD) to find out what was happening. His answer is in Genesis 25:23. “And Yahweh said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from your belly will be divided. One people will be stronger than the other people; and the elder will serve the younger.’”

Reading the prophecy above makes it clear that it is about the “nations” and “peoples” of Israel and Edom, not about Esau and Jacob, who are not even mentioned in the verse. As to the statement, “the older will serve the younger,” the Hebrew text literally reads, “the greater will serve the less.” We can infer that the “greater” means the elder or firstborn, but we do not have to make that about the man Esau being older than Jacob. Edom was formed as a nation before Israel was, and thus the nation of Edom was older than the nation of Israel. Esau had children and became the nation of Edom, while Jacob, though having children, went with those children into Egypt where they were enslaved. Israel did not become a nation until after the Exodus. Even so, eventually, Israel became more powerful than Edom, and then “Esau” served “Jacob,” such as under the reigns of David and Solomon when Edom was subservient to Israel.

As for the individual men Esau and Jacob, Esau never served Jacob. In fact, in the 20 years that Jacob spent in Mesopotamia away from his family (Gen. 31:38, 41), Esau became so rich and powerful that when Jacob tried to give him flocks and herds as a present, he refused them, saying, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself” (Gen. 33:9 NIV). Esau had several wives and many sons (Gen. 36) and became the founder of the country of Edom, south and southeast of Israel (Gen. 36:43). Jacob also had many sons and a daughter, but instead of founding a nation like his brother Esau, which had both people and a land area, he left the Promised Land and went to Egypt, where he eventually died (Gen. 46:5-7; 49:33). The nation of Israel was being formed while the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and they finally were able to move into the Promised Land after Moses died when Joshua conquered Israel.

Rom 9:13

**“As it is written**.**”** Most people are not familiar enough with the Old Testament to realize that the prophecy in Rom. 9:12 was given about 1,700 years before Christ, while the quotation from Malachi in Rom. 9:13 is not another prophecy but rather a proof that the prophecy in verse 12 was true and had been fulfilled at least in part.

**“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”** As in Romans 9:12, “Jacob” and “Esau” do not refer to the individuals, but to the countries they founded. Using the name of an individual instead of the name of the nation he founded is something we see many times in the Bible. In Genesis 9, for example, Noah’s sons Shem and Japheth, and his grandson, Canaan, were the subjects of a prophecy given by Noah. Noah’s prophecy was: “Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem. Canaan will be his servant. God will enlarge Japheth. He will dwell in the tents of Shem” (Gen. 9:26, 27). This never happened to the individual men, Shem, Japheth, and Canaan. However, many years later those prophecies were fulfilled in those men’s descendants, in the nations of the Shemites (Israel), Japhethites (Gentiles, cf. Isa. 42:6), and Canaanites (cf. Josh. 9:27). The name “Jacob” is used for the nation of Israel many times in Scripture (cf. Num. 23:7, 10, 21, 23; 24:5; Deut. 32:9; 33:10; Ps. 14:7; 44:4; 53:6; 59:13; Isa. 27:6, 9; Jer. 10:16; Lam. 2:3; Hos. 10:11; Amos 7:5; Mic. 1:5; 2:12; Nah. 2:2). Similarly, “Esau” is used for the Edomites (cf. Jer. 49:8, 10; Obad. 1:6). Israel is also called by “Isaac,” one of the names of the Fathers (cf. Amos 7:9). The nation of Egypt is called “Ham,” the man from whom the Egyptians descended (Ps. 78:51). The Amalekites and their nation are referred to by the name of their founder, “Amalek” (Num. 24:20; Deut. 25:17; Ps. 83:7). The name “Rachel” was used for her descendants (the Benjamites) who lived in the area of Jerusalem, close to Bethlehem (Matt. 2:18). Rachel was Jacob’s favorite wife who gave birth to Jacob’s youngest son, Benjamin, just outside of Bethlehem and died in childbirth (Gen. 35:16-18), so it was appropriate to say that when Herod killed all the children around Bethlehem, “Rachel” (actually, her descendants), sobbed for them.

The commentator Adam Clarke noted that “Jacob” and “Esau” actually referred to nations, and wrote: “That these words are used in a *national* and not in a *personal* sense, is evident from this: that, taken in the latter sense they are *not true*, for *Jacob* never did exercise any power over *Esau*, nor was Esau ever *subject* to him. Jacob, on the contrary, was rather subject to Esau, and was sorely afraid of him, and...acknowledged Esau to be his *lord*, and himself to be his *servant*; see Gen. 32:4; 33:8, 13.”[[167]](#footnote-16827)

It is important that we realize the phrase “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,” is quoted from Malachi, who lived around 400 BC, some 1,300 years after Jacob and Esau were born, because it shows us that it is not a prophecy, but a statement of fact—proof the prophecy of Rom. 9:12 had been fulfilled. The statement was made because the obstinate and unbelieving Jews in Malachi’s time demanded of God, “How have you loved us?” (Mal. 1:2). God’s answer was that His love for the Jews should be obvious, especially when they are compared with other countries, such as Edom (Esau), and especially when we consider that Jacob and Esau were brothers. He had said the elder nation (Esau; Edom) would serve the younger (Jacob; Israel), and it happened just as God had foretold. So God’s answer to the Jews was that He loved “Jacob” (Israel), but “hated” “Esau” (Edom). Beale and Carson state it well: “The appeal to the words of Scripture as ‘having been written’ signals that God’s word to Rebekah already has come to fulfillment.”[[168]](#footnote-30966)

**“hated.”** It is important that we understand the Semitic use of the word “hate” in this verse because it is not to be taken literally in our Western sense of the word, but is a biblical idiom meaning “love less.” The essence of the statement is, “I preferred Jacob to Esau.”[[169]](#footnote-28442) Although one could make a case for the fact that by around 400 BC (when the statement recorded in Malachi was made), history would support the idea that God did seem to “hate” Esau. But that was due to Edom’s (Esau’s) turning away from Him, and had nothing to do with the original prophecy made to Rebekah, which was only that the older would serve the younger. Esau was older than Jacob, and the nation of Edom was older than the nation of Israel. Nevertheless, the true meaning of the prophecy to Rebekah, and thus of direct relevance to God’s “loving” Israel and “hating” Edom, was that He chose that the Christ would come out of Israel. God could only choose one; therefore, before either was born or had done anything, the purpose of God was pleased to choose the nation from Jacob. This was a bestowing of great honor, so Esau, who did not receive this blessing, was said to be “loved less.”

[For other examples of “hate” used in figurative, hyperbolic language, see: Gen. 29:30-31; Deut. 21:15-17 (KJV); Prov. 13:24; Matt. 6:24; Luke 14:26; 16:13; and John 12:25.]

This verse is not about two people, but about two nations. C. H. Dodd writes that this fact helps explain that Romans 9 is not a reference to “God’s arbitrary predestination of particular persons to eternal happiness or misery, without any regard to their merit or demerit—a doctrine which some have most impiously fathered on God, who is the best of beings, and who cannot possibly hate, far less absolutely doom to misery, any creature that he has made: but that it means only his bestowing greater external favors, or, if you please, higher opportunities for knowing and doing their duty, upon some men, than he does upon others; and that merely according to his own wise purpose, without any regard to their merits or demerits, as having a right to confer greater or smaller degrees of perfection on whom he pleases.”[[170]](#footnote-30963) Clarke goes on to say, “The doctrine of unconditional predestination to eternal life and eternal death cannot be supported by the example of God’s dealings with Esau and Jacob, or with the Edomites and Israelites.”[[171]](#footnote-16062)

It is important to realize that “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated [loved less]” is in reference to the Christ-line—the genealogy that would culminate in the birth of the Messiah (cf. Rom. 9:5). There was only one Messiah, and since there were two male descendants of Isaac, God had to choose one to be the line to the Messiah, and the other was not to be. Thus, Jacob is said to be loved because his progeny led to the Messiah. The terms “loved” and “hated” need to be seen in the context of the chapter, which is the bringing forth of the Messiah. As to the individuals, Jacob and Esau themselves, a good case could be made for the fact that Esau did much better in his life than Jacob. Jacob lied to Isaac (Gen. 27:18-30) and as a result, had to flee his home, and was gone for 20 years. During that time his mother died, and he spent 14 years as an indentured servant working off the dowry for the two women he married while away from his family. Not long after finally getting back home to Canaan, his sons sold his favorite son, Joseph, into slavery, and more than 20 years passed before they were reunited. When they were, Jacob was uprooted from his home, the Promised Land, and spent his closing years in Egypt, where he finally died. In contrast, Esau stayed close to his family, married several wives, had many sons and daughters, prospered, and founded the country of Edom.

Rom 9:15

**“Moses.”** That Moses is mentioned by name is important, because he is a perfect contrast to Pharaoh. It is important to have both the vessel of mercy (Moses), and the vessel of destruction (Pharaoh), portrayed in the text. These two men are a concrete illustration of a major point God is making in chapters 9-11, which was that Israel was a vessel that had fitted itself to destruction and God had cut it off, while the “Israel of God,” including some Gentiles, was a vessel of mercy, that by its obedience had fitted itself to mercy.

Moses was a vessel who fitted himself to mercy, while Pharaoh was a vessel who fitted himself to destruction (cf. Rom. 9:22-23). God came to both of them and made requests. His request to Moses was go back to Egypt, while his request to Pharaoh was let the People go worship. Both requests were difficult under the circumstances, and both were denied. Although we do not pay attention to it much because Moses turned out to be such a wonderful man of God, Moses refused God five times (Exod. 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13), before he finally obeyed God. Moses only seems to have obeyed then because Scripture tells us the anger of Yahweh burned against Moses (Exod. 4:14), but we are not told in the Word exactly how that anger was manifested to Moses. Under the pressure of God’s anger, Moses decided to obey, and then under the tutelage of God, he became a vessel of mercy. We must not make the mistake of thinking that after Moses decided to obey, things went well for him. He almost died on the way back to Egypt (Exod. 4:24-26), he was over-optimistic about how fast God would deliver Israel and became angry with God (Exod. 5:22), he continued to have doubts about God fulfilling His promises (Exod. 6:10-12, 28-30), and it was very painful for him to see the oppression of Israel as the ten plagues ran their course, which took longer than six months and perhaps as long as a year. Through all this, God endured Moses’ doubt and anger and continued to work with him, and in the process of the interaction and obedience to God, Moses became a vessel of mercy.

Like Moses, Pharaoh was also asked to do something difficult: let the People go, and like Moses, he also refused. Then, as with Moses, God began to deal with Pharaoh to get him to change his mind. He sent increasingly harsh plague warnings to Pharaoh, and at any one of them, Pharaoh could have repented and let Israel go, especially as the plagues became very severe, and here we see the difference between Moses and Pharaoh. Moses repented when God showed His anger, while Pharaoh did not. Instead, Pharaoh became harder and harder in his heart, and cared less and less for the welfare of his people and the nation of Egypt. The interplay between God asking Pharaoh to do something that caused Pharaoh to harden his heart, and Pharaoh hardening his heart to God’s requests, is why sometimes the OT says God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and sometimes it says Pharaoh hardened it. God never actually hardened Pharaoh’s heart, but was the occasion of Pharaoh hardening it. Note how the Exodus records the interplay, using three different words for “harden.”

1. Exod. 4:21: I will make his heart strong (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)
2. Exod. 7:3: I will harden Pharaoh’s heart (#07185 קָשָׁה *qashah*)
3. Exod. 7:13: then Pharaoh’s heart grew strong (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)
4. Exod. 7:22: and Pharaoh’s heart grew strong (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)
5. Exod. 8:15: [Pharaoh] made his heart heavy (with stubbornness) (#03513 כָּבַד *kabad*)
6. Exod. 8:19: and Pharaoh’s heart grew strong (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)
7. Exod. 8:32: Pharaoh made his heart heavy (with stubbornness) (#03513 כָּבַד *kabad*)
8. Exod. 9:12: and the Lord made the heart of Pharaoh strong (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)
9. Exod. 9:35: and Pharaoh’s heart was strong (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)
10. Exod. 10:1: I (God) have made his heart heavy (with stubbornness) (#03513 כָּבַד *kabad*)
11. Exod. 10:20: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)
12. Exod. 10:27: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)
13. Exod. 11:10: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)
14. Exod. 14:4: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)
15. Exod. 14:8: the Lord made strong the heart of Pharaoh (#02388 חָזַק *chazaq*)

With both Moses and Pharaoh, God had the choice not to wait for them to change and obey, and that is the meaning of God “has mercy on whom he wants, and he hardens whom he wants” (Rom. 9:18). It is God’s choice to work with, or not work with, people who disobey. Lenski writes: “Who would have known about God’s mercy toward Israel if God had struck down Pharaoh on that first day when Moses demanded Israel’s release.”[[172]](#footnote-31803)

Rom 9:16

**“exerts effort.”** The Greek text is literally “runs,” but here is it used idiomatically for exerting effort to achieve something. Therefore, the literal doesn’t seem to be the best wording and is difficult to understand.

Rom 9:17

**“I raised you up for this very reason.”** As with the other quotations in this section, it is very important that we understand them in their Old Testament context, because the meaning there is being brought into Romans. When Romans 9:17 mentions Pharaoh and quotes the Old Testament, it is assumed that we know about them from the Old Testament, which is why, for example, Romans only mentions Pharaoh by his title and does not give an explanation of who he is and what he did. Therefore we must understand Exodus to understand this section of Romans. The whole context in Exodus is God asking Pharaoh to obey, and Pharaoh refusing to obey. Then, God makes this powerful point: He did not have to give Pharaoh plague warnings, He could have wiped out Pharaoh from the beginning. Nevertheless, He chose to give increasingly severe plague warnings. God knew that if Pharaoh continued to resist Him and His plague warnings, a couple of things would happen. For one thing, Pharaoh would have to become more and more hard-hearted to continue to resist God, especially if he had any compassion for his people and country, which were being ruined. For another thing, as Pharaoh resisted, God’s wrath and power were being made known more and more clearly. Let’s pay careful attention to the section of Scripture from which Paul is quoting (Exod. 9:16, which Paul is quoting, is in boldface type).

**Exodus 9:13-17**

13) Then Yahweh said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, says: “Let my people go, that they may serve me.

14) Indeed, this time I will send all my plagues against your heart, on your officials, and on your people, so that you know that there is none like me in all the earth.

15) Indeed, by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence and you would have been cut off from the earth.

**16) But indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain: to show you my power and so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.**

17) You are still setting yourself up over my people by not letting them go.

This section of Exodus is after the sixth plague but before the seventh, and up until now the only real damage that had been done was the death of livestock. One thing we notice in these verses is God’s request that Pharaoh let Israel go. God’s request is not “fake” or disingenuous. Pharaoh could have let Israel go, but hardened himself against God (Exod. 9:17). Exodus 9:15 really helps us understand Exodus 9:16, and why Paul would quote Exodus 9:16. In Exodus 9:15 God states to Pharaoh that He could have already destroyed Pharaoh if He had wanted. This is certainly true. God did not have to give Pharaoh plague warnings. After Moses’ first request to let Israel go, which Pharaoh refused, God could have just put Egypt in confusion by striking Pharaoh with a lightning bolt, and causing an earthquake and flood, and ushering Israel out of Egypt in the confusion.

When a person disobeys God, it forces God to make a choice: God can stop working with the person, or He can offer more chances to obey. If He offers more chances to obey, and the person obeys, wonderful. If He offers more chances to obey, and the person becomes even more disobedient, then often this means that God’s power is shown and His name glorified, which is what happened with Pharaoh. From reading Exodus we can see the progression of events and the effect they had. The plagues became more and more severe, Pharaoh became more and more hardened and unreasonable, and God’s power was shown more and more clearly, and His name was held in higher and higher honor. God did not want the people of Egypt to be destroyed, but in light of the free will disobedience of Pharaoh, God worked some redemptive purposes from Pharaoh’s disobedience.

It is safe to say that when Moses first came back to Egypt and told Pharaoh that Yahweh, the God of Israel, said to let the people go, Yahweh was little respected by the Egyptians, and indeed, by the other nations on earth. The Egyptians considered Him only a god of slaves. After the third plague, even Pharaoh’s magicians had to admit that the plague was “the finger of God” (Exod. 8:19). After the sixth plague, even some of Pharaoh’s officials feared Yahweh (Exod. 9:20). After the seventh plague, Pharaoh’s officials said to let the Israelites go (Exod. 10:7). After the ninth plague, Moses was highly regarded in Egypt by both Pharaoh’s officials and the Egyptians themselves (Exod. 11:3). By the time Israel left Egypt in the Exodus, Moses and the Israelites were so highly regarded that a large number of Egyptians left Egypt with them (Exod. 12:38). The nations around Israel remembered the plagues and the power of God for years. Hundreds of years later, as the period of the Judges was coming to a close and just before Saul was anointed as Israel’s first king, the Philistines were afraid of God because of what had happened in Egypt (1 Sam. 4:8).

God righteously gave Pharaoh chance after chance to repent, and as Pharaoh refused God time after time, God was able to bring a redemptive purpose out of the situation, turning the hearts of the people of Egypt, and even Pharaoh’s officials, and magnifying His name by His display of power,

From the Old Testament account of Pharaoh, we know that God presented Pharaoh with a difficult, but godly, decision: “Let my People go” (Exod. 5:1). Pharaoh could have made the righteous and free will choice to obey God, which would have been the righteous decision to make even though it would mean his slave labor would be gone, but he chose to “harden” his heart. Because it was God who put Pharaoh in that difficult position, the text, using the common biblical idiom of permission (see commentary on Rom. 9:18), says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Of course, God knew how selfish and cruel Pharaoh was and that he would not let Israel go, but God gave him opportunity after opportunity (plague after plague) to change his mind. Eventually, God “made His power known” (cf. Rom. 9:22) and delivered Israel from slavery.

In Romans 9, Pharaoh is a good example of the point that God is making, which is that Israel acted just like Pharaoh. Time after time God tried to get Israel to obey, and time after time they defied Him, over time becoming harder and harder against God, and more and more defiant. They ignored the Law, then perverted it completely, they ignored the prophets, then killed the prophets, then killed God’s only Son. God reached out to them over and over, but they just responded by becoming more and more calloused toward Him.

God is using Pharaoh as a specific and parallel example to the nation of Israel. Israel, like Pharaoh, had difficult choices (obeying God’s laws is not always easy), and like Pharaoh, they rejected God, hardening their hearts against Him. Then, just as God showed his power against Pharaoh by delivering His people in spite of Egypt’s military might, God showed His wisdom and mercy against the nation of Israel by “making known the riches of His glory” (Rom. 9:23) upon the true “Israel” that he had prepared beforehand, an Israel He called from both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 9:23-24).

God never forces someone to be hardened. Everyone has free will, and people are only hardened when they resist God and harden themselves in the process of resisting Him. It is ironic that the more God shows His love to a person, the more hardened the person has to become to ignore or defy that love. God is said to harden people, but that is only due to the Semitic idiom of permission which attributes actions to God when actually He only allows them to happen (see commentary on Rom. 9:18).

Pharaoh had to become very hard indeed to resist God. Pharaoh had unrighteously enslaved Israel by using his superior military strength. God made the righteous request that Pharaoh let Israel go worship in the desert. When he said “No,” God could have simply destroyed Egypt as He had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. But God continued to warn Pharaoh with plague after plague, demonstrating His power and intention that Israel be allowed to go. Pharaoh ignored the requests to let Israel go, and ignored God’s plague warnings. His heart had to become harder and harder to continue to resist God. Before He acts in power, God wants to offer many warnings and chances to repent, even when it is very unlikely someone will repent. He even did things like tell Pharaoh to order that all servants and livestock be brought under shelter to not suffer damage from the plague of hail (Exod. 9:19). He does this for a number of reasons. First, people have freedom of will and there is always the chance they may change and repent even if it takes a number of warnings. Meyer correctly asserts: “The vessels of wrath are borne with in mercy and long-suffering to give them opportunity for repentance,...”[[173]](#footnote-22803)

Second, offering many chances to repent shows that God is righteous and loving, and not a punitive or demanding God who destroys people who disobey once or twice. Third, it shows that God’s love and mercy, though great, are not endless. God can and will put an eventual end to man’s defiance, so let us not tempt God by ignoring His requests. Fourth, God’s eventual use of His power shows that He will deliver the righteous, even if it is not as quickly as those who are suffering would like, and this is a great comfort to those people who are being dominated by evil authorities. God’s people are comforted knowing that God’s promise of a new and better life is not just empty words, but many times in history He has acted to deliver His people, and He will do it again in the future. Lastly, as God’s power becomes known, other people are greatly influenced to respect Him and believe in Him.

God warned Pharaoh over and over, and warned Israel over and over. As they ignored warning after warning, and got harder and harder in their hearts, they were indeed “fitting themselves for destruction” (see commentary on Rom. 9:22).

Rom 9:18

**“shows mercy to whom he wants...and he hardens whom he wants.”** This phrase has been very misunderstood by many Christians. In order to properly interpret the verse, there are a couple of things we must understand. We must understand the context, particularly Rom. 9:17, and we must understand the Semitic “idiom of permission.”

An idiom is “a phrase or expression whose meaning cannot be understood from the ordinary meanings of the words in it.”[[174]](#footnote-20358) Idioms often do not make sense when translated literally into other languages or heard by people who have not been taught what they mean. For example, the American English idiom, “stop on a dime” has nothing to do with a dime, it means “stop quickly.”

It is vital that we understand biblical idioms if we are going to understand the Bible. What many scholars refer to as “the idiom of permission” is an idiom that occurs in the Hebrew language (in fact, in Semitic languages and occasionally in other languages as well). The “idiom of permission” generally occurs when someone is said to do something or make something happen that they contributed to happening in some way, but did not actually do.

For example, in Exodus 4:21, God says He will harden Pharaoh’s heart. In actuality, Pharaoh hardened his own heart; God did not take away Pharaoh’s free will and harden his heart (evidence of that is given below). But if God did not harden Pharaoh’s heart, why does the Bible say that He did? That is where the Semitic idiom of permission comes in. Pharaoh controlled the Hebrews as his slaves and did what he wanted with them. Then God showed up and demanded that Pharaoh release the slaves. As soon as God made that demand, Pharaoh had a choice to make. He could either obey and let the Israelites go, or he could harden his heart against God and refuse to let Israel go. Pharaoh chose to harden his heart. Although Pharaoh hardened his own heart, the Bible uses the idiom and says “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart” because God was the one who made the demand to release the Hebrew slaves, which led to Pharaoh hardening his heart.

There is a similar type of idiom in English. Let’s say you go to a movie with a friend but then a person with a huge hat sits right in front of you. You politely say, “Excuse me, I can’t see the movie, could you remove your hat please.” But hearing that, the person flies into a rage and starts yelling about being mistreated, hardens their heart, and refuses to remove the hat. Your friend says to you, “Wow. You really made that person mad.” But you did not harden the person’s heart or make them mad, all you did was politely ask to be able to see the movie. The person hardened their own heart and got mad because of what was inside them. Your polite request only brought out what was already inside the person. Your friend saying “You made them mad” is like the Bible saying “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart.” You did not “make anyone mad,” all you did was make a request that the person remove their hat and they got mad based on what was inside their own heart and mind. Similarly, all God did was make a request that Pharaoh let Israel go, and Pharaoh hardened his heart based on his own thoughts and beliefs.

It is widely recognized by scholars that in Semitic languages the active verb can be used in a permissive sense. E. W. Bullinger wrote in his book, *Figures Of Speech*, “idioma,” number 4: “active verbs were used...to express not the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do.”[[175]](#footnote-25716) In the Emphasized Bible by Joseph B. Rotherham, the phrase in Exodus 4:21 that is often translated as “I will harden his [Pharaoh’s] heart” is translated as “I will let his heart wax bold.” In defense of his translation, he offers the following in a footnote: “...the translation in the text above would seem fairer to the average Occidental [Western] mind, and is thoroughly justifiable on two grounds: (1) of the known character of God, and (2) the well-attested latitude of the Semitic tongues, which are accustomed to speak of **occasion as cause**” (p. 87). Rotherham goes on in an appendix to say “...even **positive commands** are occasionally to be accepted as meaning no more than permission” and he cites *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* as more support for his translation.[[176]](#footnote-17843)

Marcus Kalisch (May 16, 1828 - August 25, 1885) was a Jewish scholar who was educated at Berlin University where he studied classics, philology, and the Semitic languages, and he also studied at the Rabbinical College of Berlin. He was one of the pioneers of the critical study of the Old Testament in England. At one time he was secretary to the Chief Rabbi. In his commentary on Exodus, he says:

“...the phrase ‘I will harden the heart of Pharaoh’ means ‘I know that I shall be the cause of Pharaoh’s obstinacy; my commands and wonders will be an occasion, an inducement to an increasing obduration of his heart.’ And the compassionate leniency of God, who instead of crushing the haughtiness of the refractory king with one powerful blow, first tried to reform him by various less awful punishments, and who generally announced the time of the occurrence of the plagues by the words, ‘Behold, I shall afflict tomorrow,’ in order to grant him time for reflection and repentance; this clemency on the part of God increased Pharaoh’s refractoriness; it was to him a cause of prolonged and renewed resistance.”[[177]](#footnote-17948) (quoted in the Appendix of *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*).

To put Kalisch’s explanation into more modern English, we can see why the Hebrew text says “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart” and uses the idiom when God did not in fact harden Pharaoh’s heart. God asked Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, and God’s demand forced Pharaoh to make a choice: He could either let God’s people go, or harden his heart and say, “No,” which we know is what Pharaoh did. As God continued to demand that Pharaoh let the people go, and Pharaoh continued to say “No,” Pharaoh’s heart had to become harder and harder. We know that because the plagues were hurting his kingdom and his people, so he had to become more and more obstinate to not give in to God’s request. Thus, the idiom, “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart,” is a Semitic way of saying that God acted in such a way that Pharaoh had to harden his heart to resist it. God didn’t “harden” Pharaoh’s heart, Pharaoh hardened his own heart because he did not want to obey God’s request.

We see the idiom of permission in Isaiah 6:10-11 when God tells Isaiah to “Make the heart of this people fat. Make their ears heavy and shut their eyes….” Isaiah did not have the power to make people’s hearts “fat” (dull, unresponsive) and close their ears and eyes. Isaiah could not literally make people’s hearts fat, but what he could do was speak the Word of God to them, and at that point, the people would have to refuse to believe it and close their eyes and ears to the truth of what Isaiah was saying. Thus, what Isaiah did by speaking the Word to the people was openly reveal that their hearts were fat and their eyes closed to truth, and perhaps even to make the people even more hard-hearted against God.

There are dozens of examples of the idiom of permission in the Old Testament. That is not unusual since the Old Testament is large and the idiom of permission was a standard Semitic way of speaking.

* **Exodus 9:12:** “Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh.” Meaning God made a request of Pharaoh and he had to harden his heart to refuse it. If we do not see the idiom here, we are forced to say that God demanded that Pharaoh let Israel go; then God took away Pharaoh’s free will choice and hardened Pharaoh’s heart so he could not let Israel go; then God punished Pharaoh and the people of Egypt because Pharaoh did not let Israel go. That is not love and not God’s character.
* **Numbers 21:6:** “Yahweh sent fiery serpents among [the Israelites].” Meaning God had told Israel that He would protect them if they obeyed Him, but they did not obey, so He could not protect them from the snakes in the territory, which may have also induced them to be more aggressive due to demonic influence. But because the people did not obey God who had said bad things would happen if they did not obey, the idiom is worded as if God sent the snakes.
* **Ezekiel 20:25:** “I [God] also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live.” Meaning, God gave the Law, but the people refused to obey it and suffered serious consequences. We know the Law is good, righteous, and holy (Rom. 7:12). However, the Law states that consequences will come to the disobedient, so in idiomatic language, the Law ended up not seeming good for Israel because it seemed to be the reason that the people were being afflicted.
* **Isaiah 45:7:** “I make peace and create evil.” God does not “create evil.” That would be against His character and contradict the fact that He is love. “Love” and “evil” are mutually exclusive. Isaiah 45:7 contains the idiom of permission, which applies because God created spirit beings and human beings with free will, and also gave them laws, rules, and norms that made a distinction between good and evil. Thus, when spirit beings or humans broke God’s laws and norms and thus did evil by their own free will, by the idiom of permission God was said to have caused it because He set up the universe in such a way that evil can exist.

To be clear then, we see that the Semitic idiom of permission is when a person reacts to something God has said or done (such as Pharaoh hardening his heart in reaction to God asking him to let Israel go), but the idiomatic way of expressing that reaction is to say that God caused the hardening. Similarly, people do evil as their free will choice, but because God gave them free will and also made the distinction between good and evil, God is said to create evil. Although God is said to cause the thought or action, in actual fact, God does not override the free will of man, and He neither causes people to sin, nor gives His permission for them to do so.

When the idiom of permission is used, we readers must search for the connection between God and the action or reaction (often a sin someone is committing), and sometimes that connection is very subtle. It has been said that people cannot “break” God’s laws, but can only break themselves against them because they are “immovable objects.” God has set up the universe to function according to many laws and principles, which He said were “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God’s laws cannot be broken, and that is true in both the physical and spiritual world. A farmer who disregards God’s principles of sowing and reaping will not prosper, and via the biblical idiom of permission we might read that “God ruined him.” Similarly, a rock climber who disregards the worn-out state of his safety rope may, if his rope breaks, fall to his death because of God’s law of gravity, and in the Semitic idiom it might be said that, “God killed that careless person.” Is God to blame because He set laws in place? Of course not. Did God really kill the careless rock climber? No. But in the Semitic idiom, it might be expressed that way.

[For more on the idiom of permission, see commentary on Exod. 4:21; also see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *Don’t Blame God*, Chapter 5, “God Is Good (with Figures).” For more on why Christ taught in parables, see commentary on Matt. 13:13.]

Rom 9:19

**“For who has *ever* been able to stand against his purposes.”** This phrase has to be properly understood if we are to understand this verse, the context, and how God works in our lives. First, this is a statement made by “you” (“you will then say to me”) and the “you” is shown in Rom. 9:20 to be someone who argues with God, not someone who trusts God. Second, it gives the wrong impression to translate this verse, “For who can resist His will” (ESV, HCSB, NRSV) because, even as we see in this chapter, let alone the whole Bible, many people seem to resist the will of God and say “No” to God. In this chapter alone, the Jews resisted the will of God, and the Bible is full of examples of people who disregard and disobey God, and do not do what He wants them to do. So what is this verse saying?

The Greek word most English versions translate as “will” is *boulēma* (#1013 βούλημα), which refers to a plan, purpose, or intention. BDAG translates it, “intention.”[[178]](#footnote-17439) It is not the common word translated “will,” which is *thelō* (#2309 θέλω), which refers to what we “want” or “desire.” This verse is not saying, “Who has resisted the will of God and done something that God did not want them to do?” Many people do things God does not want them to do. This verse is saying, “Who has successfully withstood the plans and purposes of God?” The answer, of course, is no one. God is so resourceful and persistent that no one successfully withstands His purposes. God adjusts and adapts, and will always find a way to win in the end, even sometimes, as we see with Pharaoh, using the evil people do to show His character and magnify His glory.

The phrase “to stand against” is the verb *anthistēmi* (#436 ἀνθίστημι), and it is in the perfect tense, active voice. Wuest writes: “The use of the perfect tense here speaks of a process of standing against God’s will which has come to a finished end, and the resulting state, that of a confirmed and permanent stand against God.”[[179]](#footnote-19181) Vincent writes: “The idea is the *result* rather than the *process* of resistance.”[[180]](#footnote-29403) In other words, people can resist God and disobey Him, but because God always figures out a way to win in the end, no one can successfully withstand His purposes and intentions to the end that they are not accomplished.

We are now in a position to see what this verse is saying. Unbelievers and God-haters will accuse God of injustice, saying that because no one can successfully win against the plans and purposes of God, He should not find fault with people who sin. But let’s take the real-life example of Pharaoh and see if that is correct thinking. Although it is true that God found a way to show His power and elevate His name through Pharaoh, God did not want all that happened in Egypt to happen, even though Israel was released in the end.

When God first told Pharaoh to let Israel go into the wilderness (Exod. 5:1), there had been no plagues and no destruction or death of animals or people. Yet God’s words were not disingenuous or somehow fake—He wanted Israel to be able to go. Had Pharaoh released Israel at the command of God, God would still have been glorified—God always finds ways to bless people and glorify His name when people obey Him. Furthermore, had Pharaoh obeyed God and let Israel go before even the first plague, he would have continued to rule the most powerful nation on earth instead of destroying his nation and dying in a battle against God (although it does not make a good movie script, and many movies show Pharaoh surviving after the Exodus, actually, he died in the water along with much of his army).

Instead of obeying God and letting Israel go, Pharaoh hardened himself against God. Our loving God then sent increasingly severe plague warnings to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh stood against Him time after time and ignored the destruction and pain his hard-heartedness was causing. In the end, Pharaoh did not successfully withstand the purpose of God, and Israel left Egypt. But can we say, like the unnamed antagonist here in Romans 9:19, that because God’s purposes were eventually completed, that God should not find fault? Was Pharaoh, for example, without fault? Of course not! Pharaoh, and everyone else who defies God and sins against God, is at fault, even if God can find ways to bring glory to Himself and His people from their sinful actions.

Rom 9:20

**“argue.”** The Greek word is *antapokrinomai* (#470 ἀνταποκρίνομαι), and it means to reply or answer back, but because the verb is in the present tense, it portrays more of a back-and-forth dialogue, or as is clear from the context, an argument.

**“Why did you make me like this?”** This question is linked to both Rom. 9:19 and 9:21, and we must remember that it is spoken by the man who is arguing with God. His accusation is essentially, “Why did you make me hard like this, into a vessel of dishonor?” The fact that the Greek word translated “make” is in the aorist tense (a one-time action or “snapshot” of the situation) provides a key to understanding this verse. The verse is viewing the vessel as a finished product, not focusing on the process of making it, although the sinner could question that also. First, we must remember that God only “made,” i.e., completed the process of making, the person into a vessel of dishonor (Rom. 9:21) because of the person’s free will responses. The perfect example of that is Pharaoh, who is mentioned right in this chapter. Although God used the person’s sinful behavior in a way that ultimately was redemptive and benefited Him in some way, it was the person’s own free will decisions and sinful behavior that were responsible for the way God acted in relation to the person. Second, it is far too typical that, like the argumentative person in this verse, when the purposes of God win the day and the sinner is broken and defeated, he (or she) takes no responsibility for their actions, but blames God for what has happened, questioning God just like this verse says, “Why did YOU [God] make me this way?” A humble and honest question would be: “Why did I defy God the way I did and become so hard-hearted?” God responded to the person’s sins in a redemptive manner, but that redemption destroys sinners.

When a person, like Pharaoh, is given the opportunity to obey God but defies Him, it is then God’s prerogative as to how to continue to work with the person or to end the relationship altogether. In that sense, God really is the potter and we are the clay. Like the example of the clay in Jeremiah 18:1-4, God can have a purpose for a person, but if that person will not cooperate, then God can work to make something else of his life, or He can stop working with the person altogether.

The Bible is full of this interplay between God and people, although many times it is not clearly written. God worked with Moses to get him to go to Egypt and lead the Israelites. Moses refused God five times (Exod. 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13), but finally gave in to God. God had the choice not to wait for Moses to obey. He could have delivered Israel some other way when Moses refused the first time, but God chose to keep asking Moses, and eventually, Moses did obey God and go to Egypt. The Bible does not say what God would have done had Moses continued to refuse, but we can be sure God would have found a way to deliver Israel from slavery.

God asked Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites (Judg. 6:14), but Gideon was not confident, and in the next months God and Gideon went back and forth, asking things of each other, testing each other, but God kept working with Gideon, slowly making him into a vessel of honor as Gideon kept struggling to obey God. King Saul behaved differently. He never truly obeyed God. God installed him as king, but character flaws soon began to show themselves. When Saul disobeyed concerning the Amalekites, God made the decision to take the kingdom from him, and Samuel brought the message to him, saying, “Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day” (1 Sam. 15:28). Unlike Gideon, who had problems but overcame them and became a vessel of honor, Saul never did fully obey God, and his continual disobedience resulted in him becoming a vessel of dishonor, even trying to murder David and eventually dying in a war with the Philistines.

Solomon followed King Saul’s footsteps. He had the potential to be a vessel of great honor, but later in his life began to ignore the Word of God. He tried to pay part of the debt for building the Temple by giving away towns in Israel (1 Kings 9:10-13). He broke commandment after commandment. In defiance of God’s commands in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, he amassed gold and horses, bought horses from Egypt, and took many wives. He also married pagan women and built places of worship for many pagan gods (1 Kings 11:7-8). He did evil in God’s sight (1 Kings 11:6). God continued to warn Solomon as he traveled on his path of sin (1 Kings 11:9-10), but as with Pharaoh, those warnings only further hardened Solomon. God’s warnings, and Solomon’s defiance of them, were forming him into a vessel of dishonor. Eventually, God stopped trying to reform Solomon and said He would tear the kingdom from him (1 Kings 11:11), which He did.

The Bible does have some examples of God apparently not offering people “chances” to change and repent, but dealing with their sin right on the spot. One example is the soldiers of Ahaziah, who came to arrest Elijah. Fire from heaven burned them up right then, with no “second chances” (2 Kings 1:10). Examples like that in the Word of God show us that while God is slow to anger and abounding in love (Num. 14:18), He is not one to tempt or toy with. It is always God’s prerogative to deal with sin and disobedience immediately or offer chances for repentance.

Over and over the Bible shows how God works with people in relation to the free will decisions they make, but ultimately whether a person is a vessel to honor or a vessel to dishonor is the person’s choice. At this point, we should remind ourselves that the focal point of this chapter is Israel, and God’s dealings with them and the true “Israel,” the Israel of God (cf. Rom. 9:6). God came to the nation of Israel over and over again, but they were stubborn and defiant. They ignored and killed His prophets, and eventually killed His only Son. It was God’s prerogative to work with them the way He did century after century as they became a vessel to dishonor instead of cutting them off early in their history and working with the Gentiles. It was also His prerogative to “cut them off” when He did and deal with the Gentiles (Rom. 9:24, 30; 11:13-18).

That it is a person’s free will decisions that are primarily responsible for him being either a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor is a point that is also made in 2 Timothy 2:20-22. Those verses point out that every house has some vessels that are honorable and some that are dishonorable. Here in Romans, we see that vessels of dishonor make the free will choice to be sinful, stubborn, and disobedient. The dishonorable vessels in Timothy are dishonorable for those same reasons. So Timothy says, “if anyone cleanses himself from these [dishonorable vessels], he will be a vessel for honorable use.” 2 Tim. 2:22 then states: “So flee youthful passions and diligently pursue righteousness....” We need to realize that whether a person is a vessel of honor or dishonor is up to that person. God starts with the “same lump” of clay (Rom. 9:21), and works with it as it will allow Him, deciding how to move forward with it to accomplish His redemptive purposes.

Rom 9:21

**“does the potter not have authority over the clay.”** For more on the potter and the clay, see commentary on Jeremiah 18:6.

**“for honor and another for ordinary use?”** The translation and understanding of this phrase is vital to the understanding of this whole chapter, and it hinges upon the translation of the Greek preposition *eis* (#1519 εἰς) and our understanding of vessels of honor and dishonor.

The Greek word translated “dishonor” is *atimia* (#819 ἀτιμία). The word *atimia* is from the Greek word *timē* (#5092 τιμή, pronounced tee-'may) with the prefix “a” (“not”) in front, making it literally, “not honorable.” Although *atimia* usually means “dishonor,” it can carry a neutral sense and simply mean, “not honorable,” or “ordinary,” which explains the translations such as “common” (NASB, NIV), or ordinary” (NET, NJB, NRSV). However, we believe “ordinary” and “common” are not the correct translations of *atimia* in this context. The context is not about “honorable” and “ordinary” vessels. The chapter is about Israel, and God uses the example of Pharaoh, illustrating through him how some vessels are honorable, having done the will of God, and some are dishonorable, having defied God. When we insert the concept of “common” or “ordinary” into the chapter, we cause confusion because there is nothing in the chapter to connect it with. Furthermore, in the end, no vessel is “ordinary.” People either believe and obey God and are honorable vessels, or they disobey God and are dishonorable vessels. Even believers whom we might think have no special honor have special honor given to them by God (1 Cor. 12:23-26), so every person who believes and obeys God is a vessel of honor, while people who ignore God or disobey Him are vessels of dishonor.

We readily understand that our loving God makes some vessels into honorable vessels, but we need to understand what God means when He says that some vessels are made into dishonorable vessels. As with other words and phrases in this section of Romans, a knowledge of the context and biblical idiom is important (see commentary on Rom. 9:17). God never forces people to do dishonorable things, but God does place people in situations that reveal their true nature and intentions. As was pointed out in the commentaries on Romans 9:18 and 9:20, God never “hardens” people by taking their free will from them or forcing them to make an evil decision. However, He does harden them by actively loving them over and over again, each time putting them in the position to refuse Him. Although a person could change from rebellious to repentant at any time, as they continue in rebellion and refuse God over and over, they become harder and more calloused as a result. It is in that sense that God “makes” some people into dishonorable vessels, letting them act dishonorably in response to His actions toward them.

It is God’s prerogative whether or not to keep reaching out to someone who is resistant and “make” them harder and harder, acting in a dishonorable way and becoming themselves dishonorable. We get a clearer picture of how a person becomes an honorable vessel or a dishonorable one by studying people in the Word. For example, it seemed that Solomon was destined for great honor, but ended his life by over and over again doing evil in the eyes of God (1 Kings 11:6, cf. commentary on Rom. 9:20). The same could be said for many people who had the potential and positioning to be great, but turned away from God.

The other thing in the phrase, “into *a vessel of* honor and another into dishonor,” that we must understand if we are to understand both this verse and the chapter, is the Greek preposition *eis* (#1519 εἰς). Greek prepositions typically have many meanings, and the meaning we assign to *eis* in this verse makes a huge difference in how we understand this section of Scripture because *eis* can indicate purpose or it can refer to a destination or end result. If *eis* in this verse refers to purpose, then God makes people to be good or evil—it is just part of His plan. This verse would then be saying that God’s purpose in making people was to make some for honorable uses and other people for dishonorable uses, doing as He wished with no reference to any action or desire of the person.

In contrast to understanding *eis* as meaning purpose, *eis* can refer to a destination or end result. Then the verse would be saying that the end result of God’s working with people is that some of them are honorable vessels and some are dishonorable vessels. They reach their place of honor or dishonor by the process of interacting with God. This is the position that best fits with God’s character as a loving God and also with the rest of Scripture.

Calvinists and others who think that God predestinates people to be saved or damned prefer the translation, “for,” because in it they see “honorable” or “dishonorable” as God’s purpose for people. They assert God has a plan for people, to save them or damn them, and He does so without reference to anything the people want or do. This position is well expressed in many commentaries, but a statement by Hendriksen says it well: “God, our Maker, has the right...to elect some to everlasting life, and to allow others to remain in the abyss of wretchedness [i.e., be dammed to eternal hell].”[[181]](#footnote-26403) This seemingly unfair and unloving treatment of people is defended by Calvinists and others who believe in predestination. They say that since everyone is a sinner, it is not unfair of God to damn anyone because everyone deserves to be damned, and when God decides to save some people just because He wants to—well, that is undeserved grace for them.[[182]](#footnote-27867)

R. C. H. Lenski, who uses the word “for” in his translation but does not believe that God saves or damns men without respect to their free will decisions, points out that “for” can indicate the finished character of the vessel, and not just “their purpose.” He writes: “A vessel for honor—for dishonor, designates the character of each, designates the finished product, the one being fit for honor, the other fit for dishonor, the one fit for heaven, the other fit only for hell; it certainly does not designate only some circumstance or condition that existed when the vessels were made.”[[183]](#footnote-24871) While we agree with Lenski that “for” can refer to the ultimate purpose of God and the state of the finished product, we think the most natural reading of “for” in English refers to purpose, and therefore most people reading the word “for” will think that God’s original purpose for making the vessel was so it would be honorable or dishonorable. The truth is that people act of their free will and are on a path to be a certain way, and God works His purposes both with, and around, the person. God never designs anyone to be evil or unsaved and have no choice about it, but there are times when He can and does act in such a way that His power and glory are more clearly seen against the backdrop of evil. Furthermore, as is stated in the commentary on Romans 9:18, God can continue to interact with a person who defies Him and who becomes more and more calloused as the interactions and rejections continue, and over time the person forms into a vessel of dishonor.

With that understanding, we can see the great value in translating the Greek word *eis* as “into,” particularly since in this verse it is conjoined with “made” (*poieō*; #4160 ποιέω), and we are used to materials being “made into” something. God, the potter, has the right, the authority (*exousia*; #1849 ἐξουσία), to continue to work with people, offering them opportunities to repent, interacting with them, and allowing them to be made into vessels of honor or vessels of dishonor, knowing full well that if they become vessels of dishonor He has the ability to bring something redemptive out of their evil.

[For more on the potter and the clay, see commentary on Jer. 18:6.]

Rom 9:22

**“But what if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, endured....”** The key to understanding this verse is the word “endured,” because it shows the pain that evil causes and that even though God, in all His resourcefulness, can bring some redemptive things out of evil, He still has to endure the evil that people (and demons) do. This verse is not saying that God wants to show His wrath and power so therefore He forces people to do evil, or refuses to deliver them from their sin, just so He can then punish them publicly. God is not a God of wrath, however, wrath is part of His justice and He can and will use it on some occasions when it is deserved.

If God caused people to do evil, or if He refused to help them get out of their sin and evil ways, then He cannot be said to “endure” evil any more than a sadist “endures” the pain he is causing another person. God endures evil because it is the result of people’s free will decisions.

As we have seen from the previous verses and the scope of Scripture, God’s first desire is that people would obey Him so He can bless them. However, if someone is determined to do evil, then God is challenged with how to bring something redemptive out of that evil. Once a person is evil and defiant toward God, God then has to choose how He will deal with the person. He can respond to the person immediately as He did with Miriam when she complained about Moses and was immediately smitten with leprosy (Num. 12:10). In that case, there was no, “Do not do that again” warning from God. She sinned egregiously, and God responded publicly with power and wrath, no doubt in part to protect Moses and the national unity of Israel.

In contrast, when Pharaoh sinned and defied God, instead of destroying him with one hard-hitting plague, He offered him ten plague warnings. God “endured” Pharaoh and the evil he was doing to people, showing mercy to Pharaoh and giving him chances to repent and save himself and his people, but also knowing that because He was enduring Pharaoh’s continued defiance, when He finally decided to show His wrath and power, He could do it in a way that would accomplish some redemptive purposes. It is from the scope of Scripture we see that God does not ever want His wrath to be a “first response,” because His nature is love and He wants people to repent, obey, and be in a relationship with Him, but there are times when He wants to show His wrath and His power because there is profit in it. God would never show His wrath without a reason. He is never wrathful without just cause.

That people have free will often puts God in a dilemma. If He gives people warnings and chances to repent and change, and they do repent, then His patience and endurance have great profit. However, if the person refuses to change and repent, then the warnings simply force people to go on defying God, which only makes them more calloused and hard-hearted over time. Yet God, being loving and merciful, tends to give people chance after chance to repent, knowing that He can and will find a way to bring some redemptive purpose out of the evil people do.

There are a number of redemptive aspects to God’s showing His power and wrath. For one thing, it often puts an end to the evil being done in that situation. For example, both the Flood and the fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah put an end to the evil those people were doing. A reason that one of God’s laws is the death penalty is that it puts an end to the activities of evil people (cf. Exod. 21:12-17; Lev. 24:17-22; Num. 35:16-31; Deut. 19:1-13).[[184]](#footnote-18443)

Another redemptive benefit of God’s wrath is that it shows people that God’s patience and mercy are not endless. God can and will put an eventual end to man’s defiance, and His use of wrath makes that point (cf. 2 Pet. 2:6). Furthermore, God’s use of power and wrath being employed against the wicked is a great comfort, and can even be a source of joy, to those people who are being dominated by evil authorities. As the Psalm says, “The righteous person will rejoice when he sees *God’s* vengeance. He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked person” (Ps. 58:10; cf. Deut. 32:43; Job 22:19; Ps. 52:4-7; Jer. 11:20; 20:11-13; cf. commentary on Rom. 9:18). These reasons help explain why Scripture would say that God is “desiring to show his wrath and to make his power known.” It is not as if God “desires” to show His wrath, but rather, given how horrible evil would be if it were allowed to continue unchecked, God “desires” to bring it to an end by His wrath and power.

**“*stubbornly* shaped themselves.”** The Greek verb is *katartizō* (#2675 καταρτίζω) and means to cause to be in a condition to function well, thus, to put in order or restore; or to prepare, make, create, equip, or outfit. For example, the Greeks used it of the fitting together of bones in the body and outfitting or equipping a ship or an army. In this verse, the verb is a participle, and the form can be either passive voice or middle voice. Whether this verb is in the passive or middle voice makes all the difference in the world in this particular verse, and is central to the debate about free will or predestination. If *katartizō* is in the passive voice, it means the vessels were fitted by an outside force that acted on them. In this case, God would have made the vessels to be vessels of dishonor. If, on the other hand, the verb *katartizō* is in the middle voice, it means the people fitted themselves for destruction. In that case, the verb means the vessels caused their own problem and deserve the destruction they will ultimately receive, and that is what many commentators say this verse is saying. Meyer, although he himself disagrees, lists many such commentators.[[185]](#footnote-30104) Hendricksen notes that it is possible “…that here, in Rom. 9:22, the people themselves—in co-operation with Satan—were the active agents.”[[186]](#footnote-22023) Adam Clarke notes: “…they had fitted themselves for that destruction which the wrath, the vindictive justice of God, inflicted.”[[187]](#footnote-28895) John Bengel did not go so far as to say that the verb should be understood to be in the middle voice and that the people fitted themselves, but notes that even if the people “were fitted” (passive voice) to destruction, the text does not say that God fitted the people for destruction. He rather states the verse “is only stating in what condition God finds them, when He brings upon them His wrath.”[[188]](#footnote-29399) Lenski also believes the verb is passive, not middle, but notes that in the Greek text, “a perfect passive participle is used: ‘fitted for destruction,’ which hides the agent who, therefore, is not God—Satan fitted them.”[[189]](#footnote-12445) The words of Bengel and Lenski should be important to those people who insist this text supports predestination, because even if the verb is in the passive voice (and we do not think it is), it is an assumption to say that God did the fitting. The Greek text does not say that.

Although Meyer and some commentators assert that “fitted themselves” is opposed to the context, we disagree. The verse clearly says that God “endured” with “much patience” these vessels. But it hardly makes sense that God would have to endure these people with patience if He is the one fitting the vessels for destruction. In that case, the people’s obstinance and eventual destruction would have been His plan and His work, and He would be accomplishing it, not enduring it.

As with Pharaoh, God is working His purposes of love and mercy, which cause a hardening in obstinate people—they harden themselves rather than yield and obey—and God endures this hardening rather than bringing immediate judgment because He wants everyone to have an opportunity for salvation (2 Pet. 3:9). Adam Clarke writes: “…He [God] had endured their obstinate rebellion with much long-suffering; which is a most absolute proof that the hardening of their hearts, and their ultimate punishment, were the consequences of their obstinate refusal of His grace and abuse of His goodness.”[[190]](#footnote-24362)

**“destruction.”** The Greek word is *apōleia* (#684 ἀπώλεια, pronounced ah-'pō-lay-ah), and it means “the destruction that one experiences; annihilation.”[[191]](#footnote-17690) Jesus said that the road is narrow and the gate small that leads to “life,” while the broad road and broad gate leads to “destruction” (*apōleia*). Philippians 3:19 and 2 Peter 3:7 say the end of ungodly men and the enemies of God is “destruction,” and Hebrews 10:39 says that believing results in the “saving of the soul” (KJV), while unbelief results in destruction. When Romans 9:22 uses this word, it shows that there is more in mind than just the physical death of the sinner, but his “destruction” in the Lake of Fire (see commentary on Rev. 20:10). This is confirmed by the contrasting phrase “for glory” in Rom. 9:23, which also refers to more than just glory we experience in this life, but everlasting glory as well.

Rom 9:23

**“on.”** The Greek preposition *epi* (#1909 ἐπί, pronounced ep-'ee) generally does not mean “to” but “on” or “upon,” and it does not mean “to” here, as if God was showing his glory “to” Israel so they could see it. God was showing his glory that was on Israel, the glory they participated in, and indeed, the glory was in part shown by what they themselves experienced.

In the commentary on Romans 9:22, we saw reasons why God endured the behavior of the vessels of wrath. One of them was so that the obedient people of God would see, and draw strength and joy from seeing, the power of God in operation. That is the main point of this verse. God “endured,” “in order to make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy.” The plagues in Egypt are just an example of this, because it happens all the time all over the world as evil tries to dominate good. As the plagues progressed and while Pharaoh was hardening himself against God, Israel experienced God’s mercy. During the fifth plague, the death of livestock, none of Israel’s animals died (Exod. 9:4-6). During the seventh plague, the plague of hail, no hail fell in Goshen where the Israelites lived (Exod. 9:26). During the ninth plague, the darkness that could be felt, the Israelite homes had light (Exod. 10:23). During the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, Israel was protected when they obeyed, while in Egypt “there was not a house without someone dead” (Exod. 12:30 NIV). The mercy of God continued even after that as Yahweh guided and protected Israel with a pillar of fire and then by dividing the Sea, which opened for Israel but closed upon, and destroyed, the Egyptians. It is never easy for believers to endure the evil that wicked people do, but through those difficult times, God’s mercy is often profoundly manifested.

**“prepared beforehand for glory.”** The Greek word translated “prepared beforehand” is *proetoimazō* (#4282 προετοιμάζω, pronounced pro-et-oy-'maad-zō), and it means to “prepare beforehand, make ready ahead of time,” and it is only used here and in Ephesians 2:10. God is preparing us now, ahead of time, for the eternal glory which will surely come.

Since these vessels of mercy are contrasted to the vessels of wrath who fitted themselves to destruction (a process we saw modeled by Pharaoh), we need to ask why these vessels are “prepared beforehand” for glory. The answer is not that God predestines them to glory and they have no choice about it. That does not fit with the scope of Scripture or this context, nor does it properly contrast with the vessels of wrath who fitted themselves to destruction. The answer lies in part in that “for glory” (*eis doxan*; εἰς δόξαν) is not as much referring to the immediate glory of Israel being rescued from Egypt (although that is glorious too), but to the ultimate glory of salvation and everlasting life, which is a future event. This is confirmed by the contrast of the glory of the vessels of mercy to the “destruction” of sinners in Romans 9:22. It is even more effectively confirmed by the inclusion of “us” and “the Gentiles” in Romans 9:24, and the description in Romans 9:25-31 of the righteousness (“salvation”) of the Gentiles. Lenski agrees, and says the glory being referred to is “the glory of heaven.”[[192]](#footnote-20861) Meyer asserts that the glory is “the everlasting Messianic glory.”[[193]](#footnote-28499)

Reading the full phrase from Romans 9:23-24 without the verse break in the middle to distract us is helpful. The subject is “the vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory—including us also, whom he called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles.” Now it is easy to see that the “vessels of mercy” did not just include Israel in Egypt who escaped from Pharaoh, but also all the vessels who escaped “destruction” in the Lake of Fire and are prepared beforehand for glory. Why does God have to prepare us “beforehand” for the glory? Because we live now, but the glory we will participate in comes later.

It is important to note that in Romans 9:22, people “fitted themselves” for destruction, while in Romans 9:23 God “prepared beforehand” the vessels of mercy. The two different Greek words meaning roughly “fitted,” and “prepared,” can be close in meaning in some contexts, but here the emphasis is very different. God does not want, nor plan for, anyone to be unsaved and miss the blessing of everlasting life. People who go “to destruction” do so because they “fit,” or “outfit” themselves for it. In contrast, God has planned and prepared for everyone to have everlasting life, and He helps us achieve that as we obey Him. It is safe to say that no one would get everlasting life without God’s help and God’s doing the work of salvation. Also, in the end, no dead person can raise themselves from the grave or grant themselves everlasting life, and it is God who brings the Kingdom on earth. God does all that in fulfillment of His promises, and thus He is the one who has prepared people beforehand for everlasting life, which is future.

Rom 9:27

**“on behalf of Israel.”** In Rom. 9:25-26, Paul quotes Hosea speaking about the Gentiles. But Israel is not left out. Isaiah states a warning that any Israelite should have taken seriously, and repented of any evil ways to become part of the remnant who will be saved.

Rom 9:28

**“carry out *his* decree.”** The Greek is literally, “do [the] Word,” but that can be unclear to the modern reader. The meaning is that God will do what He said, thus “carry out” His Word, what He has decreed. God had said many times that He will destroy the evildoer, but save the meek who believe in Him.

Rom 9:29

**“Lord of Armies.”** See James 5:4 for the only other use of this phrase in the New Testament.

Rom 9:33

**“Look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“I am placing in Zion a stone.”** This quotation is taken from Isaiah 28:16. The Messiah was directly referred to as a “stone” in Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16, and Psalm 118:22 is quoted or referred to six times in the New Testament (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:10-11; 1 Pet. 2:4 and 2:7. See commentaries on Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16; and Zech. 3:9).

**“but.”** The Greek reads *kai*, normally “and,” but here it is showing that the two parts of the quotation are connected. However, we can do that more naturally with “but” than “and *yet*.”

**“put to shame.”** The verb is *kataischunō* (#2617 καταισχύνω). Notably, it is in the passive voice, meaning the action of shaming comes upon the person, rather than describing their internal state. It is not “be ashamed,” which would imply these feelings rise up in the person himself; rather, the shaming comes upon him from the outside, he is “put to shame.” We must understand that ancient Rome, as well as Palestine, was an honor- and shame-based society. There were elaborate social norms and expectations placed upon the members of society, and when they were broken, the society induced shaming as a means of social control.

**Romans Chapter 10**

Rom 10:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“them.”** This refers to “Israel” mentioned in Romans 9:31.

Rom 10:4

**“with the result.”** The Greek word *eis* (#1519 εἰς) in this verse indicates that righteousness is the *result* of belief (cf. NET). A more literal, but not as clear, translation would be “resulting in righteousness for everyone who believes.” This truth fits precisely with Rom. 10:10: “For a person believes with their heart, resulting (*eis*) in righteousness.”

Rom 10:5

**“the person who does these *commandments* will live by them**.” Paul is referring to Leviticus 18:5. Not an exact quotation, but it is not stated to be one.

Rom 10:6

**“the righteousness *that is* based on trust speaks this way.”** It is important to notice that the one speaking is “righteousness.” This is the figure of speech personification, and in this case, God’s righteousness is portrayed as a person trying to win the hearts of the doubters. Thus, Paul is not claiming to be quoting Moses, as he is showing what “righteousness *that is* based on trust” would say about salvation in the Church Age. Rather, Paul is using the principles in the Law to make his point. First, “righteousness” addresses the doubts of those who think that righteousness is difficult and even far away. Jesus has already “come from heaven,” so no one has to go there and bring him down (Rom. 10:6). Similarly, Jesus has been raised from the dead so no one has to go down to the abyss and bring him up (Rom. 10:7). Then it affirms that the message of faith is close at hand, even in our hearts and mouths (Rom. 10:8). In this section, Paul calls to remembrance a very similar situation during the time of Moses. The Israelites had the Law, but were despairing of keeping it, thinking it was too difficult. Moses answered them, saying:

**Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (NIV):** 11) “Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. 12) It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” 13) Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” 14) No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

Just as the Old Testament proclaimed that obeying the Law was not too difficult a task, attaining righteousness by faith is not difficult either. Here in Romans 10, the apostle Paul modifies the Old Testament statements so that while they are close enough to Deuteronomy that people remember what the Law said, they are not exact quotations and they fit in the context of the promised Messiah. The gift of the Law has now been superseded by the gift of the Messiah.

**“Do not say….”** This is a reference to Deuteronomy 30:12, which reads, “It is not in heaven, so that you have to say, ‘Who will go up for us to heaven and bring it to us and have us listen to it so that we can do it?’” It is not an exact quotation, and it should be noted that Paul does not write: “Moses said,” or “the Law says,” but rather that “righteousness” says. Thus, Paul is not so much quoting Moses as he is using the principles in the Law to make his point.

**“ascend into heaven.”** When Moses used this in Deuteronomy 30:12, it was in the context of going into heaven to get the commandments from God. In the context of Messianic expectation, however, people would not get the Law from God, but would get the Messiah from Him and then bring him back down with them. Thus, the explanatory parenthesis, “that is, in order to bring Christ down.” Getting Christ from heaven would be, as Deuteronomy 30:11 notes, both difficult and beyond their reach. Furthermore, it contains a denial of the fact that the difficult work of God had already been done. God had already sent the Messiah, and if we reject him and wish to go to heaven and get another, it is not only too difficult (impossible!), but a rejection of God’s gracious provision. Human effort, no matter how satisfying and empowering to those who need to feel in control of their own destiny, is worthless.

**“(that is, in order to bring Christ down).”** The figure of speech epitrechon, a type of parenthesis.[[194]](#footnote-27209) An epitrechon (which means “running along”) is a short parenthetical insertion placed in the text as an explanatory remark. It is not complete in itself, but needs the rest of the sentence to be complete.

Rom 10:7

**“descend into the abyss.”** The meaning of this phrase might be considered unclear except that it is explained clearly in the parenthesis, which lets us know that in this case, the “abyss” stands for the grave and the state of being dead. In Deuteronomy 30:13, Moses did not use the concept of bringing someone up from the abyss, but had used the idea of bringing the word from across the sea. Paul modifies the words of Moses so that, although the inference to Moses was clear, the language applies specifically to the Messiah and New Testament salvation by trust (faith). Indeed, Paul’s speaker is “the righteousness *that is* based on trust.”

Romans 10:6 speaks in reference to those who thought that the Messiah had not yet come so he would have to be brought down from heaven. Here in Romans 10:7, the verse is speaking to those who doubt the Messiah has been raised from the dead, and they must help God with that task. The use of “abyss” makes sense in this context because of the associated meanings of “sea,” and “abyss” as places associated with the dead. For example, Job 28:14 compares the abyss and the sea, both of which in that context contain the dead. Thus, Paul’s changing Moses’ “sea” to the word “abyss” would not have struck most readers as being as drastic as it seems to English readers. As in Rom. 10:6 and going into heaven, the task of helping God with raising the dead illuminates the absurdity of human effort. We simply cannot do what God requires; we have to submit to His provision and accept his gift. Even during the Administration of the Law, there was an element of faith that was necessary for salvation.

**“(that is, to bring Christ up from among the dead.)”** The figure of speech, epitrechon, which is a type of parenthesis.[[195]](#footnote-21589) An epitrechon (which means “running along”) is a short parenthetical insertion placed in the text as an explanatory remark. It is not complete in itself, but needs the rest of the sentence to be complete.

**“from among the dead.”** See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Rom 10:8

**“in your heart.”** On the surface, Romans 10:8 seems to be untrue because the Word of God was not “in the heart” of the unbelievers, which is why they were said to ignore God’s righteousness (Rom. 10:3). However, there are deeper issues involved here. First, Paul is quoting Deuteronomy 30:14, and the Jews were taught the Law from the time they were little children. The knowledge of the Law was clearly in their hearts, i.e., in the depth of them. Beyond that, the Law, indeed, all God’s commands, are holy and good, and mankind has an inherent knowledge of good and evil that is part of our basic nature (Gen. 3:22: “man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil”). Romans 2:14 notes that even without the Mosaic Law, the Gentiles can do “by nature” the things contained in the Law. This inherent knowledge of good and evil is the reason that what is considered right and wrong, and crime and justice, are similar in every culture. For example, every culture treats lying and stealing as wrong. It is precisely because people do know good from evil that God can judge all mankind to a set of righteous standards. Although we all have a sin nature that makes us selfish and self-centered, which is why children need to be taught to share, we also know instinctively, from the pain we feel when we are mistreated, that love is the correct path and hatred hurts and is wrong.

In a similar vein, we all know that we sin. Everyone knows that they make mistakes. Therefore, at a fundamental level, we all know that if we are going to be “right,” it must be done for us. So in a very real sense, the “message of righteousness” is in our hearts, and if we diligently seek it, we will find it.

Rom 10:9

**“because.”** The Greek word translated as “because” is *hoti* (#3754 ὅτι), and it can be “because,” “since,” or “that.” In this case, the meaning “because” best fits the context and scope of Scripture. The translation “because” that opens Romans 10:9 is important because it clearly connects Romans 10:8 with Romans 10:9. The point God is making in verse 8 is “the message is near to you.” But how do we know the message is near to us? The answer is “because” all we have to do to be saved is confess and believe. A summary of Romans 10:6-9 is: “Righteousness from God is not difficult to obtain. Do not say you have to go up to heaven or down to the grave to get it. It is near you, “because” if you confess Jesus is Lord and believe God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

**“if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from among the dead, you will be saved.”** Romans 10:9 is one of the very succinct and clear verses in the Church Epistles that shows how to get saved, and also shows how easy it is to get saved. We get saved by confessing Jesus is Lord and believing (or “trusting”) that God raised him from the dead. It is that simple. Salvation is easy to receive because it is a free gift. Jesus paid for our salvation, so now we just have to receive the gift of life by confessing and believing in him.

When an unsaved person becomes saved, they change dramatically, but they change spiritually, not physically or mentally. The New Testament writers use the metaphor of birth and adoption to convey the reality of Christian salvation. When a person believes and is saved, they are “born again” (1 Pet. 1:23), and they are adopted as children of God (Eph. 1:5). God adopts us and gives us his spirit, which is God’s divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Furthermore, that divine nature is holy and is spirit, and it is the “sign” of God’s new covenant people, which is why the Bible says believers have been marked with the seal of God’s holy spirit (Eph. 1:14; cf. Acts 2:38). The believer becomes a new creation due to the spirit of God in them (2 Cor. 5:17). Furthermore, when a person is saved, they come into a spiritual union with Jesus Christ, and therefore are considered to be circumcised with him, baptized with him, crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, raised with him, and in God’s eyes, are even seated with him in heaven (Rom. 6:1-10; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:10-13).

When a person confesses and believes, they receive the gift of holy spirit (i.e., divine nature), but our flesh does not change. In fact, our flesh fights against our spirit (Gal. 5:17). Because our flesh does not change, and we cannot directly “feel” the spirit inside us, many Christians doubt their salvation, especially when they have sinned or are feeling disconnected from God. That is why it is important to believe what God says in the Bible about repentance and forgiveness of sin—that if we confess our sin, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

[For more information on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For information on whether people who have not heard of Jesus can be saved, see commentary on Rom. 2:14.]

**“confess.”** The Greek verb is *homologeō* (#3670 ὁμολογέω), which means “to say the same thing,” and in this case, the person must say that “Jesus Christ is Lord.” But “confessing” is more than just uttering the words because even the devil and demons know that Jesus is Lord (Matt. 8:29; James 2:19). To “confess” means to agree with and to act according to the truth that one admits. For the devil and demons, they do not submit to Jesus as the Lord, but actively defy him and seek to destroy his kingdom.

It could be argued that because we normally think of “confess” in a negative context, such as when someone confesses to a crime, that the word “profess” or even “declare” would be a better translation for *homologeō.* However, while those could be good translation options, the negative pressure against Christ and Christianity in the world seems to make “confess” a preferred translation. And sadly, many are afraid to openly “confess” Christ because of the intense negative social pressure. Also, using the word “confess” can imply that a person previously had another “lord” (i.e., themselves, money, power, etc.) and that they have “confessed” that previous wrongful lordship, and now make Jesus the rightful Lord of their life.

**“Lord.”** Almost every time the word “Lord” occurs in the New Testament, it is a translation of the Greek word *kurios* (#2962 κύριος). *Kurios* is a title indicating respect and position of authority. Some modern readers may get confused when the Scriptures say that God is called *kurios*, Jesus is called *kurios*, and other people are called *kurios*. But the word *kurios* was just a general term for someone who was above you in rank or position, like “boss” or “captain,” and sometimes it was used simply as a term of respect, just like the modern word “sir.” For example, if we need to ask a question to a stranger, we might start by saying, “Excuse me, sir,” even though the person is certainly not nobility, or perhaps is not above us in their station in life, and may not even be a good person at all.

One thing that complicates the study of the word “Lord” (*kurios*) is that some translations of the New Testament only translate *kurios* as “Lord” when it refers to Christ or God; when it refers to others, they use “master,” “sir,” “owner,” etc. This complicates what would otherwise be a simple study, and it falsely strengthens the belief that if both Jesus and God, and only Jesus and God, are called “Lord,” then Jesus must be God. That is simply not true. *Kurios* was a commonly used word in Greek, and, as was previously stated, was a masculine term of respect and social standing.

* God is called “Lord” (Matt. 1:20; 11:25; Acts 2:39; 1 Tim. 6:15; James 5:10).
* Jesus is called “Lord” (Matt. 7:21; Acts 10:36; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 4:5).
* Property owners are called “Lord” (Matt. 20:8; 21:40; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:13; Gal. 4:1, “owner” = *kurios*).
* Heads of households are called “Lord” (Mark 13:35; Luke 16:3, “owner” = *kurios*).
* Slave owners are called “Lord” (Matt. 10:24; 18:25, 31-32, 34; 24:45; Luke 12:43; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1, “master” = *kurios*).
* Husbands are called “Lord” (1 Pet. 3:6, “master” = *kurios*).

When Romans 10:9 tells us that we must confess Christ as *kurios* (“Lord”) to be saved, it is saying that we must recognize Jesus as the boss, the one who has authority over us. Both God and Jesus have authority over us because Jesus sits at God’s right hand and administers His work.

There are Trinitarians who assert that saying Jesus is “Lord” makes him God. But that is a fallacy of equivocation. Just because the same title is given to two different individuals, that doesn’t mean they are the same individual. You can have more than one “boss” at your job, but that doesn’t make the two bosses the same person. If calling someone “Lord” made them equal or identical to God, then all the other individuals mentioned in the list above who are called “Lord” would be God as well. But that logic just doesn’t work, and most Trinitarian scholars readily understand this and thus don’t use such a weak and fallible argument.

[For more information, see Word Study: “Lord.”]

**“believe in your heart.”** When it comes to being saved, some people needlessly worry if they are saved because they ask themselves, “Did I really believe it in my heart?” There is nothing mysterious or obscure about believing in your heart. To “believe in your heart” simply means “really believe it.” When reading this, are you wearing clothes? Do you really believe it? Of course you do! We all know the feeling of what it is to believe something. There is much proof that Jesus died for your sin and was raised from the dead. And if you believe it and confess it, then you will receive life in the age to come.

**“from among the dead.”** Kenneth Wuest translates the phrase, “from among the dead.”[[196]](#footnote-15173) [See commentary on Rom. 4:24.]

**“will be saved.”** The Greek verb translated as the phrase “will be saved” is *sōzō* (#4982 σῴζω), and it has a number of meanings depending on the context. Those meanings include “saved,” “rescued,” “delivered,” and “healed.” In the context of Romans 10:9-10, *sōzō* refers to being saved from everlasting death by being given everlasting life. Here in verse 9, *sōzō* is in the future tense (*sōthēsēi*, σωθήσῃ), which is very important. Romans 10:9 accurately points to the fact that our complete “salvation” is actually a future event. Christians are not “saved” yet in the full sense of the word. We are still subject to sin, sickness, and death. When a person is “saved” in the full sense of the word, they are resurrected or transformed into new, everlasting bodies, no longer subject to their sin nature, sickness, and death. What Christians have now is God’s promise of salvation and the holy spirit as a down payment of the full inheritance yet to come (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). Nevertheless, there are some aspects of salvation that Christians experience here and now, and because of that Scripture says that Christians have been saved (Rom. 8:24; Eph. 2:5, 8; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5), are being saved (1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor. 2:15; Phil. 2:12), and will be saved (Rom. 5:9-10; 10:9, 13; 13:11; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Pet. 1:5).

* Christians have been saved in that they are viewed as being acquitted of their guilt and have been transferred into the kingdom of God’s Son. The power of death no longer has dominion over them. And they have received a new identity and way of life.
* Christians are saved in the present sense in that they are free from the rule of sin in their lives, are able to experience the powers of the age to come, and can demonstrate the authority of Christ that they have received as his ambassadors and witnesses.
* Christians will be saved in the future sense in that at the Judgment they will not face the punishment of final death, but will receive everlasting life. They will finally be fully conformed to the image of Christ and share in the glory of immortality. The battle with sin and the flesh will be gone, the threat of evil and ungodliness will be vanquished, and they will enjoy being in the presence of God forever.

When properly understanding Romans 10:9, it is important to correctly understand the aorist tense of the Greek verb. It is sometimes taught that since the verbs “confess” (ὁμολογήσῃς, *homologēsēis*) and “believe” (πιστεύσῃς, *pisteusēis*) are in the aorist tense, that they must refer to a one-time action where if a person “confessed” and “believed” at one point in time, then they “will be saved,” i.e., their salvation is permanent and guaranteed. But that is not what the aorist tense signifies in Greek.[[197]](#footnote-20391) Regarding the flexibility of the aorist and the mistaken idea that it must refer to a one-time event, D. A. Carson aptly states, “The aorist, after all, is well-named: it is aorist, without a place, undefined. It simply refers to the action itself without specifying whether the action is unique, repeated, ingressive, instantaneous, past, or accomplished.”[[198]](#footnote-30482) Sometimes the aorist can refer to a single point in time (Matt. 27:50; Acts 2:23; Rom. 5:8), and at other times an ongoing or recurring duration of time (1 Cor 7:28; Heb. 11:33-34), but the aorist does not, in itself, denote an absolute, once-for-all action. Rather, the aorist tense is “unmarked for aspect and only describes an action viewed as a whole,”[[199]](#footnote-23604) which provides no indication as to the nature of the action but only stresses the fact of its occurrence, whether momentary, iterative, durative, or otherwise.[[200]](#footnote-23023)

A good example for how the aorist is used in a cummulative sense is Romans 12:1, which says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service.” The word “to present” (παραστῆσαι, *parastēsai*) is an aorist infinitive, but the use of the aorist in no way is indicating that Paul views the dedication of one’s body as a “sacrifice” that is a one-time action in life, i.e., you present yourself as a sacrifice one time and that covers you for your whole life. Instead, the aorist is meant to bring into view the entirety of an action or event (even one that pertains to the entire course of one’s life). Another example is Heb. 11:27, which says, “By trust he [Moses] left Egypt behind, not fearing the anger of the king, because he persevered as one who sees the Invisible One.” The aorist verb “persevered” (ἐκαρτέρησεν, *ekarterēsen*) is not communicating that Moses persevered one single time for just a moment—no, Moses’ perseverance was ongoing, again and again, year after year. This usage of the aorist is known as a “constative aorist,” which is used to represent the summary of an action (sometimes over long periods of time). Here, the aorist tense is presenting Moses’ life-long perseverance as a single action, which, of course, it is not. Moses’ perseverance is comprised of countless sequential actions that transpired throughout his life.

Another example is 1 John 5:21: “Little children, guard yourselves [aorist verb] from idols.” The Greek word translated as “guard yourselves” is an aorist verb, but it does not mean just guard yourselves one time and then you are guarded forever. Believers are to continually be on guard against worshiping idols. Another example is Matthew 6:6, where Jesus taught, “But when you pray, go into [aorist verb] your inner room, and after closing [aorist verb] your door, pray [aorist verb] to your Father.” Praying is not a one-time action. We pray again and again. Another example is Philippians 2:12: “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed [aorist verb]...continue to work out your own salvation.” Even though Paul used an aorist verb, he is not saying that the people in Philippi obeyed only once and that was good enough. The context makes it clear that the believers in Philippi had developed a pattern of obedience, and Paul is encouraging them to keep on obeying. Another example is Revelation 20:4. Speaking of the believers who will be resurrected, John writes: “they came to life [aorist verb], and reigned [aorist verb] with Christ 1,000 years.” The living and reigning with Christ was a durative action. It lasted 1,000 years. Another example is Ephesians 2:2, which is speaking about sins “in which you once walked [aorist verb].” The Greek verb translated as “walked” is an aorist, but the action it communicates in Ephesians 2:2 is a continuous and repetitive walking in sin, not a one-time sinful action.

The above examples show that the aorist tense does not always communicate a “one and done” action. D. A. Carson writes, “But the very reason why the aorist tense can, in its relations with specific contexts, portray an immense range of kinds of action, is precisely because it is more plastic than the other tenses. It has a more poorly defined semantic shape than other tenses.”[[201]](#footnote-29963) Carson is certainly correct about the context determining the exact meaning of an aorist verb and whether it is instantanious, repeated, ingressive, durative, constative, accomplished, etc. It is the context, not the aorist verb itself, that determines the meaning. The assumption that an aorist must indicate a one-time action is simply not true. The aorist can indicate a one-time action or event that occurs at one point in time (cf. Jesus’ death; Rom. 5:8), but it does not indicate this in all instances as has been shown in the examples above, to which many more examples could be added. When it comes to Romans 10:9, the remote context comes from many other verses on salvation, for example, 1 Corinthians 15:2; Colossians 1:22-23; Hebrews 10:38-39; and 1 Peter 1:5, which indicate that confession and trust in Christ are not just one-time actions, but must be continued. Thankfully, trusting that Christ is Lord and that God raised him from the dead is easy. It may not be easy to trust ourselves, or to live a godly life, but that is not how a Christian gets saved in the first place, and it is not required to be saved. Our salvation is guarded by our trust in God and Christ (1 Pet. 1:5; Gal. 3:7, 9).

Rom 10:10

**“resulting in.”** The phrase “resulting in” is a translation of the Greek preposition *eis* (#1519 εἰς), which is often used to indicate result.

**“Righteousness…salvation.”** God uses both “righteousness” and “salvation” in this verse because, although they both are connected to everlasting life and thus in a sense point toward the same ultimate thing, they do refer to slightly different aspects of the human condition in the eyes of God.

When a person confesses Christ and believes he is the living Lord, that person becomes “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3), is marked with the seal of God’s holy spirit (Eph. 1:13-14), gets a new divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), becomes part of the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), is identified with Christ in all its facets (Rom. 6:5), and is declared “righteous” in the sight of God (Rom. 3:22, 26, 30; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:24). That is why even a brand-new believer is righteous in the sight of God even when they haven’t done anything besides trust in Christ (Rom. 10:10; Rom. 5:1; 8:30, 33).

“Salvation” is slightly different from being declared righteous in the sight of God. The consummation of a believer’s “salvation” is future (Rom. 10:9, “will be saved”). For the Christian, that salvation will happen when Jesus returns and resurrects or transforms our bodies to be like his glorious body (Phil. 3:21).

Salvation is a diverse topic in Scripture. That is because “saved” and “salvation” have several different meanings in Greek. They include: to rescue from danger or destruction (Matt. 8:25; 27:49); to keep safe (Acts 2:40); to heal or make well (Matt. 9:21-22; 14:30; Mark 5:23; Luke 7:50; Acts 14:9); and to save or rescue from everlasting destruction (Matt. 10:22; 1 Cor. 3:15; and many other places in the NT). Furthermore, some verses in the New Testament speak of Christians as having been “saved” in the past, being “saved” right now in the present, and that they will be “saved” in the future.

Romans 10:9-10 is written in a straightforward and clear way so that everyone can see what is the condition that God requires for salvation. When a person confesses and believes, they are declared righteous in the sight of God and are promised life in the age to come (i.e., everlasting life) in God’s kingdom.

[For more info about the past, present, and future dimensions of salvation, see commentary on Rom. 10:9, and see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:2.]

Rom 10:11

**“put to shame.”** See commentary on Romans 9:33.

Rom 10:12

**“there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.”** This is more fully stated in Galatians 3:28, which says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus.”

**“call on him.”** This is a prayer formula, and refers to prayer to Jesus Christ (see commentary on 1 Cor. 1:2).

Rom 10:13

“**everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** This is an exact quotation of the Septuagint version of Joel 2:32. The Hebrew text uses Yahweh for “Lord” and the Septuagint Greek uses *kurios*.

**“calls on the name of the Lord.”** This is a prayer formula, and refers to prayer to Jesus Christ (see commentary on 1 Cor. 1:2).

Rom 10:15

This is an allusion to Isaiah 52:7 (cf. Nah. 1:15).

Rom 10:16

**“not all.”** Figure of speech tapeinosis, “understatement.”[[202]](#footnote-22452) It is not that “not all” believed. The majority of Israel, like the majority of all mankind, has rejected God. The figure of speech, by understating the truth, actually emphasizes the point, and emphasizes the fact that very few Jews believed.

[See Word Study: “Tapeinosis.”]

**“obey.”** The Greek word is *hupakouō* (#5219 ὑπακούω, pronounced hoop-a-'koo-ō), from *akouō*, to hear, to listen. *Hupakouō* means to listen and then to act, or “to obey,” but it is based on the fact that the person first listened. Thus, there is a richness in the Greek that is hard to capture in English. When the text says they did not “obey,” it is saying that they did not pay any attention to what they were hearing, and so they did not obey.

**“Our message.”** The Greek is the noun *akoē* (#189 ἀκοή), and it refers to what is heard.

Rom 10:17

**“So.”** After making the case that people need to hear to believe, he sums up, “so” (cf. NIV), trust and “the” trust [the Christian Faith] comes through hearing.

**“trust.”** The Greek contains the article “the.” It is not only “trust” [faith] in general that comes by hearing, but trust for salvation, leading to “the” [Christian] Faith. The context of this section starts in Rom. 10:1 with Paul’s desire that the Israelites would be saved; he then moves in Rom. 10:8-9 to the word of trust spoken to bring people to salvation, then on to calling on the Lord to be saved (Rom. 10:13), and then the need for missionaries to speak of this great salvation (Rom. 10:14-15). Thus, by Rom. 10:17, it is clear from all this context that “the” trust being spoken of is trust that relates to all aspects of the Christian life.

**“message about Christ.”** Primarily a genitive of relation, the message about Christ, but it certainly includes the words “from Christ,” (genitive of origin). The word about Christ, and the words of Christ, both lead men to salvation and “the faith.” When one word (of) has two applicable meanings, it is the figure of speech amphibologia, “double entendre.”

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

**Romans Chapter 11**

Rom 11:1

**“I ask then, has God rejected his people?”** The question is logical and follows from the context. In Romans 9:30-33 Paul writes that the Gentiles, the non-Jews, “obtained righteousness” but the Jews did not. Then, in Romans 10:1-4 Paul makes it clear that the Jews were not saved, but there was salvation (referred to as “righteousness”) for “everyone who believes.” Then Paul goes on in Romans chapter 10 to further elucidate a theme that had been a theme of Romans from early on, that righteousness comes through trust, not through the Law. Given that, and also that anyone—Jew or Gentile—who trusted in Christ could be saved, it was logical to ask in Romans 11:1, “has God rejected His people?” The answer is not that God rejected the Jews, but rather that He had now accepted the Gentiles along with the Jews, and in light of the accomplished work of Christ, salvation was now by trust in Christ (Rom. 3:21-30). Sadly, the Jews rejected Christ, and in doing so “they stumbled over the stumbling stone” (Rom. 9:32) and were rejected by God.

**“For I also am an Israelite.”** Paul asks if God has rejected His people, and he then answers, “Absolutely not!” The proof that God had not rejected His people, the Jews, was that Paul, and many other Jews, had accepted Christ as Lord and thus were accepted as part of God’s people. They were saved and were part of the Body of Christ. They were the “remnant” that Paul speaks of in Romans 11:5. If God had completely rejected the Jews, then even Paul could not have been saved. Paul emphasizes that point here in Romans 11:1 by pointing out that he is of the seed of Abraham and the tribe of Benjamin and therefore obviously a Jew, and yet he is saved and accepted by God.

In New Testament times, just as in Old Testament times, God made a provision for his people, the Jews. In Old Testament times, if they would accept Him and obey His commandments they would be saved. So too, after the death of Christ, God made a provision for the Jews to be saved by accepting Christ, and many did. Thus, as Paul states in Romans 11:1, God did not reject his people the Jews.

Rom 11:2

**“God did not reject His people.”** Here in Romans 11:2, Paul continues to develop the point that he made in Romans 11:1. In Romans 11:1 Paul asked the question, “Has God rejected His people,” and then he answered, “Absolutely not!” In contrast to asking a question, here in Romans 11:2, he makes the affirmative statement that God has not rejected his people. Then to make his point he brings up the record about Elijah. In Elijah’s time, it looked as if God had rejected His people, but in actuality, there was a remnant of them left, a remnant of people who had not rejected God and thus were accepted by God. Here in Romans 11:2, Paul is making the point that the same situation that existed in Elijah’s time existed in Paul’s time: that people who accepted God on His terms were accepted by God, and that included the Jews. The Jews were not rejected by God; the Jews who accepted God’s provision were not rejected but were saved (cf. Rom. 11:5).

However, the majority of the Jews rejected God by rejecting His provision for them, the Messiah. In fact, so many Jews rejected God and His Messiah that as a nation the Jews were rejected by God. That is stated in Romans 11:15, which in a cursory reading seems to contradict what Paul said in Romans 11:1-2. How can God’s people be not rejected (Rom. 11:1-2) but rejected (Rom. 11:15)? The answer is logical: God did not reject His people but accepted those who accepted Him, but so many Jews rejected God that as a nation God did reject the Jews, and that played out in history, because starting in 70 AD and concluding in 135 AD when the Romans attacked Israel and Jerusalem, it was so devastated that it ceased to exist as a nation.

**“whom He foreknew.”** This is not speaking of individual predestination, but rather that God foreknew His people, Israel—Israel was part of His plan of salvation. That God is speaking of the nation of Israel is clear from Romans 11:1, and the phrase “whom He foreknew” is explained by realizing that God knew He would have a people long before Israel was a nation. He promised the Messiah right after the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15) and picked Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be the line through which the Messiah would come. Then He forged Israel into a nation after they left Egypt and made a covenant with them to be their God (Exod. 24:3-8). Israel was very important to God and He did not forsake them, as the opening verses of Romans 11 show.

**“an appeal to God.”** Here in the early verses of Romans 11, the Greek uses a present tense verb in places where we would normally expect a past tense verb. This is a “historical present,” a literary device that uses the present tense to speak of an event that happened in the past. This usage portrays the event vividly, placing us in the middle of the action as though we are there to see Elijah appeal to God, and hear the divine answer “say” (present tense, Rom. 11:4) back to Elijah, essentially, that all of God’s people have not been rejected; there is a remnant of true Israel that remains (cf. Rom. 9:6, “not all those who are descended from Israel are truly Israel” [NET]). The question Paul was concerned with in the present time was whether Israel had been cast off (Rom. 11:1-2). By employing the historical present, Paul vividly resurrects Elijah’s conversation with God from the past and brings it to bear on this question in the present, concluding with, “In the same way, then, at the present time there has also come to be a remnant…” (Rom. 11:5).

Rom 11:3

**“life.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), often translated “soul.” The Greek word *psuchē* has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Rom 11:4

**“*God’s* response.”** This is from *chrēmatismos* (#5538 χρηματισμός), the noun form of the verb *chrēmatizō* (#5537 χρηματίζω). See commentary on Matthew 2:12, “instructed *by God*.” The word suggests a divine response, and hence can be taken to mean “*God’s* response.”

**“men.”** The Greek is *anēr* (#435 ἀνήρ), “men,” not the generic Greek word for “people.” The reference to “men” was no doubt to be a comfort to Elijah, because it meant that part of God’s army on earth was still intact. Gideon only needed 300 men and God’s help to defeat the Midianite army of 135,000.

Rom 11:5

**“choice on the basis of grace.”** Compare NASB: “according to *God’s* gracious choice.” The Greek literally reads, “according to the choice of grace.” To translate “choice of grace” as a remnant “chosen by grace” could be confusing, as though God specifically chose each member of the remnant “by grace.” This is not the idea. Rather, the fact that there exists a remnant at all from national Israel is due to God’s gracious choice. Even though the majority of the Jews rejected God, He made the choice because of His grace to accept those who accepted Him. God did not have to do that. He could have simply rejected all the Jews by virtue of the fact that they were all under the covenant they made together and could have been treated as a whole. But God chose by grace to accept the remnant who accepted Him. This truly is grace, because even people who accept God are sinners, and don’t deserve His mercy and everlasting life.

Rom 11:9

**“*dining* table.”** The Greek is *trapeza* (#5132 τράπεζα) which means a “table,” but sometimes that only meant a place where people ate. It is clear from the context of Psalm 69:22 that the “table” being referred to is a dining table. The “dining table” of the biblical world, especially in early times but even in Roman society, was not at all like our modern “table” around which people sat in chairs. We can tell from the verse that in this case, David had in mind the most common and most simple “table” of the biblical world, which was just a mat or blanket on the ground. One might have a hard time imagining how a “table” could become a “snare,” but that was not hard to imagine in the Eastern culture, especially in David’s time when many people lived in tents and most houses had dirt floors and little actual furniture. The “table” was a cloth or mat that was laid on the floor which could cause someone to trip.

There were other “tables” in the biblical world besides a rug or mat, although that was the most common table. Some people would have a low table that people reclined around. They would eat sitting on the ground or lying down with their feet behind them, usually propping themselves up with some pillows or folded blankets. A person eating in this position could have someone wash their feet while they were eating, just as Jesus was eating when a woman came and washed his feet (Luke 7:38). Ancient tables discovered by archaeologists are very low, seldom more than 18 inches off the ground, so food could be reached by guests who would sit on mats on the ground. Occasionally the very wealthy would have a table more like our Western table with some kind of chair or stool, but they were rare.

People lay on their left side and ate with their right hand—the left hand was used for washing oneself after going to the bathroom and was considered the hand of cursing and not used to eat with, especially out of a common bowl.

Mats on the ground as tables were common in the Roman world too, although the wealthy Romans would eat in a more formal situation. The formal Roman dining room was called a *triclinium*, from the Greek word *tri*, meaning three, and *klinē*, which was a kind of couch or perhaps more accurately, a wide, cushioned, bench. The formal Roman dining room had three couches forming three sides of a square, with each couch being long and wide enough for three diners, for a total of nine people. A low square table was in the middle of the square, and servants could get to the table from the open side of the square. The diners would recline on their left side, and eat with their right hands. It was common to have music and entertainment of various kinds in these formal situations. The triclinium became popular among the Greeks hundreds of years before Christ, although in Greek culture, women were excluded from the meal. The Romans began using the triclinium, but allowed mixed company to eat.

The context of Psalm 69:22 is very important to understanding why this quotation is used here. The enemies put poison into David’s food and gave him vinegar instead of wine to drink, so David asks for vengeance. In this case, the Jews have ignored God and thus were bringing God’s vengeance on themselves.

**“retribution.”** The people spurned God, and had a retribution coming to them.[[203]](#footnote-16174)

Rom 11:11

**“so as to fall *beyond recovery*.”** This phrase is a result clause which includes the Greek preposition *hina* (translated here as “so as”) with a verb in the subjunctive mood[[204]](#footnote-26060) (see Word Study: “Hina”). Paul is asking—using the Greek word *mē* (translated as “not” above) which expects a negative answer—if Israel stumbled with the result that they have fallen irrevocably (cf. NET translation: “they did not stumble into an irrevocable fall, did they?”). The word for fall is *piptō* (#4098 πίπτω), which here has the sense of “be completely ruined.”[[205]](#footnote-24170) Robertson says this is the “effective aorist” of *piptō*, meaning “to fall completely and for good.”[[206]](#footnote-11771) The REV captures both the sense of result and the irrevocableness of the fall in question.

It is important to recognize that the *hina* clause (*hina* is translated “so as to” above) is a result clause. *Hina* can introduce a purpose clause, but if that were the case the verse would be stating that God purposely made Israel fall so He could bring in the Gentiles, but that is not what God did. God never wants people to fail or to turn away from Him. Many of the Israelite people turned away from God from their very beginning as a nation in the wilderness wanderings after leaving Egypt, and they completely ignored His efforts to call them back to obedience. Eventually, the disobedience of Israel led to God turning more directly to the Gentiles, the non-Israelites, and that is what we see here. Interestingly, as we see in some examples in the book of Acts, that the Gentiles believed did in fact make many Jews jealous (cf. Acts 13:45; 14:2, 19; 17:5, 13; 18:12; 19:9; 21:27; 23:12; 24:1, 9).

**“because of their transgression, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles.”** Besides the move of God to accept people by trust, which opened the door for Gentiles to freely believe, the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews caused many missionaries, including Paul and others, to go to the Gentiles to try to get them to accept Christ and get saved (cf. Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:28).

**“in order to.”** The Greek is *eis to* with the infinitive, which here clearly indicates God’s purpose or intent. Once Israel turned away from God, which was their decision, God then grafted the Gentiles into Israel. He did it to make salvation as available to the Gentiles as it was to the Jews, but He also knew that it would make some Jews jealous.

Rom 11:12

**“how much more *riches will* their complete number *bring*!”** The complete number of the Gentiles will bring in “much more riches” than we have here on earth today because it will be associated with the Kingdom of Christ and the resurrection of the dead; all the righteous dead will be raised and will be with Christ in his wonderful kingdom.

Romans 11:12 speaks of the “complete number” or the “fullness” (i.e., the full number) of the Gentiles, and in this context that is referring to the full number of the Gentiles who will be saved and thus bring the end, the Kingdom of Christ. God has some criteria that must be met before He sends Christ to set up his kingdom on earth. That criteria may involve a certain number of people, or it may be that God, who knows the hearts of all people, will know when no one else on earth will be saved, or there may be other criteria… God has not told us what the criteria are, so we do not know. But we do know that at some future date, the “complete number” of Gentiles who will be saved will be saved, and then God will send the Lord Jesus Christ back to earth. Today God is being patient because He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but rather He desires that everyone would repent and be saved (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4).

As Romans 11:12 says, the “complete number” of the Gentiles will bring “much more riches” than we have today. That is because when the complete number of people to be saved is reached, God will send the Lord Jesus Christ and establish the Kingdom of Christ on earth. The start of Christ’s earthly kingdom will be associated with the resurrection of the righteous dead, the first resurrection, and there will be many other riches in the kingdom as well.

Jesus Christ had spoken years earlier about the time of the Gentiles being completed (Luke 21:24), and said it would be associated with other signs “and then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory…when you see these things coming to pass, know that the Kingdom of God is near” (Luke 21:27, 31). Jesus Christ promised that when he came back he would receive the believers to himself and they would be with him: “I will come again and will receive you to myself so that where I am you will be also” (John 14:3). Jesus will receive the believers to himself by raising them from the dead, and they would then be with him in his kingdom.

It is because the complete number of the Gentiles and the complete number of the Jews is associated with the return of Christ that Paul says what he does about their acceptance resulting in the resurrection of the dead in Romans 11:15: “For if their [the Jews] rejection *has resulted in* reconciliation for the world, what *will* their acceptance *result in* but life from among the dead?”

[For more on the different resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Rom 11:14

**“if somehow I can make my own people jealous and save some of them.”** It would seem logical that in turning to the Gentiles to evangelize them, Paul was rejecting his people the Jews. But here in Romans 11:14 we see that in Paul’s mind, his efforts to evangelize the Gentiles were not just because he wanted them to be saved, but also that in getting them saved he would make Israel jealous and then some of them would be saved. Like God, Paul wanted everyone to be saved.

Rom 11:15

**“For if their rejection *has resulted in* reconciliation for the world, what *will* their acceptance *result in* but life from among the dead?”** Romans 11:15 is saying that the rejection of God by the majority of the Jews resulted in “reconciliation for the world,” i.e., it opened the door for Gentiles to be saved just as they were, so the acceptance of the complete number of Jews who will believe will result in Christ returning, setting up his kingdom on earth, and raising the dead.

To be properly understood, this verse has to be tightly connected to the context and flow of Romans 11. The “rejection” in this verse is God’s rejection of the Jews who reject God. This is the same meaning of Jews, Israel, or “His people” that we see, for example, in Romans 11:1, which says that God has not rejected “His people” the Jews, and we can be sure of that because Paul was not rejected. He was a Jew, and also God has a remnant who believed and were not rejected (Rom. 11:1-5, and see commentary on Rom. 11:1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

God cannot say in Romans 11:1-2 that God has not rejected the Jews and then say in Romans 11:15 that He has rejected them without some explanation. The point in Romans 11:1-5 and 11:15 is that the Jews who rejected God were rejected, and the Jews who accepted God were and will be accepted. Furthermore, that same truth applies to the Gentiles. Thus, the phrase “that salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:11) does not mean every Gentile is saved, and the “complete number” of the Gentiles does not mean every Gentile (Rom. 11:12), but only those Gentiles who accept God and His Son will be saved. To understand Romans 11:15 we have to have the same kind of understanding that we had to understand Romans 11:1-5 and 11:12. In Romans 11:15, “their rejection” does not mean that every Jew rejected God and thus were rejected by God, and similarly, “their acceptance” does not mean that every Jew will come to accept God and His Son. However, the fact is that so many Jews rejected God and the Lord Jesus that from a numbers point of view, the Jews as a nation did reject God and thus were rejected by Him. Those Jews who rejected God were rejected and those Jews who accept God will be accepted by God, and when the number of Jews who accept God is complete—whatever that number is—just as with the “complete number” of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:12), then God will send His Son from heaven who will set up His kingdom on earth and raise the dead. That is why the “acceptance” of the Jews will result in “life from among the dead.”

James Dunn points out that Romans 11:15 reemphasizes the point Paul made in Romans 11:12, and Dunn goes on to say, “where in v 12 he [Paul] spoke of ‘riches for the world,’ here [in Rom. 11:15] he speaks of ‘reconciliation of the world’; and where in v 12 he was content with a ‘how much more’ formula, here he expresses the ‘how much more’ as ‘nothing other than life from the dead.’ The balance between ‘reconciliation’ and ‘life from the dead’ recalls the somewhat similar balance of 5:10 and suggests that Paul is again thinking of the death of Christ as the means of reconciliation (as in Rom. 5:10). And ‘life from the dead’ could hardly be understood by Paul’s readers as anything other than a reference to the final resurrection. Here, more clearly than anywhere else so far in the letter, Paul expresses a sense of the nearness of the final consummation of God’s purpose for the world. The ‘more than’ the riches of reconciliation is the resurrection of the body, the complete redemption of the world (Rom. 8:21-23). Nothing less than this is Paul’s goal, the goal of his mission to the Gentiles: to (help) trigger off that final crescendo, when Gentile ‘riches’ will result in Jewish ‘fullness,’ will result in ‘life from the dead.’”[[207]](#footnote-24709)

**“from among the dead.”**[[208]](#footnote-12151) For the translation, “from among the dead,” see commentary on Romans 4:24.

Rom 11:19

**“so that.”** In the Greek this is a *hina* (“so that”) with a verb in the subjunctive mood (“could be grafted in”) purpose-result clause. The branches were broken off (because of their disobedience) for the purpose of grafting in Gentiles, and his breaking them off resulted in room for the Gentiles.

[For more information, see Word Study: “Hina.”]

Rom 11:20

**“fear.”** The English does not let us exactly reproduce the meaning of the Greek, or the Semitic understanding behind it. In both Hebrew and Greek, “fear” had the two meanings: being in awe of something, and being afraid. The idea is that God is so holy and powerful that, while we are in awe of Him, there is also an element of fear. We are not to be arrogant, but we are to “stand in awe” (NAB, RSV, NRSV) and “be afraid” [if we disobey] (HCSB, NIV84). Most versions, like the REV, use the word “fear” and try to educate the reader about its two different meanings.

Rom 11:22

**“kindness.”** See commentary on Galatians 5:22, “kindness.”

**“fell.”** The context reveals that this is falling into unbelief (Rom. 11:11, 20)

Rom 11:25

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“sacred secret.”** We translate the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

**“a hardening has come on part of Israel.”** This phrase has been often misunderstood, in part because of translations such as the ESV which reads, “a partial hardening has come upon Israel.” Translations that read that way or similarly try to remain true to the grammar of the Greek but cause confusion because it can seem like a Jew can be part hard and part soft. Although it is true that “Israel” taken as a nation is indeed that way, “Israel” is a collective noun, made up of millions of individuals. We feel it is important to translate the verse in a way that makes Paul’s meaning clear. The New Living Testament captures the sense very well in its translation, but drifts too far away from the Greek for our taste: “Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ.”

Throughout the history of the Jews, there have always been Jews who obeyed God and Jews who did not. That line of demarcation between obedience and disobedience became very defined when Jesus Christ came. Sadly, most Jews rejected their Messiah, something that was made even easier when the doctrine of the Trinity developed.

Rom 11:28

**“which *turns out* to benefit you.”** God turned the fact that the Jews rejected Him into an occasion to bless the non-Jews, the Gentiles. Although the Greek text more literally reads “for your sake” here, that is not the best translation because it can be so easily misunderstood. The phrase “for your sake” might be taken to mean that God worked such that the Jews purposely became God’s enemies just so He could bless the Gentiles, which is not the case. Therefore, the translation must be something such as “they are enemies, which *turns out to* benefit you.” However, there is no such contrast in the last part of the sentence. God still “loves” Israel because of the promise that He made to the “fathers” of Israel.[[209]](#footnote-27508)

**“they are beloved because of *the promises to* the Fathers.”** God made promises and even a covenant with the “fathers” of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God told them their seed would be multiplied like the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore, and that they would have the land of Israel “forever.” God repeated the promise that He would give the land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants many times, and said it in slightly different ways. He told Abraham that he and his descendants would get the land (Gen. 12:7; 13:15-17; 15:7, 18; 17:8). He told it to Isaac (Gen. 26:3). He told it to Jacob (Gen. 28:13; 35:12; 48:4). Then over and over He told Israel about the promise or that He would give them the land (e.g., Exod. 6:4, 8; 12:25; 13:5, 11; Lev. 14:34; 20:24; 23:10; 25:2). This fact was also stated by the Psalmist (Ps. 105:8-10). God also promised Abraham that his seed would be a great multitude on a number of different occasions (Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 16:10 (via Hagar); Gen. 17:6; 22:17).

It was because of the promises and covenants that God made with the “fathers” and with Israel that, even when they sinned repeatedly, Israel was not entirely consumed. By the time of Malachi, Israel was still sinning greatly, but God said in Malachi, “For I, Yahweh, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). In other words, God told the people that He would not alter His promises, and that was the reason the people of Israel were not totally consumed. They were attacked and scattered, but there was always a remnant left, just as in the days of Elijah and as Romans 11 says.

Rom 11:29

**“since the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”** Romans 11:29 has been taken out of context by many Christians, who misapply it to individuals and think that the verse is saying that no matter how a Christian behaves, God will not take from them any gift or calling they have received from Him. But Romans 11:29 is not speaking about individuals, it is speaking about God’s dealings with Israel. However, even so, it shows how Israel as a body of people linked by heritage lost their privileges due to sin and God blessed the Gentiles in their place, but Israel—the Israel who believe—will eventually be accepted again.

In Romans 11:1, Paul asks if God has rejected “His people,” and concludes that God has not rejected them “all;” there is a remnant that was not rejected. But we must pay attention to what Paul actually said. After saying that God had not rejected “His people,” Paul pointed out that he himself was an Israelite, and so if he was an Israelite, then God did not reject “all” Israel. But why wasn’t Paul rejected? Paul was not rejected because he did not reject God—Paul accepted how God had moved in history and so Paul believed in God’s Messiah, Jesus, and thus was accepted by God.

Romans 11 goes on to mention that in Elijah’s time, there was a remnant of 7,000 men preserved by God (Rom. 11:4). But the 7,000 were not just any “men,” they were preserved as a remnant because they believed in Yahweh and His law and they had not “bowed the knee to Baal.” The Israelites who worshiped Baal were not part of the remnant. Then, in Romans 11:5, Paul writes, “at the present time there has also come to be a remnant” of Israel, a remnant of chosen people. But it is important to notice that like during the time of Elijah, the remnant of chosen people at Paul’s present time were people who chose God by believing.

Romans 11:7 then goes on to say that Israel did not obtain what they had been seeking—except those who were chosen (because they chose God!)—and the rest of Israel was hardened. Israel transgressed, stumbled, and fell, and it was because they fell that salvation came to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11-12). Israel was rejected by God, but “their rejection *resulted in* the reconciling of the world,” i.e., the Gentiles (Rom. 11:15). Romans 11 goes on to say that there were “natural branches” (Jews) who were “broken off” (Rom. 11:21), but that Israel will one day come back into favor with God (Rom. 11:25).

As it is now, the Gentiles who believe—who stand by trust (Rom. 11:20) are included in “Israel” and historical Israel that has rejected God and His Messiah, who were “broken off because of unbelief” (Rom. 11:20), “if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in” again (Rom. 11:23).

So “Israel” had gifts and callings from God, but because of their unbelief, their “disobedience” (Rom. 11:30-31), they were broken off and lost those special privileges. But because of God’s love for Israel and His mercy, Israel (believing Israel) will one day be accepted by God again. But it is clear from history as well as Romans 11 that individual Israelites were also “broken off” and not considered part of the remnant because they rejected God. So on both a national scale and a personal scale, Israel could in effect lose the gifts and calling they had from God.

We also note that individuals lost the gifts they had from God due to sin and disobedience. For example, King Saul lost the kingdom he had been given by God (1 Sam. 15:26-28). Solomon also sinned greatly and lost the kingdom God gave him (cf. 2 Sam. 7:13-15 with 1 Kings 11:11). Eli and his sons were such sinners that they lost the privilege of being the High Priests for Israel, which then extended down and affected their descendants (1 Sam. 2:30-36). Also, history is full of men and women who lost the effectiveness and spiritual energizing of their ministries due to arrogance and sin.

Romans 11:29 is not a guarantee from God that if a person receives something from Him, they will never lose it. Rather, it is an explanation of why God will work with both Jews and Gentiles to restore to believing Israel some of its rights and privileges.

Rom 11:32

**“imprisoned.”** The Greek word is *sugkleiō* (#4788 συγκλείω, pronounced soon-'clay-ō), and it means, to enclose on all sides, imprison, encage. Everyone alive has been trapped by sin and disobedience. No one can escape on their own, it has to be the work of someone outside of themselves; in this case, Jesus Christ. This applies to both the Jews and Gentiles. All men, due to sin nature, have a natural tendency to defy God; we are all caged together in defiance.

Rom 11:34

Romans 11:34-35 are similar to 1 Corinthians 2:16 (see commentary on Isa. 40:13).

**Romans Chapter 12**

Rom 12:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“reasonable service”** The Greek word for reasonable is *logikos* (#3050 λογικός), and the exact meaning in this verse is quite hard to pin down. Thayer points out that the word was a favorite of ancient Greek philosophers, who used it in the sense of “rational,” from the use of *logos* as “reason.”[[210]](#footnote-25941) Thus, if it were used that way in the verse, “your reasonable service” would be a good translation. However, *logikos* was also used in a sense that referred to what belonged to the realm of words and logic versus the realm of matter. If used in that sense, “reasonable” stands opposed not to that which is foolish or *un*reasonable, but rather to that which is material, external, or of the flesh, such as the ritualistic and outward worship of the Jews. This is why many versions go with the translation “spiritual service” or “spiritual worship.” We felt, however, that to English speakers, “spiritual” was more misleading than “reasonable.” For us as Christians, our service and worship should come from within, not from without, and thus with our mind and spirit, not our flesh. Nigel Turner sets forth one more possibility for the meaning of *logikos*, and that is “of the Word,” due to the Christian community beginning to associate *logos* with the Word.[[211]](#footnote-31837) That is a possibility also. The only other time that this word is used is in 1 Pet. 2:2 as “milk of the word” (see commentary on 1 Pet. 2:2). We think that all three of these possible definitions are true to an extent, but think that “reasonable service” makes the most sense in an English translation. Furthermore, since the concept of “reasonable” is an important part of the Greek word, it seemed important to bring that out into English.

Rom 12:2

**“conformed to the pattern.”** The Greek word translated “conformed to the pattern” is *suschēmatizō* (#4964 συσχηματίζω), which means to be formed or conformed to a mold or pattern. The Devil has an agenda to make the world, and the people in it, more and more ungodly. Christians will be rewarded for not conforming to the pattern of the age, and for remaining godly. Nyland has not to “go along with” the current age.[[212]](#footnote-16765)

**“age.”** The Greek noun translated “age” is *aiōn* (#165 αἰών). The Greek word *aiōn* gets translated “age,” most of the time, but it is important that we think of “age” the same way the Greeks did. Generally, when we think of “age,” we mean a period of time. Although the word did refer to a period of time, it referred to the thinking and attitudes that existed in that age. Richard Trench writes that *aiōn* refers to “All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to cease and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral, atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again, inevitably to exhale,—all this is included in the *aiōn*….”[[213]](#footnote-25772)

Just as the owners of a Mexican or Chinese restaurant work hard to create an “atmosphere” that represents their home country, the Adversary works hard to make sure that this world has an “ungodly atmosphere.” We need to think through the implications of the statement that we are not to be conformed to the pattern of this “age,” i.e., the pattern of the ungodly atmosphere in which we are immersed. It helps a lot to understand and acknowledge that this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) is not an accident. The Adversary has worked hard for generations to put in place customs and ways of doing things that are contrary to God’s love and commands. This evil age did not “just happen.” Also, we must then realize the pressures that the culture puts on people to conform to those ungodly ways, and the price a person will have to pay to not conform to the ways of the world. There is serious pressure brought from the culture against people who want to live truly godly lives. That is why Scripture can promise: “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). As children of God, Christians should be willing to pay the price to serve and obey God, and we know that we will be richly rewarded in the Kingdom for our work for God now.

**“be transformed.”** The Greek verb is *metamorphoō* (#3339 μεταμορφόω), “be transformed” and it is in the passive voice. We do not actively transform ourselves. We control our thinking, and as we do, transformation takes place.

**“renewing.”** The Greek word translated “renewing” is *anakainōsis* (#342 ἀνακαίνωσις), and it is a compound word built from the prefix *ana* (“up, “again”) and kainos (#2537 καινός), which means “new” but generally refers to something new in quality rather than something that is new in time, which is the Greek word *neos* (#3501 νέος). This is a case where both meanings of the prefix *ana* are important, but only one can be easily brought into English. The word *anakainōsis* could and does refer to “upnewing” one’s mind, that is, bringing one’s thoughts up into the realm of God and of living a godly life instead of keeping one’s mind on earthly things. Colossians 3:2 says, “Think about the things that are above, not the things that are on the earth.” Christians need to learn to take their focus off of worldly things and bring their mind “up” to a new level, literally we must “upnew” our minds. The Fribergs define *anakainōsis* as “the action by which a person becomes spiritually new and different.[[214]](#footnote-19340) Thayer defines *anakainōsis* as a “complete change for the better.”[[215]](#footnote-19650)

The word *anakainōsis* can be understood as a renewing of the mind if one takes it to mean that the mind that is focused on the things of God gets continually pulled down into worldly thinking by events and circumstances that happen on earth, and so it must be continually “renewed” by bringing one’s thoughts back up into the realm of God and godliness.

**“test and approve.”** The Greek word translated as “test and approve” is *dokimazō* (#1381 δοκιμάζω), which means “to draw a conclusion about worth on the basis of testing.”[[216]](#footnote-15705) Although the REV generally tries to stay away from using an English phrase as the translation of a Greek word, in this case, the meaning is clear enough that a general exception needs to be made. In many situations, the Christian does not start out by knowing the will of God. Too many Christians who do not know the will of God in a given situation either do nothing or pray for an inordinately long time, waiting for a clear answer. But Romans tells us that often the will of God is “Try something!” We are to test (and many tests fail), and then finally be able to approve, the will of God.

For example, each person has a way of serving in the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:7-12), a “ministry” (a “ministry” is a way of serving) that they can and should be doing for the Lord. Some people are called to a very specific ministry, such as an apostle, teacher, encourager, or music ministry, and they sense that very clearly and get to work in the Body. However, many people are unsure of their calling or how to serve in the Body, and there are several reasons why this may be the case.

One reason is that they might not have thought about it much and thus have not applied themselves to serving in the Body of Christ. Another reason might be that they actually have several ways their particular gifts can be of service in the Body, and they are unsure about how to best apply themselves. Many people’s ministry is actually a blend of ministries, a blend of ways of serving, such as a pastor-teacher, a singing evangelist, an administrator who is also an encourager—there are countless kinds of blended ministries. Still another reason a person might not know their particular ministry is they wrongly believe they are just supposed to pray and wait until God reveals to them what to do. But He rarely does that, in part because His Word tells us a different way to find our way of serving other than waiting for revelation.

The Bible says that we are to “test and approve” what the will of God is. In most cases that means that we are to try out different ways of serving and see what fits, what we like, and if there is any kind of confirmation from the Lord. For example, a person who likes to sing but frankly cannot carry a tune might try music ministry, but find they are simply not called to that ministry. There are so many different ways of serving in the Body of Christ that each Christian may try out many different things until one fits, and often there is confirmation from the Lord. For example, a person who likes talking to others and comforting them may find they are a called encourager, and one way they would get confirmation about that would be if people they barely knew opened up to them and shared intimate details of their life that they needed help with.

Almost always, the ministry a person has will be something they like and are good at. That makes perfect sense. If God called someone to be a teacher, He would not choose someone who was scared of people, did not like to talk, and could not logically frame a teaching so that it made sense and motivated people. Sadly, the fact that the ministry a person is called to is something that they like and are good at often causes them to doubt their ministry. People wrongly believe that service to God is difficult or challenging, and so they think that something they like to do and are good at could not possibly be how God wants them to serve. They think, “If I enjoy it and am fulfilled by it, I must be doing it for myself, not for God.” While it is true that people can wrongly do things for themselves, God wants people to be effective in ministry, so of course He calls them to serve in a way that they are good at and enjoy. If a person is “other-focused” while they are working for God, then they are not serving themselves even if they love what they are doing.

God knows that we are sometimes confused about what our ministry is and how to best serve in the Body of Christ. God is blessed with our desire to serve, so He simply tells us to “test and approve” what is the will of God. If you do not know your ministry, your particular way of serving, get involved in serving the Lord in a way that is available to you and that generally appeals to you. Do things you enjoy and are good at. That is a reliable way to find your “way of serving” in the Body of Christ.

Rom 12:3

**“*of himself*.”** This is supplied from the context, which is our relation to others in the Body of Christ.

**“should.”** The Greek is *dei* (#1163 δεῖ, pronounced “day”), and refers to what is necessary. From God’s perspective, it is necessary that we think sensibly and not more highly of ourselves than is right.

**“the measure of trust.”** The Greek does not say that each person has the same measure of faith. On the contrary, although some versions say, “the measure of faith,” there is no word “the” in the Greek, and “a measure of faith” would be more accurate. Each person has a function in the body and a service (“ministry”) to perform, and God makes sure that each person has the faith potential to do the ministry God gave them. One person may not have the faith to do what another person does, but he or she has the faith potential to do what God has called him or her to do.

Rom 12:5

**“and individually members with one another.”** All Christians are “individually members with one another” in the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25).

Rom 12:6

**“prophecy.”** This prophecy is in the context of gifts, so the verse is not speaking of the manifestation of prophecy (see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:10), but rather it is speaking about a person who has the equipping ministry of a prophet (Eph. 4:11). That being said, however, it often happens that someone who does not have the ministry of a prophet has a strongsuit in the manifestation of prophecy, and so although the principle in this verse is not directly addressed to that person, it nevertheless applies to them. In fact, since we all operate in our ministries according to the trust we have in our giftings, we all must act to the limit of our trust and also keep working to increase our trust in God and the Lord.

A person with the equipping ministry of a prophet is a person who is specifically called by the Lord to hear from God or the Lord and then give the message they have heard to others. Every Christian has the ability to hear from God and prophesy (Acts 2:17-18, cf. 1 Cor. 12:7-10; 14:5, 24), and that is the “manifestation of prophecy.” But there are also specific people who have the equipping ministry of a prophet in the Body of Christ. The Church Epistles mention prophets (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Titus 1:12), and the book of Acts shows that prophets were active and important in the Church (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1-4; 15:32; 21:10). All prophecy, whether from a Christian operating the manifestation of prophecy, or from a called prophet, will be as the Spirit gives utterance (Acts 2:4). All true words of prophecy come from God or the Lord Jesus Christ, never from the speaker’s mind.

In contrast to the manifestation of prophecy that every Christian can operate, the equipping ministry of a prophet is a specific calling of the Lord on a person’s life. The Old Testament Scriptures make this very clear. Isaiah knew he was called from birth: “Yahweh called me from the womb” (Isa. 49:1). Amos describes the call of God upon his life: “I was not a prophet, nor was I a prophet’s son [disciple], but I was a herdsman and a farmer of sycamore figs, but Yahweh took me from following the flock, and Yahweh said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel’” (Amos 7:14-15).

The Greek word translated “prophet,” *prophētēs*, shows that prophets are God’s (or a god’s) chosen spokesmen. The noun *prophētēs* is found in Greek writings as early as the 600s BC, and it is related to the verb meaning to publicly speak forth or make known. The oldest occurrence we have today relates to a prophetic utterance at the oracle of Zeus at Dodona. Thus, ancient Greek language and culture confirm what the Hebrew language communicates: that even ancient pagan people realized that the words of the gods needed to be spoken forth and made known, and furthermore that the gods chose certain people through whom they spoke.

The prophet speaks the message that God gives him to speak, so it can be as varied as God wants it to be. This is an important point because often, people try to “put God in a box” and decide what a prophetic message would look like, as if we could tell God what to say.

In the Bible, prophets speak about many different things: They tell what will happen in the future (1 Sam. 2:27-36; 10:1-6; 1 Kings 13:20-24; 22:17-37; Isa. 52:13-53:12; Jer. 28:16; 29:21; Amos 7:14-17; Matt. 24:2; Acts 11:28; 21:11), and they speak about past events (Judg. 6:7-10; 2 Sam. 12:7-8; Ezek. 20:1-31; John 4:18). Their messages strengthen (“edification” KJV; 2 Sam. 7:8-12; Hag. 2:1-5), exhort (2 Chron. 15:1-7; Isa. 35:1-4; Hag. 1:3-12), comfort (1 Sam. 9:20; 2 Chron. 20:15-17; Jer. 45:1-5), bless (Gen. 48:20; Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:13), curse (Josh. 8:26; 9:22-23; 2 Kings 2:24; Jer. 48:10), call out kings and ministries (1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13; 1 Kings 11:29-39; 19:15-19; 2 Kings 9:1-13), reprove (sometimes harshly; 2 Sam. 12:1-14; Isa. 22:15-25; Jer. 36:30-31; Mal. 2:3; Matt. 16:23; 23:12-36), direct (Judg. 4:4-6; 2 Kings 4:1-7; 5:10; 6:8-10; Jer. 32:13-15), name (showing God’s opinion, 2 Sam. 12:25; Jer. 20:3), reveal what is in a person’s heart (Isa. 9:9, 17; 29:13; 48:4; Jer. 2:21; 5:23; Ezek. 14:2-4; John 1:47); interpret enigmas (Dan. 5:5-29), and reveal what is going on from a spiritual perspective (1 Chron. 5:20; Jer. 1:16; Ezek. 5:11; Dan. 9:11; John 8:42-47).

Prophets can prophesy to individuals (1 Sam. 10:1-6), groups (2 Kings 3:12-19), or entire nations (Amos 1:11-2:16), and some of what they may say might seem harsh to our ears, but still may be from God. The “grace” in the Age of Grace certainly does not mean that we have the “grace” to live profligate lives without the Lord being upset and speaking frankly to us about it.

The Bible uses vocabulary that helps us understand how God works with prophets. For example, the Hebrew word *nataph*, sometimes translated “prophet,” means “to drop, drip, or distill.” One thing we learn from *nataph* is that God drops His words upon the prophet. It means, as *Strong’s Concordance* says, “to speak by inspiration.” This means that the message the prophet brings is not his own message, but the Lord’s words, and furthermore it implies that many times the prophet may not know much of the message when he starts prophesying, but that the words “drop” upon him, i.e., he speaks them as he gets them from God.

Two more Hebrew words that help us understand how God works in prophets are both translated “seer.” One is *raah*, which means “to see” (as with the eye), and the other is *chozeh*, which means “one who has a vision” (from *chazon*, “vision”). By virtue of the gift of holy spirit upon them, prophets “saw” things that other people could not see. As God gave him revelation, a prophet could “see” into the future (Dan. 2:29-45), or into someone’s heart (Ezek. 14:3).

Something we learn while studying prophecy is that God has purposely chosen to be unclear in some of His communication. Although the tendency of most people is to blame the prophet for any unclear dream or revelation (and it is true that sin can cloud clear revelations from the Lord), this blame is often misplaced. God can be perfectly clear when He wants to be, as many Old and New Testament records attest. But there are biblical records that show that God is sometimes purposely unclear. Numbers 12:6-8 says God spoke to prophets in riddles, while to Moses He spoke “face to face,” i.e., “clearly.” Proverbs 25:2 says it is the glory of God to conceal things. Furthermore, the Bible has records of prophets receiving visions and revelations they did not understand.

For example, Daniel did not understand the meaning of what he heard (Dan. 12:8), Zechariah was shown a vision that he did not understand (Zech. 1:8-9), and Peter did not grasp what the Lord was communicating by the sheet full of unclean animals, argued with the Lord about it, and ended up “wondering about the meaning of the vision” (Acts 10:17). The two immediately discernible reasons that God is sometimes unclear are that He wants us to rely on Him and have a relationship with Him, not just look at Him as a provider, and He also wants us to work together with other believers in prayer and searching things out, and this also leads to humility and Christian maturity.

Prophets, while calling others to account, must also be accountable, because we all see through a glass darkly. Also, because of their prominent position in the Body of Christ, and because it is easy to be influenced by the flesh, it is of utmost importance that prophets maintain holy and obedient lifestyles. God considers it “horrible” when prophets live sinful lives (Jer. 23:14). Prophets must also have the courage to deliver God’s message no matter what the content.

The weighty nature of many prophetic utterances is why revelation from God was often called a “burden” (Nah. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zech. 9:1; Mal. 1:1). The prophet must also develop the wisdom to deliver his message the way the Lord would have it delivered. Because prophetic utterances can have a huge impact on the one receiving the message, it is very important that the prophet deliver the message with the same heart as the Lord would if he were here personally.

Just as prophets get lauded and praised when their prophecies are a blessing, they are derided and persecuted when their prophecies are unexpected or unwanted. Prophets must accept this in order to forestall temptations of disobedience, self-pity, envy, bitterness, and hard-heartedness, and to be able to see and hear clearly the revelation that the Lord wants communicated. Prophets must also recognize that as their ministry grows in the Body of Christ, people will come to them for advice. This is to be expected and is certainly in the Bible (cf. 1 Sam. 9:6, 9; 1 Kings 14:1-3; 22:4-28; 2 Kings 4:1-7; 8:7-8; 19:1-7; 22:11-20), but it means the prophet will have to do serious thinking about how best to serve the Body so he or she will not feel used or become overtired or disenchanted with their ministry. Also, the Church needs to recognize the tremendous value of having godly prophets in the Body of Christ and should pray for them, just as they pray for the other ministries in the Church.

Rom 12:7

**“teaching.”** The Greek word is *didaskalia* (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it were a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse, we felt “teaching” was better than “doctrine” because the verse is speaking of the person who is a teacher using his gift and teaching. For more on *didaskalia* see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13).

Rom 12:8

**“generosity.”** The Greek word is *haplotēs* (#572 ἁπλότης), and literally means “singleness.” It is the same Semitic idiom Jesus used in Matthew 6:22 when he said if your eye was “single,” then your whole body would be full of light. Idiomatically, the “single eye” is the generous eye. Christians are to give generously, liberally (see commentary on Matt. 6:22).

**“the one who leads.”** The Greek word translated “leads” here is *proistēmi* (#4291 προΐστημι, pronounced pro-'hiss-tay-me), and it has two very important meanings. *Proistēmi* means to lead, preside over, rule. However, it also has a very significant second meaning: to be a protector or guardian, to give aid and attention to, to care for. Good Greek-English lexicons have both meanings of *proistēmi*. Anyone reading the Greek text sees both meanings at once.

In the Greco-Roman world, it was a well-established custom that leaders, especially civic leaders, were also to give aid to and care for the people under them. Although most English versions feel that “lead” is the primary meaning in Romans 12:8 and thus have that in their versions, the Amplified Bible, Classic Edition, has both meanings (the AMPC reads: “he who gives aid *and* superintends.”) In contrast to most versions and the Amplified and REV, some versions have the meaning about giving aid as the only meaning in the text. Thus, Frank Laubach has: “He who helps others, let him do it with all his might.”[[217]](#footnote-22251) Similarly, Ann Nyland has: “Let the person who gives aid do it eagerly.”[[218]](#footnote-28875)

We felt that having only the definition about helping or giving aid and omitting the definition about being a leader would mislead the readers. Anyone in the Greco-Roman world grew up knowing that being a civic leader and giving aid went hand in hand, but that is not clear in today’s world. In our modern world, people who care for others typically don’t lead, and leaders far too often do not care for others, even when they are supposed to. Thus, to bring the meaning of the Greek into English, the REV followed the example of the Amplified Bible and included both meanings.

The take-home message of this verse is important to anyone who believes he or she is called into a leadership position in the Body of Christ. From God’s point of view, service in the ministry is civic service, and leadership involves actually getting with people and helping them. Christian leaders are not to “lead from behind the lines,” by just telling people what they should do; they are to get with people and lead in a personal and meaningful way, giving help, support, and aid where it is needed.

Rom 12:9

**“Utterly hate what is evil; cling to what is good.”** The structure of this verse in the context of Rom. 12:10-13, which is structured the same way, is explaining what it means to have love without hypocrisy, rather than starting a new thought. Love that does not utterly hate evil and cling to good is not love, but hypocrisy.

Rom 12:10

**“In regard to”** (see Lenski).[[219]](#footnote-31419)

**“affection for *God’s* family.”** The Greek is *philadelphia* (#5360 φιλαδελφία), a compound Greek word made up of *philos* (#5384 φίλος, a strong liking, a friendship; see commentary on John 21:15) and *adelphos* (#80 ἀδελφός), which means “brother.” It is the strong bond of friendship that exists between brothers.

**“lovingly devoted.”** This Greek word is *philostorgos* (#5387 φιλόστοργος), which is a compound word made up of *philos* (the noun form of *phileō*; see commentary on John 21:15) and *storgē*. There are four Greek words for “love” that are important for Christians to understand. They are *agapē*, *philos*, *storgē*, and *erōs*. They each mean something different and thus are important to distinguish from each other. The Greek verb *storgē* does not occur as a single word in the New Testament but is used in a compound form. It is the mutual love of parents and children, and wives and husbands. *Storgē* is the love that naturally exists between family members. A mother may not know why she loves her child, she just does. Family love is often unexplainable and very strong. Born-again Christians are God’s family, His children, and God wants Christians to have that strong kind of family love for each other. The negation of family love, being without affection, is the compound word *astorgos* (#794 ἄστοργος), found in Romans 1:31 and 2 Timothy 3:3.

[For a more complete explanation of *agapē*, *philos*, *storgē*, and *erōs*, see commentary on John 21:15.]

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the Christian community, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other Christians. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

**“seek to outdo.”** The Greek word is *proēgeomai* (#4285 προηγέομαι). Friberg’s lexicon lists “leading” and “outdoing” as meanings, and we see both those meanings in this verse. When it comes to honor, we are not to be content just to be part of the crowd, but we are to lead, and even outdo each other, in the good sense of never being satisfied with how we honor God and humankind.

Rom 12:11

**“do not procrastinate.”** “Pertaining to shrinking from or hesitating to engage in something worthwhile, possibly implying lack of ambition.”[[220]](#footnote-19569)

**“spirit.”** In this context, “spirit” refers to an activity of the mind, one’s attitude. We use “spirit” in the same way in English and refer to things such as “school spirit” and “I am in good spirits today,” meaning I have a good attitude about life today.

[For more on the meanings of “spirit” in the Bible, see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**“be enthusiastic.”** The Greek word is *zeō* (#2204 ζέω, pronounced 'zeh-ō). Literally, it means to boil due to heat, as hot water boils, or to glow, as hot metal glows.[[221]](#footnote-18437) However, the Greeks also used *zeō* in a figurative manner for boiling or glowing with emotion, such as anger, love, etc. “As to spirit (i.e., an attitude and emotion about God and the things of God) – be glowing hot.” Romans 12:11 uses the Greek word *zeō* in a figurative manner for glowing hot with emotion. However, the English word typically translated from *zeō* is “fervent.” But in today’s English “fervent” is used more to mean “passionate” than “enthusiastic,” and while “passionate” is not bad if understood properly, “enthusiastic” seems to better convey the degree of emotional zeal that the word *zeō* conveys.

Rom 12:12

**“In regard to prayer, continue steadfastly.”** Every Christian should develop a faithful prayer life. Many times in Scripture God tells us to pray (e.g., Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17).

Rom 12:13

**“In regard to hospitality.”** The biblical customs concerning hospitality differ greatly because the Bible takes place over thousands of years and involves many cultures. However, throughout the Bible there is a consistent message that people should extend hospitality to each other. This was very true in the Roman world, and the New Testament instructs Christians to extend hospitality to others. Besides Romans 12:13, the Bible specifically tells Christian leaders to show hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8), and 1 Peter 4:9 says, “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

One of the major aspects of showing hospitality to others was opening your home to overnight guests. In fact, a number of homes had guestrooms just for that purpose. One of the many reasons Christians were to show hospitality to others was because the inns in the Roman world were almost always unpleasant, ungodly places. Travel has always been difficult, and in fact, the English words “travel” and “travail” not only come from the same Latin root word, they were once the same English word and were differentiated only recently; English writings from as late as the 1700s show “travail” being used when today we would say, “travel.” In the Roman world, the condition of the inns only added to the travail of travel.

The inns were so unpleasant that people who could avoid them usually did. Most wealthy people and dignitaries were able to stay in the private residences of friends and contacts, but sometimes they just camped beside the road. Friends and associates often had an “I’ll stay at your place and you stay at mine” agreement, and sometimes formalized it with a *tessera hospitalis*. The *tessera* was a small clay tablet or a clay flat-figure that came in many shapes and sizes but was often in the shape of a pig, cow, lion, or shaking hands. The *tessera* was broken in half, and each party to the agreement kept a half. The traveler carried his half, which gave him entre to the other home even if the owner was away—if the halves matched, slaves or servants who watched over the house immediately granted room and board to the traveler.

In many cases sleeping outdoors would have been nicer than staying in a Roman inn, but the danger of robbers was usually so great that people sought out the “safety” of an inn. The general exceptions were wealthy people and groups. The wealthy usually traveled with a small army of servants who would carry the tents and food and act as bodyguards, while groups were generally protected by virtue of their size.

As a class of people, the innkeepers were of such ill repute that Roman law forbade them from joining the army or forming a trade guild. They were generally cheats and thieves, and suspected of spying on their clients and selling the information, which was very likely since they and their prostitute staff were in a good position to find out lots of juicy information from the clientele. Innkeepers’ wives also had a bad reputation (although many innkeepers were women), and St. Augustine warned travelers about innkeepers’ wives who were witches and who would add magic potions to the food and turn the traveler into a mule.

The standard clientele of the inns were usually equally as rough as the innkeepers. They were peddlers, muleteers, sailors or soldiers, slaves or freedmen running errands, runaway slaves, and the like. Roman graffiti is just one thing that reveals the rough character of the low-class Roman. The excavation of Pompeii reveals a lot of graffiti on both private and public buildings, and perhaps a third of it is scatological, and a number are curses.

Although inns in the Roman world all differed somewhat, just as our modern motels do, they also had a lot of similarities. A standard Roman inn was a courtyard surrounded by rooms. Baggage and animals stayed in the open yard, while people spent the night in a room (or beside their animal if they thought it would be stolen). Almost all inns had a kitchen and a dining room, although sometimes the cooking and eating occurred in one big room. Some inns converted the dining room into a dormitory for sleeping at night or used it for sleeping if the rooms were all full.

Innkeepers made money most any way they could, so many inns had some kind of shop attached, such as a smith’s shop, where travelers could have repairs made to animal tack, carts, etc., and some inns offered medical treatment, if it could be called that, to people who got sick on the road.

Winter cold and summer heat are always hard on travelers, and most inns offered only a little comfort. To fight the winter cold, some of the more expensive inns had a hot air duct system under the floor or in the walls (the same basic system that was used to heat the *caldarium*, the hot room in Roman baths, which contained a heated pool). The average inn, however, would have had some kind of brazier or fireplace that heated with coal or wood, or else no heat at all. However, there was no reliable relief from the heat of summer. The only way to cool rooms during the summer was any breeze coming through the door or a window. Many inns had second-story rooms that better caught the daily breezes and were more comfortable than lower rooms.

Unlike modern hotels, the average inn did not rent a whole room to the traveler but rather, rented a sleeping space in a room. In nicer inns, a person could rent a bed with a straw mattress, but often the “bed” was just a spot on the floor with straw or grasses cut from a field. The obvious question anyone renting a place in the inn would ask themselves was, “With whom (and with how many) will I be sharing a room tonight?” One had to guard his person and belongings very carefully. Roman records show that a number of people who stayed at the inns were murdered for the goods they were carrying, and stealing was very common.

Every experienced traveler also became an expert at inspecting bedding for bedbugs and other creatures, such as fleas, spiders, lizards, etc. No telling how many people had already slept on the matting that was the bed. Bedbugs were so common that they had a nickname: *cauponarum aestiva animalia*, “the summertime creatures of the inn.”

The inns were not usually very desirable places to eat, so most travelers carried at least a little something to eat on their journey, making Jesus’ specific instruction to his apostles not to take food with them when they traveled an unusual request (Mark 6:8). The ancients watered down their wine, and that included the Romans. Unscrupulous innkeepers, however, watered it down a lot to increase their profits. Paul refers to this practice in 2 Corinthians 4:2, and says he is not “adulterating the word of God” (cf. NASB), that is, he did not water down the Word for his own profit, but taught it full strength, even though sometimes that cost him dearly.

Much more ghastly than watering down the wine was the cheating of some innkeepers (actually, the Roman physician Galen said he knew of many) who stole dead bodies from the Coliseum and cooked them in order to boost profits. Inn food was usually in the form of spicy soups and stews so apparently clients rarely noticed. One cheating innkeeper was discovered, however, when a human finger bone showed up in the stew.

All inns had gambling—it just came with the clientele who stayed there. However, there were locals who frequented the inns to take part in the gambling and perhaps enrich themselves with some of the travelers’ purses. In fact, just as today people go “bar hopping” or on a “bar crawl,” occasionally some of the more well-to-do townsfolk would go from inn to inn, gambling and carousing through the night. The noise from the raucous partiers could make sleeping in the inn difficult.

Most inns were staffed by male and female slaves who, along with their everyday chores, made money for the owner by being rented out as prostitutes. So if the person or persons the traveler was sharing the room with had the money to pay for sex, well, that would be an added distraction in the room.

Since innkeepers were often dishonest, savvy travelers agreed upon the price they would pay ahead of time. A writing found in southeast Italy speaks of some of the services in an ancient inn, and the guest had obviously agreed upon the prices before paying.

**Guest:** “Innkeeper, let’s reckon up the bill.”

**Innkeeper:** “One sextarious of wine [about a pint] and bread: one *as*. Food, two *asses*.” [The *assarion*, or *as,* was about a tenth of a denarius, so a laborer would earn about ten *asserions* or “*asses*” as it was abbreviated, per day].

**Guest:** “Correct.”

**Innkeeper:** “Girl, eight *asses*.”

**Guest:** “Correct again.”

**Innkeeper:** “Hay for the mule, two *asses*.”

**Guest:** “That mule will be the death of me!”[[222]](#footnote-29707)

To avoid the inns and the ungodliness associated with them, Christians tried to find other Christians with whom they could stay. Thankfully, many Christians knew about the believers in other towns and where to find them, and people usually willingly opened their homes and hearts to brothers and sisters on the road. God commanded Christians who had food and shelter to provide hospitality for others, and that is something we should still be willing to practice today.

[Selected Bibliography: Bouquet, A. C., *Everyday Life in New Testament Times* (B. T. Batsford, Ltd., London, 1953). Casson, Lionel, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Book Club Associates, London, 1974). Davis, William S., *A Day in Old Rome* (Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1962). Evans, Craig A., *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2012). Gower, Ralph, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1987). Hamblin, Dora Jane, and Grunsfeld, Mary Jane, *The Appian Way: A Journey* (Random House, New York, 1974). Johnston, Mary, *Roman Life* (Scott, Foresman and Company, Chicago, 1957). Murphy-O’Connor, Jerome, “On the Road and on the Sea with St. Paul” (*Bible Review* magazine; summer 1985, p. 38-47).]

**“seek to show it.”** That phrase is translated from the one Greek word *diōkō* (#1377 διώκω), which is used in both Romans 12:13 and 12:14. *Diōkō* occurs some 45 times in the New Testament and is used in both a good sense and a bad sense. When used in a good sense it means to run quickly and decisively toward something, to run after something in order to obtain it, to pursue. When used in a bad or negative sense it means to persecute or to cause to run or flee (thus drive out or drive away).

Paul uses *diōkō* very effectively to get his point across in Romans 12:13-14, using the definitions of *diōkō* against one another (Bullinger notes this as one of the occurrences of antanaclasis, when a word is used twice in the same sentence but has two different meanings).[[223]](#footnote-30620) The meaning in Rom. 12:14 is obvious to us: we are not to curse those who persecute us, but are to bless them. When contrasted with that use of *diōkō*, by using it in verse 13 the Word emphasizes that we are to “chase after” hospitality, “pursue” it, “run after it in order to obtain it.”

[For more on the figure of speech antanaclasis, see commentary on 1 Sam. 1:24.]

[See Word Study: “Antanaclasis.”]

It should go without saying that this command still applies to Christians today. Although our motels and restaurants are nicer today than in the Roman world, Christians should still “seek to show hospitality.” Ecclesiastes 5:13 warns us of wealth that harms its owner, and that can be the case today. Sometimes we are afraid to open our homes to others because we fear what might happen to our things—things we have usually worked hard for. While we want to be wise, true wisdom lies in the eternal verities of valuing relationships, helping others, and fellowshipping around the Good News. These are the things we should be seeking. We should never be so materialistically minded that we put our “stuff” ahead of the chance to share and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Rom 12:14

**“do not curse.”** For more on curses, see commentary on Luke 6:28.

Rom 12:15

**“cry with those who are crying.”** The Greek verb translated “cry” and “crying” is *klaiō* (#2799 κλαίω), a word that refers to the expression of deep emotion, strong inner emotions, and as such it can refer to crying, weeping, mourning, wailing, or lamenting over someone or something. The exact meaning must be determined from the context, and many times *klaiō* expresses a mix of emotions associated with intense feelings or loss.

We live in a world that treats life very cheaply and does not process emotion well. Many times someone who has experienced great loss, such as the death of a loved one, is told to “get over it,” only weeks after the death. People process loss and/or expected loss very differently, and there is no timeline given in the Bible for how long a person should grieve or will grieve. When Jacob was told that his favorite son, Joseph, had died, he said he would go to the grave mourning (Gen. 37:35). While there can be unhealthy grieving, which is an aspect of not processing emotion in a healthy way, caregivers need to be aware that different people grieve differently and for different periods of time, and be compassionate and understanding of those who have suffered a loss.

Rom 12:16

**“Consider one another as being equal.”** The Greek is literally, “the same thing toward one another thinking.” Lenski is probably correct when he says, “This is not…‘harmonious mutual relationship’ but something far more definite: having in mind for another the same thing that under like circumstances one has in mind for oneself.”[[224]](#footnote-15504) The New Jerusalem Bible says, “Give the same consideration to all others alike,” in other words, do not pay attention to the social status of people when you are dealing with them. Many people act differently toward others depending on their social status, and we are not to do this. Treat everyone the same. This guidance is expanded in the context.

**“one another.”** See commentary on Gal. 5:13.

**“do not be arrogant.”** It is easier to express possible multiple meanings in Greek than in English here, and the Greek simply says, “not thinking [about] the high.” Thus, it can be thinking about, or regarding people of high standing (“social standing” NJB) or “high things” (as the KJV), those things we think of as higher or more valuable. Our life is not better or godlier if we associate with rich people rather than poor people, or live in a mansion rather than a hut. God looks on the heart of people, not their wealth or social status, and He pays attention to how we use the things that we have for His purposes, no matter if they are prestigious, very valuable, or ordinary. We are not to be captivated by that which is “high” in the world.

**“associate with those of lowly circumstances.”** As with “arrogant” in the previous phrase, the Greek “lowly” can refer to lowly people or lowly things.

Rom 12:17

**“Think ahead of time**.” The Greek is *pronoeō* (#4306 προνοέω), which is a compound word from the prefix *pro* (before) and *noeō* (to have in the mind). It can mean “to consider” and “to think about beforehand.” Interestingly, the KJV says “provide,” which in the English of the time period meant, “to exercise foresight in taking due measures in view of a possible event,”[[225]](#footnote-30934) or “to think about beforehand.” Over time, the meaning of “provide” became “furnish for use.” While we certainly are to “consider” how to do what is honorable for others, the verse is deeper than that. We are to think ahead of time about how to be honorable to God and people. Especially in the context of not repaying evil for evil, thinking ahead of time about how to act can keep us from acting out of emotion and the heat of the moment. We can do what is honorable if we plan ahead.

Rom 12:19

**“leave it to the wrath *of God*.”** This phrase contains the figure of speech ellipsis. Leaving out “of God,” which is clearly implied in the context, places the emphasis on “wrath.” Evildoers will not go unpunished. The Christian does not need to avenge himself, but can pray and wait for God’s wrath to manifest itself. The verb, “give place” is in the imperative mood; it is a command. God forcefully commands us to not avenge ourselves. Our part is to love and bless those who persecute us, and to step aside to allow God to avenge His people.

Rom 12:20

**“For by doing this you will heap coals of fire on his head.”** The meaning of this phrase is not immediately obvious, and so there have been many suggestions as to what it means. A large part of the problem in interpreting the verse is that there is no literal custom like it referred to in the ancient sources.

The most common interpretation of the phrase about coals of fire, and the one that best fits the context, history, and examples from ancient writings, is that the coals are not literal, but refer to a mental burning; a burning that occurs in the mind of the enemy when a kindness is done to him. We must keep in mind that Rome was an “honor/shame” society, and that people loved honor and sought after it. If a believer did an honorable thing by being kind and helping an enemy, it could create a mental conflict in that enemy because quid-pro-quo would say do something honorable back, or be shamed for failing to do so. That mental shame or conflict might prompt the person to change and come to Christ.

The burning coals on the head represent something such as the burning shame that arises in a person who is helped by an enemy, or the burning mental conflict that being helped by an enemy produces. Thus, much more in the honor-shame society of Rome than in our modern society, doing good for an enemy would indeed heap coals of fire on his head. Lange writes: “The most immediate effect of such expressions [of love] is burning shame, a religious and moral crisis. He will bend his head as if fiery coal lay on it.”[[226]](#footnote-26339) The key to the section is recognizing that shame and crisis produce change, and it is the goal of the coals of fire to produce genuine change in the enemy and win them over. Did not Jesus Christ win us to himself even when we were hostile to him (Rom. 5:6-10), by giving himself for us? And Scripture says it is the kindness of God that leads people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Telling believers to do good to an enemy in the hope that the goodness would produce shame or mental conflict that would lead to change fits with the message of Romans and the flavor of the entire New Testament.

Most commentators agree that the burning coals refer to the burning shame, or some kind of mental conflict in the person who has been helped, but they differ on how to understand the shame. Some commentators have felt that showing kindness to enemies in contexts such as this is a way to draw down upon the person severe Divine wrath, or make clear to the person there will be divine wrath in the future since the context includes “vengeance is mine, says the Lord” (cf. Chrysostom, Theodoret, Zwingli, Beza, etc.). This explanation, however, contradicts the spirit of the chapter, and indeed the spirit of the entire NT. We do not bless people so the wrath of God can come, or to make people aware the wrath of God will be poured out in the future. Also, it is the believer who is doing the kindness, and thus would be the believer who was wreaking some kind of vengeance. If being good to an enemy was a type of vengeance, then the believer’s motives would not actually be to love and help the enemy, but to attack him, although in a seemingly strange and generally unproductive way. History shows that acts of kindness toward enemies sometimes warm their hearts, but they are just as often ignored, taken advantage of, or result in no change at all.

Church Fathers such as Augustine and Jerome spoke the coals of fire on the head in terms of the pain of penitence (repentance). This is true, but we must be sure to take the illustration of the coals of fire to its full conclusion. It is true that there often is a feeling of shame and remorse when we recognize we have been wrong, but it is not the goal of kindness to produce the pain of repentance, even though repentance is part of the process of change. The goal of kindness, as we see from God’s and Christ’s undeserved kindness to us, is to produce change in the person to whom the kindness is shown. The kindness will produce the burning feeling of shame or mental conflict, which leads to repentance (which also often has shame), which results in being won to Christ.

It has been suggested by some Bible teachers that the Romans must have tortured people by putting burning coals on their heads. However, there is simply no historical evidence of a practice like that. Also, that interpretation does not fit with the context. The believer is not doing good to enemies to torture them, but rather to be like Christ and to win them over by kindness.

K. C. Pillai, a native of India who taught on oriental customs, understood the verse in a totally different way, and said the coals on the head referred to a biblical custom. Pillai taught that in biblical villages, someone, usually a young boy, would be appointed to carry hot coals from tent to tent or house to house in the morning so families could easily start their morning fires. The boy would carry the coals in a clay vessel on his head and the hot coals would warm him in the cool morning air. In the same way, our good deeds would be coals on the head and warm up the heart of an enemy.[[227]](#footnote-24434)

Unfortunately, as plausible as Pillai’s suggestion seems, there is no evidence in any ancient source that it actually occurred, especially in Rome where people lived in tight quarters. That fact, along with our knowledge that Pillai taught other things that were just modern interpretations of biblical verses, causes us to discount his interpretation as not being accurate.

The history of Christianity is a wonderful history of people doing good to those who have done nothing to deserve being treated well, and winning over those unbelievers by the very good they do not deserve. This, of course, started with God, who so loved the undeserving world that He gave His only Son. This example was followed by Christ, who so loved us that, while we were still enemies, he gave his life for us. The early Christians followed God and Christ, and throughout the centuries Christians have followed those examples, and done good to the undeserving, and by that good have won some of them to Christ. If we are going to help God change anyone, then we must be as Christ was, and give up ourselves for the benefit of others. If we can be kind to others, we have a chance of helping them change and come to Christ.

**Romans Chapter 13**

Rom 13:1

**“person.”** In the Greek, the word is “soul,” *psuchē*, (#5590 ψυχή), and in this verse it means “person.” “*Psuchē*” puts some emphasis on the fact that people need to control their thoughts and emotions, which is another meaning of *psuchē*. It is very easy to become mentally and emotionally agitated to the point of sin by what our leaders and representatives do, and God warns us against that ungodly behavior. Another thing that “*psuchē*” emphasizes here is that the command to be subject to ruling authorities applies to everyone, believer and unbeliever. There can be no godly society if a segment of the population ignores the rules.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

**“is to submit.”** This verse is in harmony with other places in the Word of God where God tells us to be obedient to civil authority (Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Romans 13 starts a section about how Christians are to relate to secular government, although the vocabulary is quite broad and the principles also apply to other types of government as well. The opening verses of Romans 12 show us that Christians are not to be conformed to the world, but are to be a living sacrifice. Then it describes how Christians are to find their individual gifts and function with them among the Body of Christ as well as in the world. The latter part of Romans 12 shifts somewhat, and places more emphasis on how Christians are supposed to relate to the unbelieving world around them: bless those who persecute you; do not repay evil for evil; allow God to avenge you. Romans 13 continues along the vein of Christians dealing with the world around them, especially the governing authorities.

Christians live in a world controlled by worldly governments. It would seem unusual if God did not have some guidance as to how the Roman Christians were to relate to the secular government that influenced their day-to-day lives, especially since they lived in the very center of the political world. That was especially true at the time, because the Roman authorities were becoming more and more aware that the Christians were not Jews.

During the life of Christ and in the early years of the Church, all the Christians were also Jews, and the Jews had special protection under Roman law. The Romans always venerated ancient societies and gave them special privileges, so the Jews were protected by Roman law because they fit the category of *collegia licita* (“permitted associations”). That was why the Jews could refuse to participate in sacrifices to the emperor and to the Roman gods and not be persecuted for it, but the Christians did not have that protection.

Paul most likely penned the book of Romans in the spring of AD 57, some 30 years after Jesus’ crucifixion, but more importantly for the Christians in Rome, 13 or 14 years after the believers separated themselves from the Jews by being called “Christians” (Acts 11:26). Thus, it was just about the time that the book of Romans arrived in Rome that the Christians were starting to be officially noticed as a new group and cast in an unfavorable light. It also worked against the Christians that in the eyes of the Romans, the man they followed, Jesus Christ, had been crucified as a criminal. The unsavory start of Christianity stuck in the minds of the Romans, as we can see from the *Annals*, written by the Roman historian Tacitus around AD 117. Tacitus wrote that Christians got their name from Christ, who was executed under the procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor.[[228]](#footnote-30066) It was only seven years after the book of Romans arrived in Rome that Nero made Christianity illegal and began a systematic and devastating persecution that took the lives of many of the great Christian leaders, including Paul.

Given what was happening in Rome concerning the Christians, it was very appropriate that the book of Romans includes a section on how to relate to the governing authorities. Nevertheless, the official persecution of Christians had not started yet, and God did not deal with what to do when one was forced to disobey the government. That is likely in part due to the fact that God dealt with that in other places in the Bible (see commentary below on “for there is no authority except of God).”

**“governing authorities.”** This is very general wording. It does not support any specific leader or authority. In Romans 13, Paul never says that any specific government or ruler is godly; he is making the general point that God instituted government among mankind, and so man has a responsibility to be subject to the governmental authority.

Governing authorities are essential to having order in any society. That is true of both the spiritual world and the earthly world. In the spirit world, there is a hierarchy with some spirit beings who are rulers or leaders. That is why some angels are called “archangels,” which means “ruling angels.” Verses such as Isaiah 14:13 and Daniel 7:10 also show us that there are spirit rulers and spirit judges.

Just as there is a government in the spirit world, God also ordained that there be government in the world of mankind. Even in the future when Jesus rules the earth there will be government. Jesus will be king, and there will be rulers under him. For example, he promised the apostles that they would sit on thrones and judge Israel (Matt. 19:28), and there will be godly rulers and judges to help Christ rule (Isa. 1:26; 32:1; Jer. 3:15; 23:4; Ezek. 44:24; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26).

Government is also essential for our “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4), and God established that there was to be government even though He knew some rulers would be ungodly. That should tell us how much God values order and how important it is for maintaining a godly society. God set forth regulations for how people were to govern each other, and the Bible tells us that the authorities that exist have been established by God (Rom. 13:1). Then He tells us to support the government and pray for it (1 Tim. 2:1-3; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

There are a few scholars who have suggested that since the word for authorities, *exousia* (#1849 ἐξουσία), is sometimes used for spiritual powers (Eph. 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16), it is referring to the godly spiritual authorities (angels) behind the physical rulers that we must be subject to. However, that does not seem to make sense given the context of Romans and the scope of Scripture, so it is rejected by almost all scholars.

**“for there is no authority except *the ones instituted* by God, and the ones that exist have been instituted by God.”** This verse can be confusing to the average reader, who might assume from it that every government and governmental authority figure is from God. That is not what the verse is saying. The point of this section is that God established authorities so that there would be an orderly society that could help and support people. This verse, and this section in Romans 13, speak in general terms about God’s purpose for government. It is not speaking of the legitimacy of any specific government or governmental leader. In fact, since having a governmental authority is necessary for a godly society, Christians should be inspired to make sure that the people in power, and the laws enacted by them, do in fact represent God and His ways.

We only have to look at the Word of God to tell that the verse is not saying every specific government has been put in place by God. Many godly people rebelled against their governments and had God’s support in doing so. Moses rebelled against Pharaoh’s evil leadership; Rahab the prostitute lied to her king (Josh. 2:2-6), but was rewarded for it and is even in the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5). Many of the Judges also fought against oppressive government with God’s help. God raised up Ehud as a deliverer, and he not only rebelled against the Moabite government, he assassinated Eglon, the king of Moab (Judg. 3:12-30). David rebelled against King Saul, and had the help of God’s prophets when hiding from Saul. The religious leaders in Jerusalem had an arrest warrant out on Jesus, but he did not turn himself in, he ignored it (John 11:57). The apostles disobeyed the commandments of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body in Israel, and told the leaders, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29; cf. Acts 4:19).

Since the Bible says a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, it cannot be that God both puts a government in place and then helps other people tear it down. But if Romans is not saying that every government and ruler is from God, what is it saying? God is a God of order, not of disorder or confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). In that light, God has established that there would be governments by which people’s lives could be governed. For example, in the Old Testament He provided for leadership in the Wilderness (Num. 11:16-17; Deut. 1:13-15), then local leadership over the towns of Israel, usually referred to as the elders of the gate (Deut. 25:7; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:11; Lam. 5:14). When Israel wanted a king, God selected Saul, who was supposed to rule according to the instructions for kings that God had set forth in the Law (Deut. 17:14-20). In the future, the Millennial Kingdom and Everlasting Kingdom will be ruled by a king: Jesus Christ.

God is not an anarchist. It goes without saying that governments that are run by humans are not going to be perfect, and God is not going to tolerate rebellion and civil disobedience just because some people do not agree with what the government is doing. The general biblical principle is that God has set things such that there is government, so we should obey the government, even when we do not agree with all its laws.

Although Romans 13 says that governmental authorities have been appointed by God, it cannot be divorced from the scope of Scripture. For one thing, God holds leaders to a higher standard and a higher level of accountability than those being governed. God’s Word and His Law are still the standard by which people are to relate to each other, and from which governments are to construct their laws. That is why, when God told Israel some things about having a righteous king, one of them was that the king was to make his own personal copy of the Law of Moses (Deut. 17:18-20). That was so the king would know the Law and how to govern his people by it.

Also, we need to realize that when government leaders decide to abrogate their responsibility to obey God, and pass laws and regulations that are contrary to His laws, godly people find themselves in the position of the apostles: “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Because God has ordained government, those people who disobey their government almost always suffer to some extent, even if their disobedience is for a godly cause. Israel suffered in Egypt when Moses stood against Pharaoh, David suffered in the wilderness when rebelling against Saul, and the apostles were jailed and beaten when opposing their ungodly religious leaders. Thus, even when rebellion seems to be called for by godly people, it is not without a price. But the Bible shows that if the people follow the leader’s anti-God rules, they suffer and may even die (see commentary on 2 Kings 17:8).

Romans 13 brings up some important issues for Christians. For example, should Christians vote? The biblical evidence is that in general, the answer is “yes,” but some people would say “no,” and for various reasons, a couple of which are covered below.

Some people say “no” to voting because they say it will not do any good because the Bible says the world will get worse and worse no matter what we do. While that is true, Christians still have the responsibility to resist evil when and where they can. Efforts to ensure a godly government can make a big difference, especially on a local level. God can use our efforts to make the world a more godly place to His advantage, and Christians will be rewarded for doing good, whether it changes things on earth or not.

If we use the logic that we should not vote because our efforts will not stop the world from getting worse, then we should also ignore God’s command to pray for our leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-2). After all, if the world is going to get worse and worse, what good will prayer do? It does not make sense to think that our efforts to elect godly people won’t help, but that our prayers for unbelievers who have gotten elected will.

Similarly, it is not logical to think that our efforts to vote a godly person into office will not help, but that our prayers for a godly person to be elected will. If Christians don’t vote, then the only people voting are unbelievers. But why would praying that unbelievers elect a godly person be effective if going out and voting for a godly person is not effective? Christians need to speak up for godly candidates, vote for godly candidates, and pray for the godly candidates, and then keep praying for whoever wins the election.

Some people say “no” to voting based upon the assumption that “God is in control,” so the person who wins the election is the person that God wants in office, but that conclusion flows against both the Word and experience. The Word is full of evil people who came to power by evil means; for example, Baasha, Zimri, Athaliah, Menahem, and Pekah all either came to the throne by murdering the king or maintained their throne by murder, and while they were reigning, every one of them “did evil in the eyes of Yahweh.” Since a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand (Mark 3:24), if God sets people in power who are evil in His sight and then works to dethrone them, His kingdom would be ruined. Hosea 8:4 says that there are kings and rulers who came to power without God’s support. So the idea that the people in charge are always the people God wants to be in charge is not biblical.

Especially after the Flood, God made it clear that mankind was to govern itself, including enforcing capital punishment (Gen. 9:6). In fact, the reason God gave laws to mankind, and the power to enforce those laws, was because God expected man to rule himself. When the rulers are wise, the people are protected from evil: “A wise king scatters the wicked like wheat, then runs his threshing wheel over them” (Prov. 20:26 NLT). When the rulers are wicked, the people have a hard life: “A wicked ruler is as dangerous to the poor as a roaring lion or an attacking bear” (Prov. 28:15 NLT). One of the great themes of the Bible is that God’s people are to work to withstand evil, and that includes withstanding evil in the political process.

Some people say that Christians should not vote or get involved in government because government is of this world. But everything in life is touched by the world and worldliness to some extent. God has always expected His people to help out in the world. We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20), not isolationists for Christ. Jesus paid taxes and told his apostles to do the same (Matt. 17:27), and that tax money was used to support the government. If God does not want Christians in political offices, then He would be telling us to hand over all the decision-making positions of power to unbelievers and then pray that those unbelievers make godly decisions. Again, that makes no sense.

The Bible mentions many godly people who reached positions of influence in government. Joseph was second in command in Egypt at a time when Egypt was the dominant world power. David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others were godly kings of Judah. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were rulers in the Babylonian Empire. Sheshbazzar and Nehemiah were governors of Judah under the Persians, and Mordecai rose to become second in command in the Persian Empire under the king, Ahasuerus. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was so devout that God picked him to be the very first Gentile convert to the Christian Faith in the Bible. Paul made friends with some of the Roman officials in Asia (Acts 19:31), and Erastus was the city treasurer of Corinth (Rom. 16:23). None of these political leaders were asked to resign or told that what they were doing was ungodly—in fact, just the opposite. Most of them rose to power with the express help of God. It makes no sense that God helped people to obtain positions of leadership in government in the past, but now wants people to avoid governmental positions or involvement because they are “worldly.” Human government has always been “worldly,” and God wants godly people in authority now just as He always has.

Some people say we should not vote because people in the Bible did not vote. But that misses the point in two ways: First, there usually was no voting in the ancient world. Kings reigned, and they appointed people, who in turn appointed other people. In the ancient world, there was very little actual participation in government available to the average person, because rulers, judges, etc., almost always came to positions of power and authority by appointment, not by being voted in. Secondly, when we look a little more deeply into the Bible, we do see times when God asked people to choose leaders.

For example, when Moses needed help running Israel, God told him to gather 70 of Israel’s elders who were known to be leaders (Num. 11:16). Moses then told the people to choose those leaders from the men among them who were wise and respected (Deut. 1:13). The Bible does not go into detail as to how the people of Israel chose the 70 men; since there were lots of elders and only 70 positions available, there surely was a process of choosing.

Similarly, when the apostles needed help running the church in Jerusalem, they did not pick the people themselves, they asked the people to choose seven men for the jobs (Acts 6:3). Also, the Judges of Israel mentioned in the book of Judges ruled by “popular authority,” but they still ruled. They came to power because of their godliness and abilities, and assumed leadership because the people recognized them as leaders. There was no formal vote, but there was an informal vote of confidence. The Judges never thought that ruling the people was somehow in conflict with godliness. Romans 13 teaches us that God does not want anarchy and chaos among the people, but has ordained that there be governments. It therefore makes sense, and fits with the Word, that governmental positions be held by godly people.

Rom 13:2

**“will bring judgment on themselves.”** This does not mean that rebellion against ungodly government is wrong, but it does mean it will come at a cost. We see this in the Bible and history. It cost Israel to rebel against Pharaoh, and it cost David to rebel against Saul. It cost the apostles to stand against the religious government of their time (Acts 5:40). It cost the Americans a lot to rebel against England. If an ungodly government comes to power and you feel it is the will of God for you to rebel against it, be prepared to pay the price.

Rom 13:3

**“For rulers do not cause fear for *those with* good conduct, but for *those who do* wrong.”** This is a general principle; a maxim, not a universal truth, a proverb that is generally true, or true under ideal circumstances, but not always true. This verse is similar to 1 Peter 3:13, “And who will harm you if you are zealous for what is good?” Of course, there are plenty of people who will harm you if you are zealous to do good—such as all the evil people who are hindered by your efforts. Similarly, there are times when evil people come to power and cause great problems for godly people. “When the wicked come to power, people hide themselves” (Prov. 28:12 HCSB). Nevertheless, in general, if a person is good and obeys the laws, he does not need to fear the government.

**“the *one in* authority.”** Although this can be rendered as an abstract noun, just “the authority,” the context shows that it refers to someone in authority (cf. Rom. 13:4, which says that he is God’s public servant).

Rom 13:4

**“God’s servants.”** A few Bible teachers have asserted that Romans 13 is not speaking about civil government, but about church government. That is not the case, although the general principle of submitting to people over us still applies. The contextual flow of Romans 12 and 13 sets forth how a Christian should relate to worldly authorities. Also, God has instituted governments among people (see commentary on Rom. 13:1).

It has been stated that civil authorities are not “God’s servants” (Rom. 13:4), but that is incorrect. If the government has been established by God, then those who serve in it are God’s servants even if they don’t act that way—and admittedly, many government officials are God’s enemies. But that is also true of the Church.

It is a well-established historical fact that the leadership ranks of the “Church”—and by that we mean both the Jews in the Old Testament and the Christians in the New Testament—have been filled with God’s enemies. Israel was barely a nation out of Egypt when Korah, a Levite and leader in Israel led a rebellion against Moses (Num. 16). The two sons of Eli, the High Priest were both very evil (1 Sam. 2:12). Isaiah had to take a stand against the priests of his day (Isa. 28:7); so did Jeremiah (Jer. 1:18; 2:26; 5:31; 26:8; 32:32), Ezekiel (Ezek. 22:26), Hosea (Hos. 6:9), Micah (Mic. 3:11), Zephaniah (Zeph. 3:4), and Malachi (Mal. 1:6).

The priests at the time of Jesus Christ were very ungodly and organized a plot that culminated in his being crucified. The Christian Church did not do any better after Christ’s ascension. Christian leaders instituted ungodly and oppressive laws, ignored the Bible (in fact, made it illegal to own one), killed “heretics,” including many wonderful Christians such as the Anabaptists who only believed what is considered Protestant mainstream beliefs today, instituted the Inquisition, started various holy wars, and more. Roman Catholics and Protestants have all had guilty parties: John Calvin was behind Michael Servetus being burned at the stake for heresy. Today, evil continues in the Church, and not a year goes by without a number of church leaders being convicted of serious sexual sins, embezzlement, and more.

Thus, saying that Romans 13 can’t be about the civil government because government leaders are evil and not “servants of God” misses the point. There are godly civil servants who serve God by maintaining order in society, and there are godly ministers in the Church; and there are ungodly civil servants and also ungodly men and women in positions of authority in the Church. The context of Romans 13 and the vocabulary in it clearly point to civil authorities, although the principles of being under authority apply to many types of authority.

When it comes to being under authority, every Christian constantly lives in a state of tension between obeying the authority and obeying God. Obedience is easy when God and the authority agree, but when they differ, the Christian must pray and use wisdom. We can see in the Bible that there is a time to disobey civil leaders, like Moses disobeyed Pharaoh. There is a time to disobey religious leaders, like the apostles disobeyed the leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 5:29). There is a time for slaves to disobey masters; children to disobey parents; soldiers to disobey their commanding officers, etc. The authority to disobey someone over you comes from the realization that God is the highest authority in the universe and no one has the authority to command you to act in a way that disobeys Him.

**“if you do what is wrong, be afraid.”** Disobedience to civil authorities can bring very severe consequences and people should rightly be afraid of those consequences. When the government stops enforcing laws, society becomes unruly and dangerous.

**“carry the sword.”** The sword was the symbol of a Roman magistrate’s *imperium*, his authority which flowed from the emperor and the Roman State (cf. Philostratus, Lives of the Sophists; 1.25.2, which speaks of the judge bearing the sword). However, it is likely that “carry the sword” in this verse is more representative of all government, since the government not only had authority over life and death but also, with the army under its control, had the power to enforce the laws.

**“agents of punishment that bring wrath.”** The Bible and history both testify to how evil mankind can be, and one of the most important tasks of government is to maintain order by punishing evil. Even in the future when Jesus Christ reigns on earth as king, he will maintain order with a “rod of iron,” which is so important to the godliness of his kingdom that it is mentioned four times in the Bible (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).

When it comes to dealing with genuinely evil people, the church has almost no power, but the state has the power of life and death and should use that power to maintain a godly society. The state is “an agent of wrath,” but generally the Church is not. In fact, it was only five verses earlier that Paul wrote that Christians should not avenge themselves, but give place to the wrath of God (Rom. 12:19). Therefore, it would not at all fit the context for Paul to say that Christians should not avenge themselves, and then five verses later to say that Christian ministers are agents of wrath and bear the sword. The way God set up society, it is the civil government that executes judgment and wrath, as is also clear in the Law of Moses. Even today we see that the state is the agent of wrath to punish evildoers. If there is illegal activity in a church, the Christians there call the police, who are the civil authorities.

Rom 13:5

**“but also because of your conscience.”** Whereas the unbeliever may only obey the law of the land to avoid the wrath of the authorities, that is not to be the case with Christians. Christians are to see the godly purpose behind government, in spite of its human weaknesses, and are to obey because of their conscience toward God. The phrase “because of the wrath” comes before “because of your conscience” in this verse because wrath is what the government can and will bring, and it works for both believer and unbeliever. But the government can’t make a person obey from their conscience; that has to come from the person himself, and Christians should recognize the godly purpose behind civil authority and work to support it and help it to be godly. Unlike unbelievers, Christians subject themselves to the civil authorities both because of wrath and their conscience toward God.

Rom 13:6

**“taxes.”** The Greek is *phoros* (#5411 φόρος). “That which is brought in as payment to a state, with implication of dependent status, tribute, tax.”[[229]](#footnote-10019) “A payment made by the people of one nation to another, with the implication that this is a symbol of submission and dependence.”[[230]](#footnote-28504) The Church Father Irenaeus wrote in *Against Heresies* (c. AD 180) that this verse proved that the authorities that Paul was writing about were actual governmental authorities, not the angelic or spirit authorities as claimed by some Gnostics (see commentary on Rom. 13:1).

Romans was written during the reign of Nero (AD 54-68) and the Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus wrote that during Nero’s rule, the taxes in Rome were so onerous that there was a popular outcry against them. That may or may not have been why Romans 13:6 mentions taxes, because taxes have always been something people have complained about. But when the believers in Rome received Romans, they could see that God supported paying taxes, even though much of what the government spent the money on was not godly. Jesus’ statement to render to Caesar that which was Caesar’s (Mark 12:17), applied to the Christians in Rome and still applies to us today.

Although the Bible says to pay the taxes, that does not mean that all taxes are godly or that we should not work for tax reform; in fact, the outcry of the people in Rome caused Nero to reform Roman taxes. When the people of Israel wanted a king, God warned them that the king would require money and material goods from them, and they would cry out to Him about it (1 Sam. 8:11-18). We still cry out about taxes, and taxes are one reason godly people are needed in government. A godly person keeps in mind that the citizens are not slaves of the state, but have a right to what they have worked for, and he tries to honor people’s efforts and personal property by allowing them to keep most of what they have earned.

Rom 13:8

**“Do not owe.”** The verb “owe” is *opheilō* (#3784 ὀφείλω), and it means to owe or be in debt to. The conjugation of this verb is important. Grammatically it can be present indicative or a present imperative. If indicative, it would be saying, “You do not owe anyone anything except to love...,” but that cannot be the sense, because we can owe people, and the context has just said that we have to pay people what we owe (Rom. 13:6-7). That means *opheilō* is a present, active, imperative, verb. The fact that it is a present active means that it can have an ongoing force, which it does in this context.[[231]](#footnote-21486) This verse is not contradicting the other verses in the Bible that say people can lend when they have extra, or borrow when they have need (cf. Exod. 22:25, 26; Deut. 15:7-11; 24:6; Neh. 5:3-5; Ps. 37:26; Matt. 5:42; lending is included, because if it is a sin to borrow, then it would be a sin to cause another to sin by lending to him).

This verse is not saying that a person cannot borrow if he has a need, or a person cannot borrow longer term or for larger items (house, car) if the debt is being repaid. The phrase “do not owe” shows that this verse is a condemnation of those who borrow and who do not repay or repay slowly and grudgingly, forcing the person who has kindly helped when there was a need to come and ask for what is rightfully his.

On the other hand, however, it should be the goal of the Christian to live a debt-free life. Far too many people are unwilling to be disciplined in their spending and go into debt to get things that they want, which usually they think they need. Debt places a huge mental burden on people, and the fact that money and sex are the two things that married couples fight over the most shows that debt can have a very harmful effect on a person’s life.

Perhaps that was even more true in the Roman world than it is today, because in our modern world, if a person dies, what he or she owed to people is canceled, and the lender ends up being the loser. That was not the case in the Roman world. In the Roman world, “An heir not only assumed the property and rights of the testator, but also inherited any debts. …he became legally responsible for the debts of the deceased, even if these exceeded the value of the inheritance.”[[232]](#footnote-14159) It is very unloving and outside the will of God to leave a financial burden upon friends and family. The cheapest funeral usually costs a few thousand dollars, and not having a will can cause family fighting and division where there was none before. Death is an unsavory subject and so many people avoid preparing for it, but that is not courageous or loving. People should prepare for death and discuss it with family to lessen the burden and grief if the Lord tarries and death does come.

**“love one another.”** The command to “love one another” was the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:34, and it is so central to Christian life that it occurs 13 times in the New Testament—and besides those, there are also similar commands to love our fellow believers (cf. 1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21). It is vital to understand the impact of this command, that it is not a general call to love everyone, although we are supposed to love everyone. It is a specific command to especially love fellow Christians, and thus is similar to Galatians 6:10, be especially good to the household of faith; that is, fellow Christians.

[For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34. For more on other ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.”]

Rom 13:9

**“neighbor.”** On who is our neighbor, see commentary on Luke 10:27. This is somewhat similar to Matthew 22:40, “On these two commandments [i.e., Love God and love your neighbor] hang the whole Law, and the Prophets.” The first and greatest commandment and the second greatest commandment are quoted by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39 and Mark 12:29-31 (see commentary on Matt. 22:36).

It is somewhat surprising that neither one of the two greatest commandments in the Mosaic Law was part of the Ten Commandments. The command to love God is in Deuteronomy 6:5, and the command to love your neighbor is in Leviticus 19:18.

Rom 13:10

**“love does no wrong.”** We must be careful not to define love from this verse. Love is much more than simply not doing wrong to people. Not harming people is an aspect of love, but it is not what love is. Love has a much more positive slant than that, and is covered in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, for example. A more complete understanding of love is that it does good to its neighbor. That more positive way of thinking about how to treat others is the “golden rule,” which is basically stated in Matthew 7:12, “however you want people to treat you, treat them the same way, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Rom 13:12

**“the day is near.”** The word “near” is from the Greek word *engizō* (#1448 ἐγγίζω), which is a common word that means “near,” “nearby,” or “close at hand,” and can refer to near in space (Luke 18:40) or near in time (Matt. 26:45). Here it is near in time. God said that the end was “near” even though it has now been some 2,000 years without the end coming. In both the Old Testament, Gospels, and New Testament, God said the end was near (Isa. 13:6; 29:17; 51:5; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; Obad. 1:15; Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Rom. 16:20; James 5:8; Rev. 1:1). We do not know the reason for this, but the effect is that we should always be ready for the Lord. In contrast with “night,” “the day” (the Greek has the definite article, “the”) is the time of light and goodness. In this context, it is also a reference to the “Day of the Lord,” when the Rapture of the Church occurs, ending the Administration of the Grace of God and beginning the Tribulation, which will culminate with the Second Coming of Jesus and the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21).

Rom 13:13

**“daytime.”** In contrast with Rom. 13:12 in which the Greek word *hēmera* (day) has the definite article (“*the* day”), this verse has *hēmera* without the definite article, so it means “daytime.” The Roman world had only oil lamps and torches to produce light after dark and these were not very effective. Thus, many people did things in the dark when they could not be seen that they would never have done in the daylight when they would be easily recognized. God wants us to “walk with decency” in the nighttime just as we do in the daytime. The Christian is not to live a double life, living in sin when he can get away with it, then pretending to be godly when others can see. Christians are to live as if they were being watched by other godly people all the time.

**“orgies.”** The Greek word is *kōmos* (#2970 κῶμος), usually translated as “orgies,” “reveling,” or “carousing.” The word originally meant something like “merrymaking” but came to be associated with wild religious festivals where drunken, frenzied mobs would parade the streets after dinner hours with torches, accosting people, singing, and carousing. This was associated with orgies and self-mutilation.

Rom 13:14

**“and do not think ahead.”** The Greek phrase is the word “not,” the word “do” (or “make”) in the imperative present middle, and the word for “forethoughts,” but the translation “do not make forethoughts” is awkward. We have rendered the phrase “do not think ahead.”

**“think ahead.”** This is translated from the Greek noun *pronoia* (#4307 πρόνοια), what is thought about beforehand. The flesh has desires, and many people follow those desires instead of bringing their thoughts captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Many times our sin starts by our paying attention to what our flesh desires, and then thinking ahead about how to get what it wants, what it is pressuring us to do that is outside the will of God. We start with the faintest forethoughts, which become stronger and stronger as we dwell on them and as the forethoughts take shape into ideas and plans. We dwell on the desires, then can become consumed with them to the point that we begin planning to fulfill them, finally acting on what our flesh craves. This verse is the way out: do not think ahead about how to fulfill the desires of the flesh. Of course, it is very difficult to just “not think” about something, we must replace those thoughts by thinking of something else.

**“flesh.”** The “flesh,” which in this context represents both our flesh and our sin nature, produces desires in us that are not godly. These can be as simple as oversleeping or overeating, desires of the flesh of our body, or they can be desires that are very depraved in nature. The more ungodly a person becomes, the more mental time he or she spends thinking about and planning how to fulfill these ungodly desires. God tells us to bring our thoughts captive to Christ, to not allow ourselves to think ungodly thoughts (2 Cor. 10:5). The book of James describes the downhill course of ungodly thinking. First, we are enticed by our own desires or lusts (*epithumia*; the same Greek word as used here in Rom. 13:14). The lust then “conceives” as it is incubated in our minds, and then it gives birth to sin. Sin eventually ends in death (James 1:14-15). In the Greek, the verb “to do” in this verse is in the imperative mood, the mood of command. God knows that if we think about how to satisfy our fleshly desires, we will end up in sin, so He commands us to not allow ourselves to think ahead of time about how to satisfy our fleshly desires.

**Romans Chapter 14**

Rom 14:1

**“weak in the faith.”** The Greek text can be translated as “weak in the [Christian] Faith,” and some scholars and some English translations go that way (cf. R. C. H. Lenski on Romans,[[233]](#footnote-27141) and versions such as the KJV, Geneva Bible, and NET). However, other scholars and English versions support “weak in faith” (“weak in trust”), which could also fit here. The verse and context are speaking about opinions, not about laws or commandments, which would be more appropriate if the subject was the Christian Faith.

In the context of the Roman world, a person who was weak in their trust in God, or in their belief that Christ declared all food to be clean (Mark 7:19), might reason that with so many idols around, any publicly sold meat might have been offered to an idol, so why take the chance of offending God? So that “weaker” person would not eat meat.

In reality, almost every Christian is strong in some areas and weak in others, so godly Christian life has to be about loving and accepting one another, not judging and dividing from one another. In the end, every Christian is responsible for knowing the will of God—which is primarily found in the Bible; ignorance of the Bible is no excuse (cf. Luke 12:47-48)—and every Christian will be judged by the Lord (2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil”).

[For more on translating the Greek word *pistis* as “trust” and not “faith,” see Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust.’”]

**“do not quarrel.”**The phrase “do not quarrel” has the Greek preposition *eis*, which can indicate purpose or result. We are to “welcome” those who are weak in the faith (not just “accept” them), but we are not to welcome them just so we can debate with them about why they believe what they believe, and we are to steer away from letting our welcoming others result in quarreling and debates. If there is discussion over differences, it should, as always, be kind and respectful.

The Greek word translated “quarrel” is *diakrisis* (#1253 διάκρισις) and it comes from the root word *krinō*, which is “to judge.” Thus, the word can refer to passing judgment, or that which came from passing judgment, i.e., a quarrel. This verse says that we are to welcome people who differ from us, and we should, with open arms. But too often Christians receive each other but have secret motives of changing each other, which often just leads to fights. If we receive people, let’s continue in that love. If God opens a door for discussion, fine, but we do not start with that purpose.

Rom 14:2

**“One person believes he may eat anything.”** In an interesting twist of history, this verse has become very relevant again. When Paul penned the verse, the person who believed they could eat “anything” ate foods that were considered “unclean” according to the Mosaic Law, such as pork, and meat from sacrifices offered to idols. The Mosaic Law and pieces of sacrificed animals are no longer a concern, but today people ridicule and reject one another over “healthy” food. Pork is still a subject of debate, but so are sugary and fatty foods like cookies and cake, and there are also many other food choices over which people argue. Yes, God wants us to be wise and some things are not healthy to eat, but the Word of God directs us to let people live their own lives and we are not to divide the Body of Christ over food. No matter how “healthy” a person eats, they will still die and stand before the Judgment Seat, so we need to live in a way that is loving to people and pleases God.

Rom 14:3

**“The one who eats *everything* must not treat...with contempt.”** This seems to be the best rendering of the verb *exoutheneō* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω), “to look down upon; to treat with contempt,” which is in the third-person, present imperative. In other words, the meaning here is that each person is to be careful how they treat others. If the verse is rendered something like “Let the one who eats not...” as many versions are, then the understood subject of the verb (the Church, perhaps?) is to make sure that people do not treat others with contempt. But there is no guidance about how to stop people from looking down on others, and no guidance as to what to do with someone in the Church who looks down on others.

**“treat…with contempt.”** From *exoutheneō* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

**“accepted.”** The Greek is *proslambanō* (#4355 προσλαμβάνω) and it means to accept, as God or Christ would accept someone, but often more than that, to welcome someone, to take the person into one’s home. It occurs in Rom. 14:1 and here in verse 3. In verse 1 we translated it “welcome” because it was one person welcoming another. In the context of verse 1, “accepting” seemed too cold for the context; as Christians, we are not just to “accept” one another, but to welcome each other. However, we do not usually think of God as “welcoming” us, but rather we feel blessed to know that we are “accepted” by God. Although we recognize that “welcome” and “accepted” are the same word in Greek, we thought it communicated the sense in English better to say “accepted” than “welcome.”

Rom 14:4

**“someone else’s.”** The Greek is “another’s.” The REV has translated the Greek text as “someone else’s,” which captures that thought very clearly.

**“household slave.”** The Greek is *oiketēs* (#3610 οἰκέτης) and means a slave who is part of the household, or it can refer to a domestic. The emphasis here must not be missed. This is not simply *doulos*, slave (or servant; #1401 δοῦλος), or another Greek word for servant. The emphasis is that this person is part of the household. A household slave was a slave, certainly, but also part of the household. He or she was not a hired servant who could come and go, but a part of the household. That God would use the word *oiketēs* here brings our minds back to the fact that each Christian is part of God’s household; we are slaves in His house because we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and ransomed with the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9). Just as no Roman would go to another man’s house and pass judgment on his slaves, we are all God’s slaves in His household and are not to pass judgment on one another.

Rom 14:5

**“more important than *another* day.”** We are not to judge others for the time, or days, they set aside for special activities or rest. See commentary on Colossians 2:16, and for more on the Sabbath, see commentary on Exodus 20:10.

Rom 14:8

**“we live…we live…we die…we die.”** A beautiful figure of speech, epadiplosis, which is the name of the figure of speech that occurs when the figure epanadiplosis occurs in successive phrases or sentences.[[234]](#footnote-30416)

Rom 14:9

**“died and was made alive *again*.”** When used with “died,” the word *zaō*, “live,” has the force of “become alive” or even “become alive again.” Jesus died, and then God raised him from the dead. Jesus said the same basic thing in Revelation 1:18.

That Jesus was dead and was raised to life by God is a very important fact that needs to be examined. First, it gives every believer comfort and knowledge that God can and does raise the dead, which is the foundation of the Christian’s hope of everlasting life. Second, it shows that Jesus was a fully human being. God cannot die.

[For more on dead people being totally dead and not alive in any way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the fact that the soul can and does die, see Word Study: “Psuchē.” For more on why Jesus had to be fully dead, not just have his body die, see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:20. For more on why it cannot be that the human part of Jesus died but the God part did not, see commentary on Matt. 27:50. For more on Jesus being fully human and not “God in the flesh,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” and see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and also see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith.*]

**“so that he would be Lord over both the dead and the living.”** The Bible says that Christ is Lord over the dead and the living. This is a way of expressing the completeness, the totality, of Christ’s Lordship. While it is easy to see how Christ could be Lord over the living, it is not as easy to see what it means for Christ to be Lord over the dead. But the dead are not dead forever. At some point in the future, Christ will speak and the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Man and come out of their graves (John 5:28-29). The dead will obey the voice of Jesus Christ because he is Lord over the dead.

Rom 14:10

**“you *who are weak*...or you *who are strong*.”** The Greek text is literally, “You...or You” which could be very confusing to the average reader, because it would not be clear if Paul is referring to two groups of people or one group. There are a few clues in the text that Paul is speaking to two groups of people, the weak and the strong. Firstly, Paul uses “or” (#2228 ἢ) which implies that his audience falls into one of the two categories. Secondly, Paul uses the exact same language as he does in Romans 14:1-3 when describing the two categories of Christians. The weak person only eats vegetables, and Paul exhorts that person to not “judge the one who does.” The strong person eats everything and Paul exhorts that person to not treat the weak person “with contempt.” Both “judge” and “treat with contempt” are used with respect to the weak and strong Christians. Therefore, in Romans 14:10, when Paul uses the exact same vocabulary “judge” and “treat with contempt,” it is very likely that he is referring back to the same two groups of people, the weak and the strong.

**“why do you judge?”** The problem is not that judging is wrong, as some people misinterpret Matthew 7:1, but that the Romans should not be judging their fellow believers over the wrong types of issues. They are passing judgment on things that are not sins or wrong at all, such as what one eats (Rom. 14:3), or if one keeps the Sabbath or not (Rom. 14:5). In fact, there are many other instances in Scripture that Christians are supposed to judge rightly (John 7:24), for purposes such as keeping the Church pure (1 Cor. 5:12), and judging if people are telling the truth (1 Cor. 10:15). Thus, rightly judging is not prohibited in Scripture.

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“treat…with contempt.”** From *exoutheneō* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

**“judgment seat of God.”** Every person will be judged in the future, and rewarded or punished according to what he deserves. Although this verse says “judgment seat of God,” Jesus will do the actual judging, and 2 Corinthians 5:10 says “judgment seat of Christ.” God is the “power behind the throne,” and will ensure that Christ’s judgment is accurate, but Christ will do the actual judging (cf. John 5:22, 30; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16).

It is much easier to understand verses that speak about the judgment seat or worship if we have an Eastern mindset and do not think like a Westerner. Eastern rulers almost always had a vizier, a “second in command,” who ran the daily affairs of the kingdom. There are many examples of this in the Bible. Joseph was the vizier, or second in command, for Pharaoh (Gen. 41:38-45), and Haman and Mordecai were viziers for Ahasuerus, the king of Persia (Esther 1:1, 3:1, 8:2). King Darius planned to make Daniel his second in command (Dan. 6:2). “King Belshazzar” (Dan. 5:1) was actually the vizier, the second in command acting as the king de facto. The real king was Nabonidus, which is why Belshazzar could only make Daniel the third ruler in the kingdom, because he himself was already second ruler (Dan. 5:7).

Much of the time, the true regent was not available to the public. Oriental rulers spent a lot of time in pleasure with women, sports and hunting, eating, receiving dignitaries, etc. They were often considered gods on earth and were simply not available to the general public. The book of Esther tells us of one time when King Ahasuerus was in his private quarters and had not come out for a month (Esther 4:11). The king’s vizier would have been running the kingdom during that time. If we understand the king-like authority of the vizier, and that in a very real sense, he often ran the kingdom, we can better understand verses about the judgment seat of Christ and why Christ is worshiped.

Regarding the judgment seat: sometimes it is called the Judgment seat of God (Rom. 14:10), and sometimes the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Revelation 20:11-13 describes what we refer to as the “White Throne” judgment, and although the one doing the judging is not stated in that verse, we can tell from the scope of Scripture that it is Jesus Christ (the more accurate Greek texts read “throne” in Rev. 20:12, not “God”). No one from the ancient Middle East would be confused by sometimes saying the judgment seat of “God” and other times saying the judgment seat of “Christ.” God is the power behind the judgment, which is actually done by the vizier, in this case, Jesus Christ. Thus, it is God’s judgment seat because it has His ultimate authority. However, it is Christ’s judgment seat because he does the actual judging. Jesus Christ made it clear that he would be doing the actual judging when he said: “the Father does not judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son...And he [God] gave him [Christ] authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man. I am not able to do anything on my own. As I hear, I judge. And my judgment is righteous because I do not seek *to do* my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:22, 27, 30).

Regarding worship: In the kingdoms of the ancient Middle East, the king was worshiped, but so was the vizier (and so were the gods of the kingdom). Oriental people did not see worship as a “god only” thing. Worship consisted of things such as bowing or prostration, acts of respect, etc., and they were given to any god or person who was due that kind of treatment. In Persia, for example, people worshiped their gods, and the king, and the vizier. Note in the book of Esther that the king commanded the vizier to be respected, and the people “bowed, and reverenced” Haman (Esther 3:2 KJV). The Hebrew word translated “reverenced” is most often translated “worshiped” when the subject is God, and it confuses the issue of worship when the same word is translated “worship” when the subject is God, but “reverence” or “give honor to” when the subject is humans. The English reader loses the fact that both God and people were worshiped, but the worshipers knew who was a god, who was the king, and who were simply officials in the kingdom. John was perfectly comfortable worshiping the angel (falling down prostrate before him; Rev. 22:8), but the angel said not to do it because “I am a fellow servant,” not because worship was not due to those who are “worth it.” Both God and Christ are due “worship,” and both should be worshiped by Christians, who also should know who is God and who is the vizier.

Rom 14:12

**“each of us will give an account of himself to God.”** Many verses in the Bible point to the fact that on the Day of Judgment, people will have to give an account of how they have lived. This is not just a New Testament revelation; it occurs throughout the Bible. For example, Jesus taught that people will have to give an account for what they say (Matt. 12:36). Many other verses say the same thing (e.g., Eccl. 11:9; 12:14; Matt. 12:36; 16:27; Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 4:4-5).

Furthermore, on Judgment Day, it is God’s appointed judge, Jesus Christ, who will do the judging. Jesus knew this was going to be the case even before his death and resurrection, so he said, “…the Father does not judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). Paul also taught that Jesus was going to be the one to do the judging (e. g., Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16).

[For more on the fact that on Judgment Day people will get what they deserve, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10. For more on Jesus Christ being the agent of God who will judge people on Judgment Day, see commentary on Rom. 2:16.]

Rom 14:13

**“we are not to judge one another.”** Romans 14:13 is using the word “judge” in a negative sense, like Matthew 7:1 does. This use of “judge” refers to making an unjust or ungodly judgment. However, we cannot live life without making judgments, so in John 7:24, Jesus called upon us to “judge with righteous judgment” (see commentary on Matt. 7:1 and John 7:24).

There will always be stumbling blocks and pitfalls in the world, but no Christian should be the cause of them. Jesus taught, “How terrible it will be for the world because of the stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but how terrible for that person through whom the stumbling block comes!” (Matt. 18:7).

**“brother or sister’s.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive. In other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

Rom 14:14

**“(I know… )”** This verse is the figure of speech parembole, which is a form of parenthesis. A parembole occurs when the interposed sentence is independent and complete in itself. It would still make sense if it were separated from the sentences before and after it.

**“in.”** The Greek word *en* in the phrase, “in the Lord Jesus” refers to Paul’s connection with Christ. It means, “in connection with.” The word *en* can mean “by” in some instances, but it is less likely that it means “by” here, since Paul was likely not personally instructed by Jesus about clean and unclean things, but rather came to that knowledge, part by the instruction of others, part based on Scripture, and part due to spiritual insight and revelation. Thus, he was persuaded “in connection” with the Lord Jesus. See commentary on Romans 6:3.

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

**“nothing is unclean in itself, but to the one who considers something to be unclean, to that person it is unclean.”** This statement is not a “universal principle” but a statement that needs to be taken in context, and the context is food and holy days, and these two things are a model and example of the kinds of things that are not sin but that people can consider to be “unclean” or sin, and then for them, they are unclean even though they are not “unclean” to God. Furthermore, Paul’s statement uses the word “unclean,” not the word “wrong” or “sin.”

There are things that are “sin,” and sin cannot be made “clean” in the eyes of God by simply thinking it is not sin. Romans 14:14 does not say, “nothing is sin in itself, but to the one who considers something to be sin, to that person it is sin.” Many things in life are matters of opinion, such as what food to eat, and then there is genuine sin, evil, and wrongdoing, and they cannot be made “right” by thinking they are right. The person who wants to live a righteous life in the sight of God must read the Bible and learn what behaviors are right in the sight of God.

Rom 14:15

**“if your brother or sister is distressed because of the food *you eat*, you are no longer walking according to love.”** This statement is so contrary to the way our society generally feels today that it behooves us to pray over it and consider how we live. It is the trend in society today to feel that “My right to express how I think and feel is more important than how you feel about it.” This then outworks in society in a myriad of different ways. For example, hard-hearted people might say, “The T-shirt I am wearing may have offensive words or pictures on it, but if I feel like wearing it, you can deal with it.” Or “I know I use the ‘F-bomb’ a lot in my speech, even in public, but it’s how I feel, so I shouldn’t have to watch what I say.” Or “Smoking is legal, so if my smoke blows over where you are, you can move.” Or “I can text or email you whatever I want, no matter how it makes you feel, because I have a right to express my feelings.”

That kind of “I can do what I want and you can deal with it,” attitude is not the attitude God wants us to have. It is not walking in love, and in many cases it is sin. Walking in love is a challenging balancing act, with many factors to consider. However, we must realize that it is available to walk in love. No matter how ungodly, crass, rude, or evil society gets, God still created the universe and humankind, and He sets the standards for godly behavior and genuine love. Being loving and respectable is not a matter of public opinion or “how everyone behaves,” it is a matter of following the ways of God, and doing our best to please God.

It can be hard not to cause offense to people. Some people are so sensitive that they are offended by all sorts of things, but although it can be hard to please them, Christians must nevertheless have the attitude that we work to be non-offensive to all people. On the other hand, evil people are offended by right and justice, and we will not be able to help being offensive to them. In fact, the evil, ungodly nature of the world and worldly people is why Jesus is called a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (Isa. 8:14; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8). Evil is always offended by good, and we do not have to stop doing what is right because evil people are offended.

In spite of the fact that it can be hard to live without offending someone, many verses in the Bible help us genuinely walk in the love of God if we follow them. For example, we should live with an attitude of thankfulness (Col. 3:15). Our speech should build people up, not tear them down (Eph. 4:29). We should avoid obscene language and crude jokes (Eph. 5:4). We should dress modestly (1 Tim. 2:9). We should strive to be sensible and respectable (1 Tim. 3:2).

Also, verses like Romans 14:15 help guide us. The context is eating food, and the Jews had very strict dietary laws that did not apply to Christians. But many Jews who had converted to Christianity were still influenced by their Jewish upbringing and the Mosaic Law and were upset about “Christian freedom.” So the Christian is in a dilemma: should I eat what I want because God allows it even though it offends my Christian brother, or should I not eat in his presence because his feelings are more important than my freedom?

God lets us know that there are many situations in which the feelings of my fellow Christians are more important than my freedom. But what if the person was not Christian? Could I eat then? No, not then either, because we are trying hard to win the non-Christians, and someone who is offended is hard to win over (Prov. 18:19). Within the confines of godliness, we work to conform in what we eat, wear, etc., to those around us so that we can win them (1 Cor. 9:20), and it never hurts to be more conservative than they are. If we are going to do our best to live peaceably with all people (Rom. 12:18), we need to think about how what we say or do will affect others. We will be guided in how to live as Jesus lived if we consider the feelings of others to be more important than our freedom to express ourselves.

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“Do not destroy … the one for whom Christ died.”** This is an important point in the text, because in the heated arguments over right doctrine and right behavior that sometimes occur between Christians, people can lose sight of the fact that Christ died for both parties. We must be humble and keep in mind that we are all wrong on some things, we are just not aware of what we are wrong about, and furthermore, we are not the one who judges others, God is the Judge! We do not know the hearts, minds, or God-given assignments that God has given others, but we should well know that Christ died for them, so we should treat them with the love and respect that is due a fellow believer. Especially when it comes to weaker believers, stronger, more confident, louder Christians can really “destroy” the confidence of the weaker believer.

Rom 14:16

**“slandered.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Rom 14:17

**“in *connection with* the holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. It is a rare phrase, being used here and in Colossians 1:8. The Greek in Romans 15:16 is the same, but the context is different so the translation is different.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Rom 14:19

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the Christian community, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other Christians. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

Rom 14:21

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

Rom 14:23

**“But the one who doubts.”** Until this verse, Paul has been writing about the “strong” believer and how the strong Christian must take into account the beliefs and conscience of the “weak” believers. Now he changes the direction of the thought, and makes the point that the weak believers must take responsibility for their actions as well. They may be “weak” when it comes to certain aspects of the faith, like the food they eat, but they must be strong in their convictions. They must not allow themselves to be pulled into doing things that they are doubtful about or that they are fairly convinced are wrong.

**“condemned.”** The one who acts against his own conscience and without faith is condemned both by himself (self-condemnation) and by God, for what he is doing is sin, as the verse says.

**“based on trust.”** The Greek simply has the phrase *ek pistis*, more literally, “from trust,” but it means that what we do must be “out from our trust,” or we would say more clearly, based on our trust.[[235]](#footnote-23356) This is a stern warning for Christians to be clear about what they believe and then base their actions on that. Too many times we Christians get swept up in the moment or “go along with the crowd” and end up doing things that we really do not want to do. We have to know what we believe and then act in accordance with those beliefs. If we are pulled into doing things that we think are wrong, and do them anyway, that is sin. The Christian is charged with pleasing God, not pleasing others.

**Romans Chapter 15**

Rom 15:1

**“weaknesses.”** The Greek is *adunatos* (#102 ἀδύνατος), and means without strength, impotent, powerless, weakly, disabled. In this case, the context makes the meaning clear. The context of Romans 14 is the weak in faith not walking in the freedom they have in Christ, and those who are strong in the faith learning to live in peace with them, not leading them to sin against their conscience. It could be said that the chapter break between Romans 14:23 and 15:1 breaks the context and causes the majority of Christians to misunderstand the meaning of Romans 15:1-3. Romans 14-15 are clear: we who are strong in the faith have an obligation to help, and bear, those who are not. We have an obligation to not please ourselves, but to do what blesses others.

Rom 15:3

**“The insults of those who insult you fell on me.”** The “you” is God. People insulted God, and their scorn fell on the psalmist. Later, Jesus ended up receiving the insults and scorn of the people who insulted God. Today Christians bear much of the brunt of people who scorn and insult God (cf. Matt. 5:11; 1 Pet. 4:14).

Rom 15:4

**“to teach us.”** The Greek word “teach” is *didaskalia* (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (almost as if it were a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or the teaching. (See commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13). Here it is used with the preposition *eis*, which is an indicator of purpose: thus, “for teaching us,” “for our instruction,” “to teach us,” etc.

The KJV translates *didaskalia* as “learning” in this verse, which has caused some people to misunderstand it, and worse, to use it to make an artificial division between what God gave us to “learn” from, in contrast to what God gave us as instruction “to” us. Of course, there are some things we learn from that are not written for us to obey, and other things that are written to us for us to obey, but that is not the point of this particular verse. *Didaskalia* is used 21 times in the NT, and this is the only place the KJV translates it “learning.” Had the KJV translated it “teaching” here, we could have seen its relation to verses such as 2 Timothy 3:16, where “all” Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, is profitable for “teaching.” Christians are to be taught from the whole Bible.

God changes some of His rules from Administration to Administration. For example, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were to eat only plants (Gen. 1:29). After the Flood, God changed His rules about eating and told mankind we could eat meat also (Gen. 9:3; for more on Administrations in the Bible, see commentary on Eph. 3:2). On the other hand, some of God’s rules do not change. We all know that commandments of God such as “do not steal” or “love your neighbor” are applicable through all administrations. Charles Ryrie wrote: “…certain principles…are often carried over into succeeding ages, because God’s truth does not cease to be truth, and these principles become part of the cumulative body of truth for which man is responsible….”[[236]](#footnote-11848) How do we know what commands of God we are to obey and what commands have been superseded by other commands? The only way is to read and study the whole Bible and see if and when God changes His rules. On certain subjects, such as what we are to eat, or regulations about marriage, the changes are clear. On other subjects, the changes are not as clear but can be discovered by diligent study. One thing we must keep in mind is that the Church Epistles are specifically addressed “to” the Church, so commandments in them are like a trump card: if God gives us a command in the Church Epistles, that trumps the commands of God in other Administrations. Thus, when God says in 1 Corinthians 7:2 that marriage is a one-man-to-one-woman relationship, that trumps the Law, which allowed a man to have more than one wife.

All of God’s revelation is to teach us. That is the lesson here, and in 2 Timothy 3:16, which both use the word *didaskalia*. However, there is a difference between being “taught” by something and obeying it. We are taught by the Levitical rules of animal sacrifice, but we are not to obey them. That is why is it imperative for anyone who wants to obey God to know what commands are “to” him and what commands he only learns from. There are some people who overly emphasize the fact that the Church Epistles are written “to” the Church, and downplay the rest of God’s revelation to mankind. We must never do that. Even commands of God we are not to obey, like the instructions in Leviticus on how to do animal sacrifice, teach us about God and His ways. More importantly, however, there is much in the Old Testament and Gospels that are “to” the Church by virtue of the fact they are commands of God that were never superseded by any revelation in the Church Epistles. Many subjects covered in the Old Testament or Gospels are never again mentioned in the Epistles: God said it once, and that should be good enough for us. For example, “love your neighbor” is a command that applies in all Administrations. But only in the Law does God give us examples of how to do that in many specific situations; for example, how to structure a righteous society by having building codes, specific civil penalties for lawbreakers, regulations about lending and borrowing, and much more. These regulations are “to” us as much as the information in the Church Epistles by virtue of the fact that God gives them once and never repeats them. They are His one-time revelation for building a godly society. When it comes to prayer, the Church Epistles emphasize prayer (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17), but it is in the sermon on the mount we have a sample prayer with instructions on things like making sure we are not praying in order to be seen by people. That revelation is still “to” us because it is never superseded by anything in the Church Epistles. Like 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed,” and every verse of it is to teach us. Furthermore, much of it is directly applicable “to” us.

Here in Romans 15:4, it seemed clear to say “to teach us” (being internally consistent in the REV, translating *didaskalia* as either “teach,” “teaching,” etc., or as “doctrine” (that which is taught). It seemed more confusing to say that the things written earlier were “doctrine,” because that could confuse people about whether we should try to obey all the Law, which we obviously cannot in light of later revelation.

Rom 15:5

**“the God who gives perseverance and encouragement.”** This phrase in Greek is a genitive construction, literally translated, “the God *of* perseverance and encouragement.” However, in Greek, the genitive communicates relation, namely, in this context, that God somehow relates to “perseverance and encouragement.” Translators must use context to determine the best way to translate the genitive.

The problem with the typical genitive translation “of” is that it seems to communicate that these are characteristics of God, that God has perseverance and encouragement. Although that may be true, the context is more about how perseverance and encouragement are things Christians receive from God, specifically through the Scriptures (Rom. 15:4). Therefore, in this context, perseverance and encouragement are things Christians have, not something God possesses. Thus, the REV has translated the phrase as, “the God who gives perseverance and encouragement.”

Rom 15:7

**“accept one another.”** The use of “accept” (*proslambanō*) recalls Paul’s argument in Rom. 14:1-15:6 (esp. Rom. 14:1) where he lays out instructions for how “weaker” and “stronger” believers are not to judge each other according to their own respective beliefs and practices pertaining to food or observance of particular days/festivals. The “strong,” who believe all food is clean and all days are sacred, are to “accept” the “weak,” who believe dietary restrictions and observance of certain days as still a good practice to follow, and in like manner, the “weak” are to accept the “strong.” Thus, Paul lays out his appeal here for both the “weak” and “strong,” representing largely Jew and Gentile Christian groups, to not allow their disagreements on these matters to become a reason for condemning the other and breaking fellowship. Paul’s emphasis is on the fact that while such tensions and disagreements between the “weak” and “strong” believers do exist, these differences are not to preclude the need to recogize the equal standing in the new covenant for all members of both groups. And so, Paul exhorts mutual acceptance among both groups of believers, not withstanding their choice to maintain different practices concerning diet and observance of special days.

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the Christian community, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other Christians. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

Rom 15:8

**“Christ has become a servant…”** Romans 15:8-9 reveal the inclusiveness of God’s love. Instead of just loving the Jews and not the Gentiles, Romans 15:8-9 shows that God loves both Jews and Gentiles and that Christ came for both groups. Indeed, “God so loved the world” that He sent Christ for everyone.

The Greek syntax of Rom. 15:8-9 can be read in several ways. Either there are two subjects, *Christ* who becomes a servant, and the *Gentiles* who glorify God, or Christ is the singular subject throughout. The evidence seems to better support that Christ is the continuing subject. Rather than the Gentiles, it is Christ who glorifies God, as verse 9 illuminates with the quotation: “I will praise you among the Gentiles.”

The main clause of these verses is “Christ has become a servant,” while the rest of Rom. 15:8-9 fleshes out exactly how Christ has become a servant. It is fleshed out in three senses: *who* is he a servant to, *why* is he a servant, and *towards what end* does he serve? First, concerning who Christ is a servant to. He is a servant to the circumcision (i.e., the Jews). There is a genitive of reference in the Greek (“*with reference* to the circumcision”). And, he is a servant to the Gentiles. There is an accusative of respect in the Greek (“*with respect* to the Gentiles”).[[237]](#footnote-29402) Thus, there are two categories of people with respect to which Christ serves—Jews and Gentiles. This encompasses all of humanity.

Next, we are given two parallel *huper* clauses (#5228 ὑπέρ; “for the sake of”) telling us why Christ is a servant to each group: to the Jews it is for the sake of the truth of God, namely to confirm that God is faithful to his promises to the Jewish people; and to the Gentiles it is for the sake of mercy, likely because these promises also come to Gentiles by God’s mercy alone.

Lastly, there is a purpose expressed for Christ’s service to each group. This is communicated through *eis to* and the infinitive, which expresses purpose, or it could also express result.[[238]](#footnote-21841) These two purpose clauses give us a greater sense of the “why” contained in the *huper* clauses mentioned above. They work together with the *huper* clauses, adding on to them. For the Jews, we have already seen, it was in order to confirm the promises made to the fathers. For the Gentiles, Christ’s purpose was to glorify God (the Greek only has the infinitive “to glorify” at this point, dropping off the *eis to* in an ellipsis, since the Greek readers would easily supply it in their minds). Not only would Christ glorify God by bringing mercy to the Gentiles, but even the Gentiles themselves would bring much praise and glory to the Father on account of Christ’s work as well—which is seen in the following verses that call the Gentiles to rejoice, praise, and hope in God (Rom. 15:10-12).

Rom 15:12

**“The root from Jesse.”** Jesus Christ is the shoot that came up from the stump of Jesse. The title “Shoot from Jesse” refers to the hope the Messiah gives us as well as the fact that he provides nourishment and stability. Most English versions have “root” instead of “shoot,” “root-shoot,” “scion,” “descendant,” etc. However, when it comes to determining the meaning of a title (and “Shoot from Jesse” is a title of the Messiah), we have to use the context in which the title occurs. In this case, both the introduction of the title in Isaiah 11 and the last use in Revelation 22 show us that it refers to a shoot or sprout that has grown out from the trunk of Jesse. The phrase “Shoot from Jesse” occurs two times (Isa. 11:10; Rom. 15:12), but Romans 15:12 is a quotation of Isaiah (from the Septuagint). Similarly, the phrase “Shoot from David” occurs two times (Rev. 5:5; 22:16). Jesse was the father of David (Ruth 4:22; 1 Chron. 2:12-15), so the phrases are basically equivalent. However, the name “Jesse” is more closely associated with the whole royal lineage and the people of God, while the name “David” is more directly associated with the kingdom.

There are some Trinitarians who assert that the translation should be “root” and that this title proves that Jesus is God, but that is not the case. First, we do not have to draw that conclusion even if we think the translation should be “root,” because there are other meanings of “root” besides being the source of something, but the context of when and where the title appears shows it does not refer to the Messiah being the source of David. This is why even many Trinitarian scholars do not think it refers to “source.”

The Hebrew word translated “root” or “shoot” is *sheresh* (#08328 שֹׁרֶשׁ), and the Greek word is *rhiza* (#4491 ῥίζα, pronounced 'hreed-zah). In both Hebrew and Greek, the words can refer to either a “root” or a “shoot” that comes up from a root. Furthermore, in both Hebrew and Greek, the words are used both literally and metaphorically. For example, a literal use of the Hebrew word occurs in Job 14:8, while Job 5:3 and Proverbs 12:3 use the word metaphorically as a source of supply and stability, and Deuteronomy 29:18 uses it metaphorically to refer to the source of something. The same thing happens in Greek. The word *rhiza* can refer to a literal root (cf. Matt. 3:10; Luke 17:6), or it can be used metaphorically as the source of supply and stability (cf. Rom. 11:18), or it can be used for the origin of something (1 Tim. 6:10).

Given the two possible translations, “root,” or “shoot,” the better translation of both the Hebrew and Greek words is “shoot,” i.e., a shoot that comes up from the root. This is clear from the first use in Isaiah 11:10 and the last use in Revelation 22:16.

The context of Isaiah is that the Jews lived in a time when it seemed their kingdom was in ruins and the hope of Israel seemed gone. The Kingdom of Israel, represented by the words “Jesse” or “David,” was just a stump of what it had been under David and Solomon. The once-great United Kingdom of Israel had split into two rival countries: Israel to the north and the much smaller Judah in the south. Furthermore, both countries had been attacked by foreigners, including Egypt, the Syrians, and the Assyrians. In fact, during Isaiah’s day, Assyria captured Israel and carried the people away, replacing them with foreigners. It did not look as if there would ever be a Kingdom of Israel again. The people needed hope. At that time, the word of the Lord came to Isaiah and promised that a shoot would indeed come up out of the stump of Jesse. That prophecy is Isaiah 11.

**Isaiah 11:1-9 (ESV: abridged).**

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse…And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

After those wonderful verses came the powerful verse about the Messiah himself: “In that day the Shoot from Jesse shall stand as a banner for the peoples. All the nations will inquire of him, and his resting place shall be glorious.” The context makes the title, “Shoot from Jesse,” very clear. The Messiah will come from Jesse and restore the kingdom, indeed, he will restore the entire earth to its Edenic state. He will start out as a “shoot,” with humble beginnings, but he will eventually rule and restore the earth.

Notice that there is no hint in this context that the Messiah somehow started Israel or was its source. There is no hint of the Trinity. The Messiah is shown to be a descendant of Jesse; he comes from the stump of Jesse (Isa. 11:1). As for the translation “shoot,” many lexicons, commentaries, and versions prefer the translation “shoot” or some equivalent to it, and not the translation “root,” even though most English versions still read “root.” For example, BDAG lists Romans 15:12 saying, “that which grows from a root: [a] shoot, scion.”[[239]](#footnote-18490) Commentaries by scholars such as Lenski concur. Meyer says “root-shoot,” referring to a descendant (and points out that the Hebrew word *sheresh* (#08328 שֹׁרֶשׁ) can also refer to a shoot from a living root).[[240]](#footnote-27205) Newman and Nida understand that the text is referring to someone who comes from Jesse, and think perhaps the best translation should be “descendant.”[[241]](#footnote-18556) R. C. H. Lenski writes in his commentary on Romans 15:12:

The word ῥίζα refers to a live root that sends up a sprout, hence “the root-sprout,” the article designates the one person referred to. Jesse was David’s father; in Rev. 5:5 and 22:16 we have “root-sprout of David.” The royal house that sprang from David was cut down; from the root Jesse (appositional genitive) only a tender young sprout would grow up, so tiny and apparently so weak compared with the old royal tree. …Here is the hand of God: a mere root-sprout, small, lowly, from the defunct royal Jewish house, is the Lord and hope of the world of all nations.[[242]](#footnote-12142)

A number of English versions have “shoot” or something equivalent, including what the “shoot” is, a “descendant.” The New English Bible and the *Moffatt Bible* have “Scion,” which is a shoot or bud. *God’s New Covenant*, the translation done by Heinz Cassirer, has “the scion sprung from Jesse.” The New Testament by Edgar Goodspeed says, “The descendant of Jesse will come,” and The Good News Bible has “A descendant of Jesse will appear.” Charles Williams (*The New Testament in the Language of the People*) translated the phrase, “The noted Son of Jesse will come,” showing that he felt *rhiza* referred to the descendant of Jesse, the Son of Jesse.

Isaiah is clear that the Messiah comes from Jesse, and thus “shoot” is a better translation than “root,” but Revelation 22:16 also shows us that the translation should be “shoot from David” or an equivalent phrase. Jesus Christ is speaking, and he says, “I am the *rhiza* and offspring of David.” Jesus is highlighting who he is by phrasing it in two different ways. He is not using the terms in an opposite manner, as if he were both the source of David and the offspring of David. For one thing, his audience would not have understood that. He was using the title “shoot from David” just as Isaiah used “shoot from Jesse.” Furthermore, in typical Semitic fashion, he was stating something twice in slightly different ways for clarity and emphasis. Thus, he said he was the shoot that came from David, the offspring of David. This is closely related to the messianic title, “Son of David.” As the Messiah who came from David and would restore Israel and the earth, it is fitting that Isaiah and Romans show that Jesus will be someone whom not only the Jews, but the Gentiles, will look to for leadership.

The fact that both the Hebrew word *sheresh* and the Greek word *rhiza* can refer to either a root or a shoot from the root allows for one more possibility: that the text contains the figure of speech amphibologia, double entendre, and both meanings are included in the verse. Although the context dictates that “shoot” would be the dominant reading, we cannot rule out the fact that God chooses words very carefully, and the Messiah is also our stability and source of sustenance. Thus, while we are to focus on the fact that the Messiah is the “shoot from Jesse” (and David) and is our hope when hope seems lost, we are not to lose sight of the fact that our sustenance and stability are also provided by the Messiah.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

Rom 15:13

**“may.”** The wish comes from the optative mood of “fill.”[[243]](#footnote-26716)

**“as you continue to believe.”** The sense of the Greek *en* is “through,” or perhaps even better, “in connection with.” The joy and peace do not “just happen” to the Christian, but are in connection with his continuing faith, his continuing believing.

**“abound in hope through the power of holy spirit.”** In this verse, God connects the reality of the hope in the life of a believer to the power of the holy spirit. The gift of holy spirit makes the hope more real in many ways. First, there is the effect the holy spirit has in us as it works to conform us into the image of Christ (Gal. 5:16-25). Perhaps more to the point is how, when we see the power of holy spirit at work in us as we receive revelation, speak in tongues, and manifest the spirit in other ways, God becomes more real to us, and thus his promises about the future (our hope) abound in us as well. The verse immediately before Romans 15:13, (Rom. 15:12), speaks of the hope of the coming of the Messiah, the root of David, which is one of the great promises of God that we can hope for.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Rom 15:14

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the Christian community, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other Christians. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

Rom 15:16

**“a servant.”** The Greek is *leitourgos* (#3011 λειτουργός). It is used of a public minister, a servant of the state, and it is also used of a minister in a sacred manner. Many think that the word always connotes a sacred minister, but there is much to argue that in this context the word can mean a secular minister. There are aspects of both meanings that are true, and this is one of the advantages of the Greek text—it packs both meanings into one word. In the Roman world, public servants bore the expense for festivals, celebrations, games (including gladiator matches), etc. By addressing himself as a public servant, one would immediately note that he was the one who bore the expense of his own efforts in bringing the Gentiles to Christ, something he points out at other places in the Epistles. Both public servants and sacred ministers did what they did on behalf of others, which was certainly the case with Paul.

**“serving like a priest *in proclaiming* the good news of God.”** In this verse, Paul is comparing himself and his ministry to that of an Old Testament priest in two ways.

The first way he likens himself to an Old Testament priest is in proclaiming the good news of God. One might ask, “How is this like an Old Testament priest, I thought they just made sacrifices for the Israelites?” In the Old Testament, every seven years, during the Feast of Booths, the priests and (likely) the Elders of Israel were supposed to read aloud the Law to all the people of Israel, including any foreigners who may be present (Deut. 31:9-13). Likewise, in Leviticus 10:11, Yahweh tells Aaron and his sons (the priests), “to teach the children of Israel all the statutes that Yahweh has spoken to them by Moses.” Lastly, in Nehemiah 8:3-6 Ezra, the priest and scribe, read the book of the law to all the people of Israel, and helped them understand it (Neh. 8:13). Therefore, it is clear that the Old Testament priest’s duty was not only to perform sacrificial rituals, part of their duty was also to read and teach God’s law and his commandments. So, when Paul says that he is serving like a priest in proclaiming the good news, he is comparing his proclamation of the good news with the Old Testament priest’s proclamation of the law. In that way, Paul is serving God like a priest.

The REV is supplying the word “proclaiming” because that is the way in which Paul served in relation to the good news. Paul did not serve God by creating the good news or hearing the good news; rather he served God by proclaiming the good news (Rom. 15:20). Therefore, “proclaiming” is properly supplied to help the reader understand in what way Paul served the good news.

The second way in which Paul is serving God like a priest is that, just like the priests brought forth sacrificial offerings to God (Lev. 6:6-7; 9:7; 16:6; Heb. 7:27), so to Paul brings forth a spiritual offering, the Gentiles, to God. Paul proclaimed the good news to them, in hope that they would believe the good news and transform their lives accordingly, so that they would be an acceptable offering to God (Rom. 15:16), which is an echoing of how in the Old Testament, sacrifices had specific requirements for being acceptable sacrifices (Lev. 22:19-21).

**“*my* offering—the Gentiles—.”** The Greek, “offering of the Gentiles,” is the objective genitive and thus has the force of “the offering, that is to say, the Gentiles.” Paul’s offering to God was the Gentiles.

**“made holy by the holy spirit.”** The gift of “holy spirit” that is born inside each believer “sanctifies” them, i.e., it makes them holy. Thus, the Gentiles, when they get born again, become holy to God. God is holy and spirit, and like any parent, when He gives birth, His children get his nature, so they are holy too. The way it works is that when a person gets “born again,” he or she receives the gift of God’s nature, which the Bible calls “holy spirit” (1 Thess. 4:8), and because God’s children have God’s holy nature, they are holy and are called “holy ones.” (See commentary on Phil. 1:1, “holy ones.”)

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Rom 15:19

**“power of *God’s* spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the “Holy Spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more information on the uses of “spirit,” including “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**“from Jerusalem and all around as far as Illyricum.”** As an apostle primarily called to go to the Gentiles, Paul’s ministry could have been worldwide, but time and circumstances never permit that for any one person. Here in Romans 15, Paul mentions in general terms the area in which he himself had traveled and evangelized, which was from Jerusalem to Illyricum on the Adriatic Sea. Although writing to the Romans in this Epistle, he himself had never been to Rome at this point in his ministry. However, he must have had extensive communication with people from Rome, because he knew a lot about them (see commentary on Rom. 16:3).

Illyricum was a province located to the northwest of Greece. It bordered the Adriatic Sea. Scripture never mentions Paul traveling in Macedonia further west than Berea (Acts 17:10ff), and the logical place for him to travel west to Illyricum would have been from Thessalonica. From there he could have taken the Egnatian Way west to one of its two ports on the Adriatic Sea, Dyrrhachium or Apollonia. Thus, it is likely that when Paul was in Thessalonica on his third missionary journey, he made the decision to go through Macedonia (Acts 19:21), and it is likely that when he was in Macedonia (Acts 20:2), he took some time and traveled west. He did not have the time to travel west on his return journey through Macedonia (Acts 20:3) because he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem.

Paul said he did not want to build on another man’s work (Rom. 15:20), but it is obvious that occasionally he did. By the time he was making itineraries, the message of Christ had reached many places in the Roman world. Nevertheless, there were places, it seems, that it had not reached before Paul arrived and taught (e.g., Salami, Paphos, Antioch of Pisidia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth).

Rom 15:20

**“I make it my aim to proclaim the good news where Christ has not *already* been named.”** Paul desired to teach about Jesus Christ in places where the people did not know about Christ, and although he did that quite often, he was not always able to do that (see commentary on Rom. 15:19). There were places where the message of Christ had been preached before he arrived there (e.g., Acts 19:1).

Rom 15:24

Although many commentators see an anacoluthon in this verse, for us there is no need for it.[[244]](#footnote-18436)

**“after I have first enjoyed your company for a while.”** The Greek reads somewhat differently, saying that Paul would like to “fill up” his “measure” with them, which is very unclear in English. When we say we have “had our fill” of a guest, it means we are unhappy with the situation and it is time for him to leave. Thus, we believe the REV has the correct sense of the verse.

**“sent off well-supplied.”** This translation seeks to capture the nuances of the Greek word *propemphthēnai* (#4311 προπεμφθῆναι). The word means “to assist someone in making a journey, send on one’s way with food, money, etc.”[[245]](#footnote-17053) So, the word does not just mean “to send off,” nor does it mean “to give assistance,” it means both, to send off and help supply someone for their journey.

Rom 15:26

**“Macedonia,” “Achaia.”** This is the figure of speech metonymy. This is a common use of metonymy, the regions being put for the people who live in them. The Gentile believers had made a contribution to help their Jewish brothers, and Paul was eager to deliver this gift, no doubt in part because he hoped it would help alleviate some of the division between the Jewish and Gentile Christians.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Rom 15:27

**“minister.”** The Greek is *leitourgeō* (#3008 λειτουργέω), and it means to serve the state at one’s own cost, or to do a service or perform a work. It was a word used specifically of the priests and Levites who performed sacred rites in the Temple, and is used in the NT of Christians serving Christ. Therefore, this word brings to mind the specific service of the Levitical priests to God, and by being used here of the Gentiles, it is as if just as the Levites have served as priests to God, now the Gentiles serve as priests to the Jews, who in a way represent God to them (they would be the representatives of God, having brought the Law, the Christ, the Old Testament, etc.).

Rom 15:28

**“have securely delivered to them this contribution.”** The Gentile churches that Paul founded had given a gift to the Jewish Church in Jerusalem. That is one of the reasons Paul felt that he must take the gift personally, and not hurry on to Rome and Spain right away from Corinth or Macedonia. Paul had directed that there be a financial gift sent to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4) and had encouraged the people to give (2 Cor. 8-9). Paul felt very strongly that the Jewish church needed to know that even as the Word went out first from them to the Gentiles, now the blessings of the Gentile churches were coming back to the Jews. The text more literally reads “myself having sealed to them this fruit” (the verb being in the middle voice), using the custom of the seal to make the point. The “seal” was the assurance that the job was done completely. When a letter was completely written and addressed, then it was “sealed.” In this case, Paul wrote that he would “seal” the money to the believers in Jerusalem, i.e., make sure it was securely received by them. Anyone could have taken money to Jerusalem, but Paul felt his presence was essential to communicate the essence of the message that went with the blessing.

**“after visiting you.”** The Greek is literally “by way of you.” Paul would travel through Rome on his way to Spain.

Rom 15:30

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

Rom 15:31

**“so that I will be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea.”** Sometimes we Christians think about doing something unwise or that is possibly against the will of God, and we think that if we pray for God to cover and protect us, then He will. That is not the case. When we do something unwise God’s grace will not always be able to cover us, and when we do something that is against the will of God, He will not help us be successful, even His grace may not cover us. Just because a Christian has good intentions does not mean that he is right; good intentions do not equal being right in the sight of God. That is why the Bible exhorts Christians to always be wise, and even have a multitude of counselors.

Paul’s prayer here in Romans is a good example that having good intentions and trying to be right is not the same as being right. It is possible that Paul did not have crystal clear revelation not to go to Jerusalem when he wrote Romans, and certainly not revelation that was clear to him. But he absolutely did have clear revelation not to go to Jerusalem long before he reached Jerusalem, but he ignored it.

Paul wrote the book of Romans while he was in Corinth on his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-Acts 21:17). On his first two missionary journeys, Paul departed from Antioch of Syria and ended by returning there. He never got to return to Antioch on this third missionary journey because he was arrested in Jerusalem and sent to Rome. From Romans 15:30-32 we learn that Paul planned to take the financial blessing (the money that had been collected from the believers) that he was traveling with to Jerusalem, securely transfer it to the believers there, and then travel to Spain by way of Rome (cf. Rom. 15:28).

But God was trying to tell Paul not to go back to Jerusalem; someone else could have taken the money there. We can tell from Romans 15:30-32 that Paul was already being warned by God not to go to Jerusalem, but he disobeyed God and went anyway, at great cost to himself and the Church. He was nearly killed in Jerusalem (Acts 21:31), then he spent more than two years in jail in Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea (Acts 24:27), then he spent many months being taken as a prisoner to Rome (Acts 27:1-28:16), then he spent two years under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). So this wonderful apostle who opened up Cyprus, Turkey, and Greece to the Good News of Jesus Christ was sidelined in prison for close to six years because he did not listen to God. Furthermore, during those six years, the Adversary was able to marshal such forces against the Church—both persecution from the outside and division on the inside—that after Paul was released from prison, he found that many of his converts had turned away from him. He wrote to Timothy four or five years after being released that everyone who was in the province of Asia, which included the city of Ephesus where he had spent so much time teaching the Word, had turned away from him (2 Tim. 1:15).

When we read the book of Acts we can see Paul’s journey to Jerusalem from Corinth, where Romans was written. He went back north through Macedonia (Acts 20:3). No doubt he visited his converts in cities such as Athens and Thessalonica on the route, although that is not mentioned. He also visited Philippi (Acts 20:6), where he had founded a church on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-40). Then he sailed east across the Aegean Sea for Troas, a coastal city in the Roman province of Asia (Acts 20:5-12). From Troas, Paul traveled south, following the coast to Assos (Acts 20:13), then Paul got on a ship and sailed south to Mitylene, then continued sailing south to Samos, then on to Miletus (Acts 20:14-15).

It was from Miletus, about 50 or so miles from Ephesus by land, that Paul sent for the elders of the Church at Ephesus, with whom he had just spent some three years on the earlier leg of his third missionary journey (Acts 19:10; Acts 20:31). It was in his conversation with those elders that Paul said things that, if his eyes were open, would have kept him from going to Jerusalem. He told them that God warned him in “every city” that prison and afflictions awaited him (Acts 20:23). Furthermore, God told him that “grievous wolves” would enter the flock and hurt the believers (Acts 20:29). Although it is unlikely that Paul could have stopped all the damage from happening to the Church, he might certainly have been able to stop some of it had he been free and able to travel. Also, the fact that God warned him in “every city” tells us that God was trying hard to tell him not to go, and his journey to Jerusalem was not over yet—he still had a long way to go.

As we continue to read Acts we see that Paul continued his journey to Jerusalem, and God faithfully kept trying to warn Paul not to go. When he came to Tyre on the Phoenician coast north of Israel, “through the spirit” the disciples “repeatedly told Paul that he should not set foot in Jerusalem” (Acts 21:4). When Paul sailed into Caesarea he still had time to abort his trip to Jerusalem, even though it was now only about 70 miles (115 km) away. God sent the respected prophet Agabus to Caesarea to warn Paul and tell him not to go, and the people in Caesarea pleaded with him not to go (Acts 21:10-12), all to no avail. Paul ignored God’s warnings, went to Jerusalem, was imprisoned, and the Church suffered.

So Paul had prayed and enlisted the help of others to pray that he would be delivered from the Jews in Jerusalem, as we see here in Romans 15:30-32. Perhaps the answer to Paul’s prayer was the clarity with which God spoke to him over and over to not go, which indeed would have answered his prayer because he would have been delivered from the Jews.

There are certainly lots of lessons we can learn from what happened to Paul. One of them is not to be so focused on what we want to do that we don’t “hear” the voice of God. Another is that if it is against the will of God to do something, praying for “protection” is not the right course of action. God may do his best to protect us from our stupidity, but it is almost certain that we and others will still suffer to some extent. Believers need to find the will of God and go about doing it. We will never know how the course of Christianity might have developed if Paul had not gone to Jerusalem.

[For more information about it not being the will of God for Paul to go to Jerusalem, see commentaries on Acts 21:12 and 21:14.]

**“service.”** The Greek word is *diakonia* (#1248 διακονία), and generally, it means service or ministering, the office of those who serve in the church, the office of the deacon in the church, and the service of those who prepare and present food. In this case in Romans, the context shows us it refers to the “service” of bringing a gift, in this case, money, to the believers in Jerusalem. This explains why translations such as the New Jerusalem Bible translate it, “the aid I am carrying.”

**“holy ones.”** The Christians. See commentaries on Romans 15:16 and Philippians 1:1, “holy ones.”

Rom 15:32

**“refreshed by being together.”** The Greek word is *sunanapauomai* (#4875 συναναπαύομαι), and it means to relax in someone’s company, or rest with.[[246]](#footnote-21690) The Romans were so familiar to Paul, and so at ease with him, that he could genuinely rest with them.

**Romans Chapter 16**

Rom 16:1

**“commending.”** The Greek word is *sunistēmi* (#4921 συνίστημι). It has a number of different meanings, but in this context, BDAG notes that it means “to bring together as friends or in a trusting relationship by commending/recommending; to present, introduce or recommend someone to someone else.”[[247]](#footnote-15243) In this verse, both the ideas of introducing and recommending are equally important, so we conflated the text in the REV to include both meanings. Paul did not just introduce Phoebe, he recommended her to the Romans. However, as the Roman church did not know Phoebe, he also introduced her.

**“deacon.”** The Greek word is *diakonos* (#1249 διάκονος, pronounced dee-'a-kah-nas), which means servant or “deacon.” In general, the word means a servant or an assistant but in the Christian Church it came to be an official title of an office in the church of those who were not “overseers” (actually running the congregation), but in charge of important duties. This is clear from a study of the word in the New Testament, particularly as it is used in 1 Timothy 3:8, 12; Philippians 1:1. There have been endless debates about whether God would allow a woman to hold the office of deacon in the church. Those who say that women cannot hold offices of authority in the Church say that in this verse *diakonos* should be translated “servant.” In contrast, those people who say that women could hold offices in the Church say that *diakonos* should be translated “deacon.” We assert that in the Church there is neither male nor female in Christ (Gal. 3:28), and that Phoebe held the office of a deacon in the church at Cenchreae. There is much evidence that women played a very important role in the early church (cf. commentaries on 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:12). One important piece of evidence that Phoebe was a “deacon” and not just a “servant” is the fact that she is called “a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.” There is no other place in the New Testament where a person is called a “servant” of a specific church. Christians are servants of God, or servants of Christ, but not servants of a specific church. In contrast, deacons were appointed to be deacons in specific churches. No person was a “deacon” of the Christian Church at large.

Phoebe was a deacon in the church at Cenchreae, which was a port of Corinth on the eastern shore of the Isthmus of Corinth, about 7 miles (11 km) southeast of Corinth. Phoebe must have been a very spiritual and trusted woman in the first-century church, because Paul trusted her to take the Epistle to the Romans to the Church at Rome, even though the Christians at Rome did not know her.

Romans 16:1 is one of the verses in the New Testament that shows that women were elevated in the Christian Church in a way that they had never been in the Jewish or Greco-Roman culture.

[For more on how the NT elevated and empowered women, see commentaries on 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:11; 5:14 and 1 Pet. 3:7.]

Rom 16:2

**“receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones.”** The two phrases appear to be appositional, such that “receive her in the Lord” is the same as “in a manner worthy of the holy ones.” We might expand it to be, “receive her in the Lord, that is to say, in a manner worthy of the holy ones.” The idea seems to be that the Romans receive Phoebe “in connection with” the Lord, in a godly way. This verse does not seem to be using the phrase “in the Lord” as descriptive of Phoebe, as if it were saying, “receive Phoebe, who is in the Lord, in a manner worthy of the holy ones,” although the wording of the Greek text certainly allows for Phoebe to be a believer who is “in the Lord.”

[For more on this phrase, see Word Study: “In the Lord.”]

**“help her with whatever she might need from you.”** This phrase has led many to believe that Phoebe had business in Rome and needed to go there anyway, and that may be true. It may also be that what she needed was hospitality and help getting back home after delivering the Epistle to the Romans.

Rom 16:3

**“Prisca and Aquila.”** In Romans 16:3-16, Paul, who had never been to Rome himself, showed that he knew a lot about Rome. He would have gotten his information from people who had been to Rome and told him what was happening there. He sends greetings to the believers in Rome from Timothy, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius, Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus (Rom. 16:21-23), so each of them must have been to Rome or knew believers who were there. The people to whom Paul sends greetings in Rome is an extensive list of believers, again showing his extensive knowledge of the Christian work going on there. The people Paul specifically sends greetings to who are living in Rome are: Prisca and Aquila, Andronicus and Junia, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Persis, Philologus and Julia, Rufus and his mother, Nereus and his sister, Epaenetus, Mary, Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, Herodion, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, Olympas, the *household* of Aristobulus and the *household* of Narcissus (Rom. 16:3-15).

Most of the people in the lists in Romans 16 are unknown to us today, although some of them are mentioned in other places in the Bible and a couple of names are recognizable in Roman history, such as the name “Prisca” and also Erastus the treasurer of the city of Corinth.

Rom 16:4

**“life.”** See commentary on Romans 11:3.

Rom 16:7

**“Junia.”** The identity and role of “Junia” have been hotly debated from a number of angles. It was once insisted that Junia could be a masculine name, but that argument has been pretty much conclusively settled by a study that showed there were over 250 uses of the name Junia in the Greek sources extant today, and not one of them was masculine.[[248]](#footnote-21230) Another angle of the argument arose because there are Greek manuscripts that have the masculine name Junias instead of the feminine Junia. However, those manuscripts were shown to be of a later date and not representing the original text, and thus, what they actually showed was the anti-feminine bias of the Church at that time, and scribes would rather alter the text than admit to a feminine apostle. Today, there are many commentators who recognize that Junia is indeed a woman’s name but assert that the proper translation of the text is not that she was an apostle, but rather was “noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles” (HCSB) or “well-known to the apostles” (ESV). However, although the Greek text can be read that way, is that the most common and logical reading? The reason commentators assert that is the way the Greek text should be translated comes from bias, not a simple reading of Greek. Lenski, usually a very reliable commentator, but one who feels that women should not be leaders, writes that if Junia were an apostle, “such an apostle would be strange indeed.”[[249]](#footnote-14832) The simple and straightforward reading of the Greek text is that Junia was an apostle. Thus, Romans 16:7 is one of the many verses in the NT that elevated women in the family, society, and the Church

[For more about women’s position in the family, society, and Church, see commentaries on Acts 17:12; 18:26; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14 and 1 Pet. 3:7. Also, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“fellow Jews.”** See commentary on Romans 9:3.

Rom 16:8

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

Rom 16:10

**“in Christ.”** Paul is using this phrase similarly to how he uses the phrase “in the Lord.” Paul means that Apelles is “approved as a follower of Christ,” or “approved as a Christian.” Thus, Apelles is a trustworthy Christian, he is approved in the eyes of Paul.

[For more on how “in Christ” is being used, see Word Study: “In the Lord.”]

Rom 16:11

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

**“fellow Jews.”** See commentary on Romans 9:3.

Rom 16:12

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

Rom 16:13

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

Rom 16:17

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“keep on the lookout for.”** The Greek is *skopeō* (#4648 σκοπέω), and it means to pay careful attention to, notice, watch. It is in the active voice, present tense, so it means to continually keep doing it. In this context, it seems like “watch out for” was not exactly the meaning, because that phrase is more akin to “be careful of” or “guard yourself against,” than “keep your eye on those” (NASB). The context seems to be that God is warning Christians to keep an eye out for people who cause division rather than to “be on guard against” people who cause division. The context makes it seem like the congregation at Rome had not yet been infected by people causing division (cf. Rom. 16:19), but Paul was telling them to make sure they pay attention in case anyone does start to sow division.

**“cause.”** The Greek is *poieō* (#4160 ποιέω), which means “to do” or “to make,” and in the phrase with the definite article is a substantivized present participle, which means “those who are making.” There are people who, out of ignorance or on purpose, because of their pride, stubbornness, or evil hearts, cause division and create obstacles, temptations, and pitfalls. Destroying someone’s spiritual walk can have everlasting consequences, and people who do that to themselves or others need to be dealt with swiftly and decisively.

**“Stay away from them!”** The Greek is *ekklinō* (#1578 ἐκκλίνω), and it means to avoid association with someone, to shun, to keep away from. This is a verb in which the tense and mood communicate volumes, and the word itself and the wording of the phrase augment the verb. The verb is in the imperative mood, and thus is a command, so we placed an exclamation point at the end of the sentence. Lenski translates the phrase, “definitely incline away from them!” He adds, “definitely, decisively, once for all, incline away from them—‘from them,’ not merely from their teachings.”[[250]](#footnote-22035) People who cause divisions are to be dealt with quickly and decisively, not allowed to linger in the congregation and spread their poison.

Rom 16:18

**“serve.”** The Greek verb is *douleuō* (#1398 δουλεύω), from the noun *doulos*, a slave. It means to serve as a slave, or serve, and metaphorically can also mean to obey or submit to. An argument could be made that in this verse, *douleuō* should be translated “to serve as a slave to,” or “be a slave to.” As it is used here, *douleuō* can refer to the fact that the individual works very hard, like a slave. Just because a person serves himself does not mean the work is easy, although some people do serve their own appetites by trying to make their lives easy. Many people work to please themselves, but work very hard, some even to the point of destroying their health, family, friendships, etc. The word *douleuō* can also refer to “serving as a slave to,” in the sense of being a slave to one’s appetites, like a drug addict is a slave to his addiction. Some people are slaves to their desires rather than being in control of their desires. Even in that case, however, the people are working to please themselves. In this verse, the Scripture is pointing out the motivation for the work—to please themselves instead of the Lord Jesus.

**“bellies.”** The Greek is *koilia* (#2836 κοιλία), which is singular in the Greek text, but in connection with the “people,” it refers to each person’s belly. *Koilia* has various meanings, including belly, womb, stomach, and the inner parts of a person. It refers to the emotional life of the person. Modern science is now learning that the enteric nervous system is integrally involved with our emotions, and thankfully, this is reflected in the biblical languages, both Hebrew and Greek. It is why we talk about a “gut feeling,” or have an upset stomach when we hear bad news, or why our bowels sometimes release when we are really afraid or shocked.

Here, the word “belly” paints a graphic picture and includes many meanings, such as emotions and intentions, and shows that these kinds of people just serve themselves and do what they feel like doing. They are not serving Christ. “Belly” hearkens all the way back to the Garden of Eden, when Eve served her own “belly” and not God, and did what she “felt like doing.”

**“smooth talk.”** The Greek word is *chrēstologia* (#5542 χρηστολογία), a compound word from *chrestos* (“kind”) and *logia* (“speech”). In this case, used in a bad sense, it is “smooth talk,” meant to deceive unwary listeners.

**“nice-sounding words.”** The Greek is *eulogia* (#2129 εὐλογία), a compound word from *eu* (good) and *logia* (speech). In the Bible, it is used in both its good sense of a “good saying,” thus “blessing, eulogy,” etc. (cf. Rom. 15:29), and in its bad sense of flattery, as it is used here. These liars speak “nice *sounding* words,” but they do not mean them, so they are really just lies and flattery. Nevertheless, they are effective because people are naïve or unsuspecting. The Adversary tries to stop Christians from being discerning by labeling them as “judgmental,” and often that ruse works. Sometimes, a teacher will be speaking a mix of truth and error, and someone listening will try to point out the error that is mixed in with the truth, but get accused of being picky and judgmental. It is never wrong to separate truth from error. Scripture tells us to “...test everything *and* hold on firmly to what is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). Paul got very upset with the Church at Corinth when they did not correctly discern the motives and teachings of the false apostles: “For if someone comes who preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or *if* you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different good news, which you did not accept, you put up with that easily *enough*” (2 Cor. 11:4). Yet we know that the false apostles who had infiltrated the church at Corinth did not teach only error. They, like all false teachers and even the Devil in Genesis 3, mixed truth and error, and Christians must be discerning enough to separate them. Not all smooth talk and nice words are godly and true.

**“thoroughly deceive.”** The Greek is *exapataō* (#1818 ἐξαπατάω). It is the verb *apataō* (#538 “deceive”) and the prefix *ek* as an intensifier, thus, “thoroughly deceive.”

**“unsuspecting.”** The Greek is *akakos* (#172 ἄκακος), a word made from the prefix a (“not”) and *kakos* (bad, of a bad nature, morally bad), and it means without badness, harmless, innocent, free from guilt. In this context, it means unsuspecting.[[251]](#footnote-22172) People who are morally upright get taken advantage of when they remain unsuspecting. It is not that the righteous have to be suspicious of everyone, but on the other hand, they need to keep their eyes open for inconsistencies in people’s lives and words.

Rom 16:19

**“innocent.”** The Greek is *akeraios* (#185 ἀκέραιος), meaning “unmixed or pure, as in unmixed wines or metals; without a mixture of evil, free from guile, innocent, simple.”[[252]](#footnote-32596) The Bible informs the believer not to be ignorant of Satan or his devices (cf. 2 Cor. 2:11). The Christian is to be wise about both what is good, and also is to keep from getting involved in evil. The contrast in this verse is between “good” and “evil.” The Christian is to be wise with respect to what is good, and at the same time, be “innocent” with respect to what is evil. Some versions pick up this sense of the word. For example, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible translates it “pure,” and God’s Word Translation translates it “to avoid what is evil.”

Rom 16:20

**“God of peace.”** The phrase “God of peace” is a common one in the New Testament (cf. Rom. 15:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20). This is undoubtedly due to the fact that peace is so important to a blessed life, and it is so absent in the world around us. God is here called the “God of peace” because the context is those people who are causing divisions and problems among the believers (Rom. 16:17). God is not a God of division and strife, but of peace, and although people influenced by Satan are causing problems now, that will go away very soon.

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost.

[For more information, see commentary on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“swiftly.”** The Greek phrase translated swiftly is *en tachos* (ἐν τάχος), literally meaning, “in speed.” The main idea of the verse is that very soon God will crush Satan. The Bible says exactly that in many other places as well—that Satan’s end will be soon (Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 7:29; Phil. 4:5; James 5:8; 1 Pet. 4:7; 1 John 2:18; Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:6, 20). Another implication of the phrase is that when Satan’s end comes, it will come quickly. The rule of the Devil will be destroyed very quickly when the Lord Jesus appears (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:11-20:3). It will not be a lingering death, but will be destroyed in hours when the Lord appears to fight the Battle of Armageddon. There is one more overtone in the verse that we must pay attention to, and that is that this verse also includes the believers’ victory over Satan now if we will obey God and do what He tells us to. We do have many victories over Satan in this life (cf. 1 John 2:14; 4:4). We must note that the verse says that Satan will be crushed “under your feet,” i.e., the feet of the believers. Of course, this will be more fully fulfilled when we participate in the Battle of Armageddon (cf. Rev. 19:14), but we also have victories over Satan’s plans now. In this case in the Church at Rome that involved people causing division, if we are wise about what is good and untainted by evil (Rom. 16:19), and if we watch for, and stay away from, people who cause divisions, then we will quickly defeat Satan’s plans to divide our congregations. It is never easy to confront and dismiss those who cause divisions, in part because we want to allow people to have their own opinions. However, there are people who step over the line in that area, and we must deal with them quickly and decisively, as God says to. If we do, Satan’s plans will be quickly stopped. If we do not obey God in this matter, the word of those who cause division will spread like gangrene and overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17, 18).

**“grace of our Lord Jesus.”** A textual variation (notably in the Western Texts) adds the word “Christ” to this benediction (cf. ASV, ESV, KJV, NRSV). However, the original was most likely the shorter reading found in the earliest manuscripts and represented in the REV and most modern versions. The addition is explained by the principle called “the expansion of piety,” which is the tendency of scribes to continue to enlarge names, titles, doxologies, etc. over time, often due to overzealous reverence. In this case, the original “Lord Jesus” gets expanded to “Lord Jesus Christ.” It is much more likely that “Christ” was added than that it was omitted by copyists.[[253]](#footnote-20052)

**“you all.”** The “you” is plural, thus “you all.”

Rom 16:21

**“fellow Jews.”** The Greek word is *sungenēs* (#4773 συγγενής), and it refers to people who are related by blood, or in a wider sense, are of the same country or race. In this case, it refers to Paul’s fellow Jews (see commentary on Rom. 9:3).

Rom 16:22

**“greet you in the Lord.”** This does not mean, “I greet you, who are in the Lord,” but rather, “greet you *as a fellow-believer*.” It is Tertius’ way of letting the Christians at Rome know that he is a fellow Christian, and is greeting them as such. The same basic format is found in 1 Corinthians 16:19. It seems certain that Paul would not let a non-Christian scribe write down the Epistle of Romans as he dictated it. Given the circumstances and confines of writing as a prisoner in Rome, it is certain that Paul and Tertius had a wonderful working relationship.

[For more on this phrase, see Word Study: “In the Lord.”]

Rom 16:23

**“Erastus, the city treasurer.”** Craig Keener writes: “If this is the same ‘Erastus’ who is attested in a Corinthian inscription as an *aedile* [pronounced ee-dial] in this general period (and this is likely), he must have been a wealthy benefactor of the city, part of the municipal aristocracy. Candidates for the *aedile* had to promise significant donations to the city to gain election.”[[254]](#footnote-30903) The office of *aedile* was an elected office that dates back to the time of the Roman Republic. *Aediles* were responsible for the maintenance of public buildings and the regulation of public festivals. They also had powers to enforce public order.

Rom 16:24

Omitted from the REV. The textual evidence is very strong that the phrase that appears in the KJV is an addition, which is why almost all modern versions omit it. If it were original, there seems to be no reason why a scribe would have omitted it, and the general tendency was to expand liturgical formulations, such as the ones found at the end of Epistles. Other good evidence that it was an addition comes from the fact that the phrase does not appear in the same place in all the manuscripts. Some place it earlier, and some manuscripts place this verse after Rom. 16:27 so the book ends with the benediction.

Rom 16:25

**“sacred secret.”** God refers to the “Administration of Grace” (Eph. 3:2) as the “Administration of the Sacred Secret” (Eph. 3:9), and uses the phrase “sacred secret” many times in the Church Epistles because much of what Christians have today in Christ was indeed a secret, hidden in God and unknown in the Old Testament. God says that the sacred secret was hidden until God revealed it after Pentecost (Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 2:7-10; Eph. 3:4-5; Col. 1:26).

[For more on why the REV translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “Sacred Secret” and not “mystery,” see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

Rom 16:26

**“according to the command of.”** The Greek is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:1.

**“in order to bring about obedience *that is* based on trust.”** See commentary on Romans 1:5.

Rom 16:27

**“forever.”** The literal Greek is “to the ages,” which in this context, which is the glory of God, means “forever.”

1. Jerome Carcopino, Daily Life in Ancient Rome, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-11102)
2. BDAG, s.v. “ἀφορίζω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20698)
3. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 36-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-17607)
4. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-26279)
5. Cf. Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary; John Murray, Epistle to the Romans, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-20070)
6. Lenski, Romans, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-20990)
7. William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Romans, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-15128)
8. For more on the use of the genitive, see Daniel Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 79-136. [↑](#footnote-ref-14220)
9. Lenski, Romans, 48-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-11531)
10. See H. E. Dana, and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-24611)
11. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 51; Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-25694)
12. Cf. many references in BDAG, s.v. “ἀδελφός.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25170)
13. Gerard Kittel, TDNT, s.v.“ βάρβαρος,” 94-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-13013)
14. Cf. Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, Is There Death After Life? [↑](#footnote-ref-23602)
15. BDAG, s.v. “θειότης.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16239)
16. Cf. Stephen Meyer, Signature in the Cell, 555. [↑](#footnote-ref-12636)
17. BDAG, s.v. “ἀκαθαρσία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31558)
18. Thayer, Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ἀκαθαρσία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18626)
19. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-19069)
20. William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Romans, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-20397)
21. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 128-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-21382)
22. Richard Chenevix Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-28243)
23. Thayer, Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “μακροθυμία. ” [↑](#footnote-ref-32235)
24. Charles B. Williams, The New Testament: A Private Translation in the Language of the People. [↑](#footnote-ref-10216)
25. BDAG, s.v. “κατά,” def. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-30754)
26. Also see John W. Schoenheit, The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul. [↑](#footnote-ref-24655)
27. Louw and Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, s.v. “ἀμετανόητος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12919)
28. Liddell and Scott, s.v. “θησαυρίζω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22216)
29. Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 143; Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Epistle to the Romans, 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-29632)
30. Ceslas Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, vol. 2, s.v.“ ἐριθεία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27059)
31. Spicq, Theological Lexicon, 2:70. [↑](#footnote-ref-15607)
32. Bromiley, TDNT, s.v. “ἐριθεία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31313)
33. Cf. Daniel Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 535-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-22671)
34. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-12182)
35. R. C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, 278-279; Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “δοκιμάζω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22978)
36. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “δοκιμάζω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24163)
37. BDAG, s.v. “μόρφωσις.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22021)
38. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 188-189. [↑](#footnote-ref-24831)
39. Lenski, Romans, 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-31198)
40. BDAG, s.v. “μέν.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29845)
41. See Lenski, Romans, 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-24375)
42. See HCSB; Lenski, Romans, 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-25392)
43. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-19773)
44. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 242-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-11599)
45. N.T. Wright, Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision, 90 (emphasis added). [↑](#footnote-ref-25093)
46. Lenski, Romans, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-28111)
47. BDAG Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ἐπίγνωσις.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10741)
48. Walter Elwell, ed., Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 953, “Righteousness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16408)
49. N.T. Wright, Justification, 90 (special emphasis added). [↑](#footnote-ref-19254)
50. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 252; Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Romans, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-22766)
51. James M. Boice, Romans, vol. 1: Justification by Faith, Boice Expositional Commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-18948)
52. Friberg, Analytical Lexicon, s.v. ἱλαστήριον. [↑](#footnote-ref-30293)
53. Louw and Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, s.v. “ ἱλαστήριον.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21825)
54. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-17444)
55. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Romans, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-18609)
56. Lenski, Romans, 262; Kenneth S. Wuest, Word Studies: Romans, 62; Rotherham, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-17217)
57. Cf. Lenski, Romans, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-18617)
58. Cf. BDAG, s.v. “ ἵστημι.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15490)
59. Cf. F. F. Bruce, Romans [TNTC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-16873)
60. Cf. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:351. [↑](#footnote-ref-14479)
61. Cf. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:351. [↑](#footnote-ref-14411)
62. BDAG, s.v. “καταργέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13042)
63. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 286-293, “antanaclasis”. [↑](#footnote-ref-30325)
64. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 538-608, “metonymy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21781)
65. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-25868)
66. Cf. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:353. [↑](#footnote-ref-28589)
67. Robertson, Grammar of the Greek New Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-24639)
68. Wuest, The New Testament: An Expanded Translation, 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-13036)
69. Cf. Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible; Wuest, Word Studies:Romans, 74; Wuest, New Testament, “out from among the dead,” 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-16257)
70. Cf. Dunn, Romans 1-8 [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-32023)
71. https://charactercounts.org/six-pillars-of-character, accessed October 12, 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-16233)
72. BDAG, s.v. “καταισχύνω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21603)
73. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-25148)
74. Robertson, Grammar of the Greek New Testament, 790-792. [↑](#footnote-ref-20539)
75. BDAG, def. b, 497. [↑](#footnote-ref-22467)
76. See J. Barr, Biblical Words for Time, 47–81. [↑](#footnote-ref-16701)
77. BDAG; TDNT, s.v.“ὑπέρ”; Robertson, Grammar, 630-632; Robertson, The Minister and His Greek New Testament, 35-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-24346)
78. Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 355-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-28911)
79. Robertson, Grammar, 500-501. [↑](#footnote-ref-25956)
80. Wallace, Greek Grammar, 116-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-10704)
81. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:360; Lenski, Romans, 384-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-28067)
82. John Bengel, Gnomon of the New Testament: Pointing Out, from the Natural Force ..., 2:117. [↑](#footnote-ref-29399)
83. Cf. Newman and Nida, A Translator’s Guide on Paul’s Letter to the Romans; also, CJB, GW, NEB, H. Cassirer (God’s New Covenant), Goodspeed (New Testament), Weymouth (The New Testament in Modern Speech), Williams (The New Testament in the Language of the People). [↑](#footnote-ref-23439)
84. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament, 592. [↑](#footnote-ref-31565)
85. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 391. [↑](#footnote-ref-13472)
86. Lenki, Romans, 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-19001)
87. BDAG, s.v. “δόξα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25163)
88. BDAG, s.v. “δόξα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15597)
89. Cf. Wuest, New Testament, “out from among those who are dead,” 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-18516)
90. Wuest, Word Studies from the Greek New Testament, s.v. “σύμφυτος,” 1:99. [↑](#footnote-ref-21597)
91. Thayer, Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, s.v. “ὁμοίωμα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32429)
92. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 400. [↑](#footnote-ref-30494)
93. Lenski, Romans, 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-32478)
94. Barclay Newman and Eugene Nida, A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans, 116; James D. G. Dunn, Romans 1-8 [WBC], 52; see also BDAG. [↑](#footnote-ref-27301)
95. Timothy Friberg, Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament, s.v. “εἰ.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32388)
96. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 404 (cf. his note on Col. 3:1 in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians). [↑](#footnote-ref-21354)
97. Bullinger, A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament, 396, def. 4a. [↑](#footnote-ref-31518)
98. Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Epistle to the Romans, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-13669)
99. R. F. Weymouth, The New Testament in Modern Speech. [↑](#footnote-ref-11662)
100. James Moffatt, The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments. [↑](#footnote-ref-24693)
101. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, “Conditional Sentences,” 680-711. [↑](#footnote-ref-18155)
102. Wuest, Word Studies:Romans, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-31455)
103. Wuest, Word Studies: Romans, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-18524)
104. Heinrich Meyer, Epistle to the Romans, 401, note CVII on Rom. 9:23. [↑](#footnote-ref-22803)
105. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 426. [↑](#footnote-ref-27214)
106. BDAG, s.v. “ἀκαθαρσία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20185)
107. Thayer, s.v. “ἀκαθαρσία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32348)
108. Nyland, The Source New Testament, 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-27649)
109. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 447-49; Meyer, Epistle to the Romans, 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-16499)
110. Wuest, New Testament, “up from among the dead,” 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-31272)
111. Cf. Wuest, New Testament, 363. [↑](#footnote-ref-18340)
112. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 744-747, “hypocatastasis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30913)
113. Quoted in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Sin: Origins and Universal Extent.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21697)
114. James B. Pritchard, ANET, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 590, line 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-25792)
115. For more on the figure of speech personification, see Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 861-869. [↑](#footnote-ref-12658)
116. Dunn, Romans 1-8 [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-22015)
117. Longenecker, Epistle to the Romans [NIGTC], 856. [↑](#footnote-ref-14190)
118. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 491, “antimereia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17126)
119. Bruce M. Metzger, Textual Commentary, 515. [↑](#footnote-ref-27452)
120. Metzger, Textual Commentary, 516. [↑](#footnote-ref-19555)
121. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 905. [↑](#footnote-ref-14832)
122. Kruse, Paul’s Letter to the Romans [PNTC], 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-20367)
123. J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible: Romans, Chapters 1-8, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-27572)
124. BDAG, s.v. “διότι.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25778)
125. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-16188)
126. Robertson, Grammar of the Greek New Testament, 790-792. [↑](#footnote-ref-30083)
127. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 527, on Rom. 8:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-20399)
128. Robert K. Brown, and Philip W. Comfort. The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-16810)
129. Cf. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 804-806, “amphibologia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22025)
130. Cf. Wuest, New Testament, “out from among the dead,” 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-26596)
131. Thayer, s.v. “μέλλω”; Louw and Nida, s.v. “μέλλω”; Lenski’s translation, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 515. [↑](#footnote-ref-25311)
132. McGee, Thru the Bible: Romans, Chapters 1-8, 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-30472)
133. Zane C. Hodges, Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-27270)
134. Lenski, Romans, 524. [↑](#footnote-ref-20139)
135. Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 462. [↑](#footnote-ref-14354)
136. See BDAG, s.v. “πρός” (3.e.δ). [↑](#footnote-ref-13821)
137. Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics. [↑](#footnote-ref-26799)
138. August Tholuck, Exposition of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-23875)
139. Brendan Byrne, Romans, Sacra Pagina, 258, 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-26083)
140. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 535. [↑](#footnote-ref-10772)
141. Cf. Lenski, Romans, 543. [↑](#footnote-ref-27040)
142. See also: Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-32150)
143. BDAG, s.v. “συναντιλαμβάνομαι.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26630)
144. Cf. Lenski, Romans, 544. [↑](#footnote-ref-22436)
145. Friberg, Analytical Lexicon; cf. BDAG. [↑](#footnote-ref-26366)
146. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 551. [↑](#footnote-ref-27652)
147. Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, Don’t Blame God. [↑](#footnote-ref-12044)
148. F. F. Bruce, Romans [TNTC], 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-30149)
149. Janet Magiera, Aramaic Peshitta New Testament Translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-22383)
150. BDAG, s.v. “συνεργέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14393)
151. Cf. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 635, “synecdoche.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27559)
152. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 553. [↑](#footnote-ref-14502)
153. Heinrich Meyer, Epistle to the Romans, 334 (emphasis original). [↑](#footnote-ref-16726)
154. Barnes, Barnes’ Notes, 609 (emphasis original). [↑](#footnote-ref-11916)
155. Bauckham, 2 Peter and Jude (WBC), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-14265)
156. Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, note on Eph. 1:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-31907)
157. Cf. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 256-259, “climax.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10347)
158. BDAG, s.v. “σύν.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13455)
159. Lenski, Romans, 568. [↑](#footnote-ref-30684)
160. BDAG, s.v. “ὀδύνη.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28174)
161. Daniel Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 551. [↑](#footnote-ref-21883)
162. Cf. John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans; Lenski, Romans, 583. [↑](#footnote-ref-12798)
163. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 387. [↑](#footnote-ref-31526)
164. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:381. [↑](#footnote-ref-10466)
165. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 476-77, “parembole.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31721)
166. Adam Clarke, Clarke’s Commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-20458)
167. Adam Clarke, Clarke’s Commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-16827)
168. G. K. Beale, and D. A. Carson, Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-30966)
169. Cf. C. K. Barrett, Romans [BNTC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-28442)
170. C.H. Dodd, quoted in Clarke’s Commentary on Genesis 25:23. [↑](#footnote-ref-30963)
171. Adam Clarke, Clarke’s Commentary on Genesis 25:23. [↑](#footnote-ref-16062)
172. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, commentary for Rom. 9:23, 624. [↑](#footnote-ref-31803)
173. Heinrich Meyer, Epistle to the Romans, 401, note CVII on Rom. 9:23. [↑](#footnote-ref-22803)
174. The World Book Dictionary, s.v. “idiom.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20358)
175. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, 823, “idioma,” number 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-25716)
176. Wilhelm Gesenius, Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar. [↑](#footnote-ref-17843)
177. Marcus Kalisch, A Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament: Exodus, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-17948)
178. BDAG Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “βούλημα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17439)
179. Wuest, Word Studies: Romans, 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-19181)
180. Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, 3:105. [↑](#footnote-ref-29403)
181. William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Romans, 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-26403)
182. Cf. James M. Boice, Romans, vol. 3, Boice Expositional Commentary, (Rom. 9:19-21). [↑](#footnote-ref-27867)
183. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 619, 621. [↑](#footnote-ref-24871)
184. Cf. John W. Schoenheit, The Death Penalty: Godly or Ungodly? [↑](#footnote-ref-18443)
185. Henrich Meyer, Epistle to the Romans, 380. [↑](#footnote-ref-30104)
186. William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Romans, 328. [↑](#footnote-ref-22023)
187. Adam Clarke, Clarke’s Commentary, 6:114. [↑](#footnote-ref-28895)
188. John Bengel, Gnomon of the New Testament: Pointing Out, from the Natural Force ..., 2:117. [↑](#footnote-ref-29399)
189. R. C. H. Lenski, Romans, 623. [↑](#footnote-ref-12445)
190. Adam Clarke, Clarke’s Commentary, 6:114. [↑](#footnote-ref-24362)
191. BDAG, s.v. “ἀπώλεια.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17690)
192. Lenski, Romans, 624. [↑](#footnote-ref-20861)
193. H. Meyer, Epistle to the Romans, 383. [↑](#footnote-ref-28499)
194. Cf. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 472-74, “epitrechon.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27209)
195. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 472-74, “epitrechon.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21589)
196. Wuest, New Testament, 369. [↑](#footnote-ref-15173)
197. Frank Stagg, “The Abused Aorist.” Journal of Biblical Literature 91, no. 2 (1972): 222-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-20391)
198. D. A. Carson, Exegetical Fallacies, 2nd ed., 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-30482)
199. Stanley E. Porter, Idioms of the Greek New Testament, 2nd ed., 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-23604)
200. Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament, 557-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-23023)
201. D. A. Carson, Exegetical Fallacies, p. 71 [↑](#footnote-ref-29963)
202. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 159-164, “tapeinosis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22452)
203. Cf. Lenski, Romans, 688-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-16174)
204. Cf. Wallace, Greek Grammar, 473. [↑](#footnote-ref-26060)
205. BDAG, s.v. “πίπτω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24170)
206. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:384. [↑](#footnote-ref-11771)
207. James D. G. Dunn, Romans 9-16 [WBC], 670. [↑](#footnote-ref-24709)
208. Cf. Wuest, New Testament, “from among the dead,” 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-12151)
209. Barclay Newman and Eugene Nida, A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-27508)
210. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “λογικός.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25941)
211. Nigel Turner, Christian Words. [↑](#footnote-ref-31837)
212. Nyland, The Source New Testament, 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-16765)
213. R. C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, 217-218. [↑](#footnote-ref-25772)
214. Timothy and Barbara Friberg, Analytical Lexicon, s.v. “ἀνακαίνωσις.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19340)
215. Joseph Thayer, Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ἀνακαίνωσις.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19650)
216. BDAG, s.v. “δοκιμάζω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15705)
217. Frank Laubach, The Inspired Letters of the New Testament, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-22251)
218. Ann Nyland, The Source New Testament, 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-28875)
219. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 767-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-31419)
220. Louw and Nida, Greek-English Lexicon; cf. Lenski, Romans, 768. [↑](#footnote-ref-19569)
221. Gerhard Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. “ζέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18437)
222. Lionel Casson, Travel in the Ancient World, 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-29707)
223. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 286-293, “antanaclasis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30620)
224. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 775. [↑](#footnote-ref-15504)
225. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “provide.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30934)
226. John P. Lange, Romans, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures. [↑](#footnote-ref-26339)
227. Pillai, Light Through an Eastern Window, 112-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-24434)
228. Cf. Cornelius Tacitus, The Annals, 15.44. [↑](#footnote-ref-30066)
229. BDAG Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “φόρος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10019)
230. Louw and Nida, Greek English Lexicon, s.v. “φόρος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28504)
231. Cf. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Romans, 438, “Do not keep on owing...” [↑](#footnote-ref-21486)
232. Gregory S. Aldrete, Daily Life in the Roman City, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-14159)
233. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 814. [↑](#footnote-ref-27141)
234. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 245–50. [↑](#footnote-ref-30416)
235. Cf. Stern, The Complete Jewish Bible, 1419; Newman and Nida, A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans, 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-23356)
236. Ryrie, Dispensationalism, 35-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-11848)
237. See G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, 687-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-29402)
238. See Daniel Wallace, Greek Grammar, 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-21841)
239. BDAG Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ῥίζα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18490)
240. Meyer, Epistle to the Romans, 543. [↑](#footnote-ref-27205)
241. Newman and Nida, A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans. [↑](#footnote-ref-18556)
242. Lenski, Romans, 872-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-12142)
243. Cf. Lenski, Romans, 874; Robertson, Word Pictures, 4:419. [↑](#footnote-ref-26716)
244. Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, Romans, 889-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-18436)
245. BDAG, def. 2, p. 873. [↑](#footnote-ref-17053)
246. BDAG, s.v. “συναναπαύομαι.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21690)
247. BDAG, s.v. “συνίστημι.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15243)
248. Cf. James R. Edwards, Romans [NIBCNT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-21230)
249. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 905. [↑](#footnote-ref-14832)
250. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 916. [↑](#footnote-ref-22035)
251. BDAG, s.v. “ἄκακος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22172)
252. Louw and Nida, Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ἀκέραιος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32596)
253. Also see James White, The King James Only Controversy, “the expansion of piety,” 43-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-20052)
254. Craig S. Keener, IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd ed., 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-30903)