

A detailed marble sculpture of a man with a beard and long hair, wearing a draped garment. He is seated and leaning forward, writing on a scroll with a quill. The background is a textured, light-colored stone wall.

**“To Gentiles
for Jewish Ears”**

*Readdressing Paul’s Audience
and Purpose in Romans*

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Proposals regarding the purpose and intended audience of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans have become so numerous that an attempt to provide a comprehensive list even of the *summaries* of those proposals in an introductory footnote at the outset of what is yet *another* proposal would be as exhausting as it is pointless. If we set aside for a moment the question of the letter’s purpose and focus instead on that of Paul’s intended audience, however, we find two predominant views: either Paul was addressing both Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Christ collectively or else he was directing his words primarily or exclusively to the non-Jewish believers in Rome. The second of these proposals seems to have been gaining greater support in recent decades.¹

¹ As Robert Jewett notes, “In the early period of historical-critical research on Romans, scholars tended to follow F. C. Baur in the assessment that Paul’s audience in Rome was entirely Jewish Christian” (*Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 70). Among those who have argued at greatest length that the intended audience of Romans was composed solely of non-Jewish believers in Christ are Paul J. Achtemeier, “Unsearchable Judgments and Inscrutable Ways: Reflections on the Discussion of Romans,” in *Pauline Theology*, Vol. IV: *Looking Back, Pressing On*, ed. E. Elizabeth Johnson and David M. Hay (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 3–21; Neil Elliott, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul’s Dialogue with Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 56–59, 66–67, 271–75; Andrew A. Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 53–114.

What is often overlooked, however, is that no matter to which of these groups Paul was directing his letter, he must have assumed that members of the other group would read it as well, not merely because it would eventually fall into their hands, but also because, given Paul’s notoriety and all that he was known to have accomplished as “apostle to the nations” or “gentiles” (ἔθνῶν ἀπόστολος, Rom 11:13; cf. 1:5; 15:15–16), members of both groups would be eager to know what he had to say, especially if he was announcing his plan to visit the believers in Rome. In fact, unless the Jewish believers in Christ that lived in Rome had broken off all relations with their fellow Jews, including both family and friends—something that virtually all New Testament scholars would reject out of hand—, Paul must have anticipated that the contents of his letter would also become known among Jews who were *not* believers in Christ. In addition, of course, Paul would have been well aware that none of the groups just mentioned was entirely homogeneous and that a plurality of identities and opinions existed within each of them.²

² Paul does not address his letter to the ἐκκλησία in Rome, most probably because the believers in Christ there met in different synagogues and house churches such as that which Paul mentions in Rom 16:5. According to Jewett, “there would have been dozens of groups at the time that Paul wrote his letter,” and therefore Paul would have intended his letter to circulate among these groups (*Romans*, 62).

Even though in his letter Paul mentions explicitly the purpose of his visit to Rome, debates over that question have been almost as widespread and intense as the debates over the purpose of the letter itself. The primary reason for this is that he mentions a variety of reasons for wanting to go to Rome, including the desire to impart to the readers some "spiritual gift" that would "confirm" or "strengthen" them (1:11), to be encouraged in his own faith while also encouraging them in theirs (1:12), to "obtain some fruit" among them as he has among other gentiles (1:13), to "preach the gospel" to them (1:14), and to enjoy a refreshing visit with them before being sent on his way to Spain by them to preach the gospel there (15:24).

Although these reasons are not mutually exclusive, scholars have generally focused on one of them in particular as the *primary* reason for his plan to visit the believers in Christ in Rome. Even when taken together, however, these reasons in themselves do not seem to justify the extraordinary length of the letter. As Colin Kruse observes,

Part of the problem presented by the letter is that in 1:1–15 and 15:14–16:27 Paul implies that he was writing to prepare the way for his visit to Rome and a subsequent mission to Spain, while seeking prayer support for his impending visit to Jerusalem with the collection. However, such a purpose does not seem sufficient to explain the long theological and ethical sections of the letter (1:16–11:36; 12:1–15:1). Any satisfying solution to the problem of purpose, therefore, must show how the theological and ethical sections of the letter relate to the purpose implied in Paul's statements at the beginning and end of the letter.³

This difficulty has led many scholars to

propose that the primary reason behind Paul's plan to visit Rome is distinct from any of those he mentions explicitly in the letter, in which case he deliberately avoids mentioning that reason due to some fear or concern on his part. Once they have presented arguments in support of their own proposal regarding the purpose of Paul's letter and visit, interpreters of the letter have then tended to focus on a particular passage or combination of passages that they regard as central to the letter or as representing its climax or conclusion.⁴ Subsequently, they must explain how the rest of the letter relates to that central point, climax, or conclusion and why Paul deemed it necessary or important to discuss at such length all of the other points that appear in the letter, especially given the fact that Paul had never visited the believers in Rome *to* whom and *for* whom he writes.

In what follows, I will argue that the believers in Christ *for* whom Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans are not merely the gentiles *to* whom he addressed the epistle but also the Jewish believers in Christ who would read or hear it, and perhaps other Jews who were not believers in Christ as well. Furthermore, strictly-speaking, there is no central idea, climax, or conclusion that serves as the key to understanding and explaining the rest

⁴ Among the most common proposals for the key passage, center, or climax of Romans are 3:21–26 (see, for example, C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 68), chapters 9–11 (see, for example, Thomas H. Tobin, "Paul's Letter to the Romans," in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune [Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], 398–412 [409]), and chapters 14–15 or 14–16 (see, for example, Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 163–91).

³ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 6–7.

of the letter's contents, although Paul's stated purpose in 15:24 is of primary importance for defining what constitutes that key.

To explain this proposal, I like to use the illustration of a student preparing for the pastoral ministry who will be preaching at a church service at which a small committee in charge of supervising her and perhaps even approving her for ordination will be in attendance for the purpose of evaluating her preaching skills. In this scenario, throughout her sermon the student will not address herself directly to those doing the evaluation—especially if she has been told not to reveal to the congregation the identity and purpose of those visiting—, since her task is to proclaim a message that is relevant and meaningful for the congregation as a whole. Due to the importance and significance of this evaluation, the student will want to demonstrate to the supervising committee her exegetical and hermeneutical skills, as well as her ability to be faithful to the biblical text and to the doctrinal emphases that her church values, while at the same time displaying her ability to engage the members of the congregation in a dynamic fashion that will create in them the impact she desires. When preparing and delivering her sermon, therefore, she will be very concerned to satisfy and fulfill the criteria that serve as the basis upon which she will be evaluated, and in that sense will write and preach her sermon *for* those doing the evaluation. In fact, she will probably be much more concerned about the response she will receive from those doing the evaluation than the manner in which the members of the congregation will respond. Nevertheless, her priority must still be that of addressing in a relevant and compelling way the needs, reality, and contexts of the members of the congregation in order to evoke a favorable response from them, since only in that way can she also receive a favorable response from those evaluating her sermon.

A careful examination of Paul's Epistle to the Romans reveals that there he is doing something very similar. Because he will be traveling to Rome and hopes to obtain strong support from the believers in Christ there for his evangelistic work in Spain, he wishes to evoke a favorable response in those who will read or hear his letter. As one who is known and acknowledged as "apostle to the gentiles" even among Jewish believers in Christ, he knows that he can confidently address his letter to the gentile believers in Christ in Rome "with boldness" (15:15), in contrast to the Jewish believers there, over whom he was not thought to have the same type of authority. At the same time, however, he is well aware that among many Jews—including both those who believe in Christ and those who do not—, he is regarded as a polarizing figure who generates tensions, controversy, and turmoil in Jewish circles as a result of his views regarding Israel and the Mosaic law. Given the prestige and importance of the city of Rome within the empire, as well as the prestige, authority, and influence that the communities of believers in Christ there possess by virtue of their location and perhaps their size and history as well, Paul can hardly expect to be well-received by the persons who will serve as his contacts in Spain and achieve success there if he cannot claim the support of the communities of believers in Christ located in Rome, and especially if they are in fact antagonistic to him and his ministry.⁵ In addition, given that less

⁵ Jewett argues that Paul would have needed the assistance of the Roman believers in Christ to establish bases of operation in each of Spain's three provinces, provide logistical support for him and his colleagues for their travels and lodging, recruit translators fluent in Latin, Greek, and other tongues, and select the right contacts in Spain in order to develop leaders for house churches and tenement churches (*Romans*, 79, 89-91). "In the Spanish context, the decisions would have to be made ahead of time and negotiations would be

than a decade earlier the Roman emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome due to disturbances that had arisen among them, Paul may have hoped that his letter might help allay any fears or concerns within the Jewish community at Rome that his visit would inflame further the tensions that no doubt continued to exist among many Jews there.

The Tone and Stated Purpose of Paul's Letter

Although Paul states explicitly the reasons for which he is writing to the Roman believers in Christ, he never expounds on those reasons at any length in his letter. The fact that he is eager to obtain their support and friendship is evident from the tone that permeates his letter, especially at its beginning and its end.⁶ Paul expresses his gratitude to God for the believers in Christ located in Rome, rejoicing that their faith is "proclaimed throughout the world" (Rom 1:8) and that their obedience is "known to all" (16:19). He stresses that he has desired to visit them for some time, but that to his deep regret various circumstances have impeded him from doing so (1:11, 13; 15:22–24). Rather than placing himself above them in a position of superiority, Paul expresses his hope that they may be "mutually encouraged by each other's

required to prepare the way before the arrival of Paul and his coworkers. If inappropriate local patrons were chosen, the entire mission would be jeopardized" (91). A. J. M. Wedderburn also rightly notes that "Rome was in many respects the key to future work in the West, for not only did all roads lead to it, but all led out from it as well" (*The Reasons for Romans* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988], 43).

⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer characterizes Romans as an "irenic discussion" of topics Paul writes about elsewhere (*Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 33 [New York: Doubleday, 1993], 73).

faith" (1:12) and presents himself humbly as Christ's "servant" (λειτουργός) who has nothing of which to boast except that which God and Christ have done through him (15:15–19). He addresses the readers as the "beloved of God," those who have been "called" as "saints," and his "brothers and sisters" on whose behalf he "unceasingly" offers up intercessions, yearning to "share some spiritual gift" with them to build them up and wishing them nothing but grace, joy, hope, and peace from God and his Son (1:7–13; 15:13–14). Towards the end of the letter, Paul virtually apologizes for having dared to write so boldly and at such length to them, since he knows that they are already "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another"; thus the most he can do is to "remind" them of these things (15:14–19). Paul's words here support the conclusion that his reasons for writing have more to do with those Jewish believers in Christ who will see or hear his letter than with his gentile readers, since according to Paul himself the latter have little need for any letter on his part, and much less one that is so extensive. There are thus good reasons for supposing that Paul's expressions of affection and adulation for the Roman believers to whom he writes, not only in the passages just considered but also in the long list of greetings found in 16:3–15, are so ebullient and effusive precisely because he is extremely anxious to gain their acceptance and support.

At the same time, Paul does not speak negatively of anyone in the letter, with two exceptions.⁷ These appear in 3:7–8, where he alludes to certain people who judge him as a

⁷ While some interpreters regard Rom 16:18–19 as an allusion to a specific group of persons, I would instead agree with James D. G. Dunn that here "Paul does not have any particular people in mind" (*Romans 9–16*, WBC 38B [Dallas: Word, 1988], 906). Even if he does, however, his language suggests that they are not (yet) in Rome.

sinner and speak evil of him for supposedly teaching others to "do evil things so that good things may come"—something he strongly denies—and 15:30–32, where he expresses his concern that "those in Judea who are disobedient" will reject or influence others to reject him and the offering that he has gathered for the "saints" there who are enduring hardships. It is significant, however, that when he mentions these critics and opponents, Paul locates them elsewhere, thereby distancing them from the believers in Rome, for whom he has nothing but praise, admiration, and love.

Paul's Reputation

In the two passages from Romans just mentioned, Paul acknowledges explicitly that among some people—who appear to be Jews rather than non-Jews—he has gained a reputation that sets them at odds with him. Paul's own letters and numerous passages from the Book of Acts indicate that Paul advocated and practiced with deep conviction the full inclusion of non-Jews who came to faith in Christ in the ἐκκλησία that he regarded as making up the one ἐκκλησία or "body of Christ" without requiring that they submit fully to the Mosaic law.⁸ Those writings also suggest that

many Jews criticized and opposed Paul, often aggressively, for reasons related to this practice. Such "full inclusion" included the claim that, in the eyes of the God of Israel, those non-Jewish believers in Christ who did not submit fully to the Mosaic law were just as acceptable and righteous as those Jewish believers in Christ who remained committed to observing that law faithfully.⁹

It is not difficult to understand why Paul's firm and unyielding position on these points would have generated conflict and opposition in some Jewish circles. If non-Jewish believers who *did not* submit fully to the Mosaic law could attain through their faith in Christ the very same righteous status before the God of Israel that Jewish believers in Christ who *did* submit faithfully to that law were said to possess, then of what value was that law? What was gained by observing it? And what did it matter whether one was Jewish or not? Could uncircumcised gentiles who believed in Christ now even be considered just as much members of God's chosen people as those who were circumcised and identified themselves as Israel? In the ears of many Jews, such a claim would be extremely problematic.

In fact, after observing how Paul received with open arms into the ἐκκλησία gentiles whose lives had previously been characterized

⁸ While I would question some of her conclusions, I concur wholeheartedly with Paula Fredriksen that it is inaccurate to speak of Paul's gospel or mission as "law-free," as so many Pauline scholars do ("Why Should a 'Law-Free' Mission Mean a 'Law-Free' Apostle?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134 [2015], 637–50). In Romans, Paul himself insists that he does not set aside the Mosaic law (3:31) and that believers fulfill both the law and its righteousness (8:3–4; 13:8–10). Because Paul undoubtedly expected gentile believers in Christ to observe not only the second table of the Decalogue but many other commandments of the Mosaic law as well, it may be better to speak in

terms of Paul not demanding of non-Jewish believers in Christ full submission to the law.

⁹ As Terence L. Donaldson stresses, "Paul's fundamental claim is that uncircumcised Gentile believers enjoy full and legitimate status before God (which he refers to as righteousness) on the basis of their faith" (*Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997], 126). Elsewhere Donaldson alludes to "Paul's insistence that Gentile believers are full and equal members of the family of Abraham" (230).

by all sorts of immorality and the abominations and vices associated with the worship of idols and false gods, some Jews might cynically raise the question of whether they now should abandon their law observance in order to give free reign to their lusts and passions as those gentiles had done before coming to faith in order that they might subsequently be received with the same open arms into Paul's ἐκκλησία, where they too would be accepted by God as fully righteous despite their abandonment of the Mosaic law. Supposedly, this abandonment might even be considered a *good* thing. In essence, this would involve affirming, "Let us do evil things so that good things may come" (Rom 3:8).

Even those Jewish believers in Christ who did not oppose Paul directly would ask whether his insistence that gentile believers need not submit fully to the law was equivalent to giving them free license to continue practicing a lawless and immoral way of life. As Thomas H. Tobin notes, Jewish believers would initially find it difficult to understand "how anyone could be a believer in Jesus without also accepting the continued observance of the ethical commandments of the Mosaic law. Any challenge to the sanctity of that law or to the observance of its ethical precepts would have appeared to them perverse ... [Paul's] rejection of the value of the observance of the Mosaic law must have seemed scandalous to them."¹⁰ Inevitably, those who had always lived under the law would ask: "What are the consequences of no longer being obliged to observe the law? Can the consequences be anything but disastrous?"¹¹

¹⁰ Tobin, "Paul's Letter," 406.

¹¹ Tobin, "Paul's Letter," 409.

The Apologetic Nature of Romans

Given Paul's reputation and the conclusions to which his inclusion of uncircumcised gentiles within the ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ seemed to lead, if Paul wanted to be welcomed to Rome by the Jewish believers in Christ there and gain their support, it was important for him to respond to questions such as those just mentioned in a way that would be acceptable to them. This is precisely what he seeks to do in the body of his letter, which runs from 1:16 to 15:13. Throughout these chapters and even into chapter 16, virtually everything that Paul writes can be seen as apologetic in some way. As we shall see, this is true even of the passages that do not *appear* to be apologetic. This apologetic purpose explains the letter's length: "The reason for the astonishing detail of Paul's arguments in Romans is that he wants to allay the argument of his opponents and slanderous rumors before he arrives."¹²

Paul's objective throughout the main part of Romans thus seems to be that of explaining, clarifying, and justifying in different ways—particularly through his use of the Hebrew Scriptures—exactly *what* he teaches and exhorts others to believe and practice. The fact that Paul is laying out for his audience his beliefs and teaching on certain subjects and questions has led many scholars to conclude that Paul's purpose in Romans is that of providing his audience with a summary or outline of the gospel he proclaims.¹³ Yet the fact that a

¹² Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Purpose of Romans," in *The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 231–42 (240). For similar perspectives, see Anthony Guerra, "Romans: Paul's Purpose and Audience with Special Attention to Romans 9–11," *Revue Biblique* 97 (1990), 219–37; Jewett, *Romans*, 90; Kruse, *Romans*, 10.

¹³ Werner G. Kümmel, for example, characterizes as the "old view" the position that "Romans is the

considerable part of Romans is paraenetic or hortatory in nature has brought other scholars to the conclusion that Paul's purpose in Romans is primarily *pastoral*: he wishes to offer the Roman believers in Christ guidance and perhaps even correction aimed either at fostering and encouraging certain attitudes and practices among them or at bringing about in them some type of change in conduct or thought.¹⁴

A close look at Romans, however, reveals that Paul is in fact doing *both* of these things, yet at the same time he is also defending himself from the criticisms, accusations, and objections—both actual and hypothetical—of those who are or may be opposed to his teaching and work. The reason that he does all of these things simultaneously is that, while he is addressing his words *to* the gentile believers in Christ in Rome, he does so especially *for* the Jewish believers in Christ there, who in reality are his primary concern. This proposal explains the "double character" of Romans pointed out by W. G. Kümmel years ago when he wrote that the letter "is essentially a debate between the Pauline Gospel and Judaism, so that the conclusion seems obvious that the readers were Jewish Christians. Yet the letter contains statements which indicate specifically that the community was gentile-Christian."¹⁵ It also responds to the concern of A. J. M. Wedderburn

theological confession of Paul, which has been appropriately characterized [by G. Bornkamm] as 'the testament of Paul'" (*Introduction to the New Testament*, 17th rev. ed. [Nashville: Abingdon, 1975], 312-13).

¹⁴ The writings by Fitzmyer, Elliott, Watson, Kruse, and Tobin already mentioned above, for example, all argue that Paul's purpose in Romans is primarily pastoral, although each of these authors has a different understanding of precisely what that pastoral purpose is.

¹⁵ Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 309.

regarding the need to address "*both* the fact that Paul's arguments in the body of the letter seem to have Jewish criticisms of his message in mind *and* the fact that at times he plainly seems to be addressing himself to Christians who are not Jews,"¹⁶ and answers questions such as those raised by Paul Fowler:

[W]hy does Paul feel the need to argue that the law is holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good? Why does he emphasize the priority of the Jew and Jewish advantage? Why does he talk about gentile arrogance and conceitedness toward Jews? Why does he carefully frame the letter from a Jewish perspective? Why is there so much attention devoted to Jew-gentile relations? And why does Paul begin his letter by stressing that his call is to bring about the 'obedience of faith among the gentiles' if his real intention is to debate Jews? ... In other words, why should Paul be arguing with some Jewish interlocutor when throughout the letter he is trying to uphold the Jews and the law of God?¹⁷

On the basis of questions like these, scholars such as Fowler have concluded that Paul is not "having a 'dialogue with Jews'" and that "the primary focus of his remarks" were "Christian gentiles" rather than "Jewish believers."¹⁸ Yet if Paul wrote Romans *to* gentile believers in Christ *for* the Jewish believers in Rome, then there is a sense in which *both groups* constitute his intended audience, *but each in a different way and for different reasons*.

The apologetic nature of Paul's letter is clear from the very start. He begins by stressing that

¹⁶ Wedderburn, *Reasons for Romans*, 5 (emphasis original).

¹⁷ Paul B. Fowler, *The Structure of Romans: The Argument of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 126.

¹⁸ Fowler, *Structure of Romans*, 127.

the Messiah he proclaims is thoroughly Jewish as the son of David of whom Israel's prophets and Scriptures spoke from ancient times (1:1-4). By repeatedly identifying himself as apostle to the *gentiles*—and thus *not* to the *Jews*—, affirming that any "harvest" he hopes to reap in Rome will be confined to the gentiles, and defining his ministry in terms of a priestly service in which he presents as an acceptable offering to God gentiles "sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (1:5, 14-15; 11:13; 15:16), Paul provides assurance to the Jews in Rome that he will not be involved in any activity that might stir up the type of dissension, discord, and turbulence that had led to the expulsion of many Jews from the city less than a decade earlier. His exhortation to the Roman believers to be subject to the governing authorities in 13:1-7 would also communicate to the Jews in Rome that Paul would not threaten the somewhat tenuous and fragile status quo that probably existed there.¹⁹

Similarly, the greetings found in the final chapter of Paul's letter should be seen as having an apologetic purpose. In this case, rather than defending himself to them, Paul provides the recipients of the letter with a long list of "character witnesses" who know him and are able to vouch for him and his teachings against any possible opposition (16:3-15).²⁰ The warmth and affection with which he greets the persons he mentions there and the Roman believers in general at the beginning of his letter also serves to show all those who will see it or hear it read that Paul is amicable, kind, and conciliatory by nature rather than being a divisive, contentious, or incendiary figure. The greeting he sends the Roman believers from "all the churches of

Christ" in 16:16 subtly insinuates that to accept or reject him is to accept or reject all of those churches as well, since he evidently has the authority to speak for them: "This comprehensive greeting implies that the apostle has the official backing of all the churches in Achaia, Macedonia, Asia, Galatia, Syria, and elsewhere."²¹ Paul's description of the offering he has gathered for the saints in Jerusalem as an expression of the indebtedness of the gentile believers to the Jewish people provides concrete evidence of his love for his fellow Jews, while his petition that the Roman believers support him with their prayers so that his offering may be well-received and he may be "rescued from those in Judea who are disobedient" conveys the idea that to stand together with him against those who oppose him is to stand on the side of God himself (15:25-32). His warning regarding those who cause divisions and σκάνδαλα and deceive others in 16:17-18 serves the same purpose, communicating to his readers that he himself does none of these things and therefore that to fail to support him is to fail to support what is good, right, and just. All of these passages, then, contribute to the notion that to oppose Paul and the gospel he proclaims in accordance with the Scriptures is to oppose God as well. They are thus apologetic in nature.

Similar observations can be made regarding the body of the letter, which begins: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of salvation for all those who believe, for the Jew first and then for the Greek" (1:16). The first words of this sentence suggest that there are some who are saying or may say that Paul *should* be ashamed of the "gospel" he proclaims because it is false, misleading, divisive, offensive, or all of these things together. At the

¹⁹ On both the religious and civil aspects of these tensions, see Arland J. Hultgren, *Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 16; Guerra, "Romans," 219-23.

²⁰ So Hultgren, *Romans*, 18.

²¹ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "The Reason for Romans: The Evidence of Its Epistolary Framework (1:1-15; 15:14-16:27)," *Review and Expositor* 100 (2003), 17-33 (29).

same time, following a practice he will continue to use throughout his letter, here Paul carefully and explicitly puts "the Jew" in first place and "the Greek" or "gentile" second (2:9-10; 3:1-2, 9, 29-30; 9:1-11:32; 15:7-9, 26-7). Paul wishes to leave no doubt that he continues to regard Israel as possessing a special, unique, and irreplaceable status in God's sight and his plan.

Outside of Rom 3:1-2, where Paul affirms that the advantages of "the Jew" and the benefits of circumcision are "much in every way," the most emphatic and passionate expression of this position regarding Israel is found in Rom 9:1-5. There, after insisting that he is "not lying" but "telling the truth" and testifying to what is assuredly in his conscience, Paul expresses not only his "immense heartache" and "unrelenting grief" at the rejection of the gospel he proclaims on the part of many of his Jewish sisters and brothers, but also his desire that he himself might be "accursed" and "separated from Christ" if only that would result in their embracing that gospel in order to attain salvation (9:1-3; cf. 10:1; 11:14). He then refers to his fellow Israelites as those whom God regards as his own children and stresses that it is to them that God has graciously given the glory of possessing the covenants, the law, descent from the patriarchs, access to himself through the sacrificial worship carried out in his temple, and the promises of salvation that include the sending of his Messiah from among them as the one through whom that salvation will come to pass (9:4-5). Towards the end of the section of his letter that begins with this passage, Paul declares unequivocally that in the end "all Israel will be saved," since for the sake of the patriarchs God's election of Israel as his beloved and the gifts and calling he has bestowed on them are "irrevocable," no matter how disobedient, obstinate, and rebellious some of them may be (11:25-32; cf. 10:21; 11:7-10). Even when he speaks of this disobedience, Paul attributes it in large part to the fact that God has

hardened—or perhaps even merely "callused"²²—his people Israel, thus suggesting that they are not fully responsible for their actions. Paul also seems to commend their great zeal as "*in and of itself a good thing*,"²³ though that zeal has unfortunately been misguided, not because of any malice on the part of his "brothers and sisters," but simply due to their ignorance or lack of enlightenment (10:1-3).

The passages that reflect most overtly the apologetic nature of Paul's letter are those in which he articulates a question that affirms an idea which might seem to follow logically from an argument he has just finished presenting, only to respond with an emphatic *μη γένοιτο*: "By no means!," "Absolutely not!," or "God forbid!" This expression serves to convey in the most vigorous manner possible his rejection of those ideas. In these passages, which are ten in number, he insists that despite the unfaithfulness of many within Israel, God remains faithful and does not act unjustly, that the faith

²² So Mark D. Nanos, "'Callused', not 'Hardened': Paul's Revelation of Temporary Protection Until All Israel Can Be Healed," in *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation. Essays in Honour of William S. Campbell*, ed. Kathy Ehrensperger and J. Brian Tucker (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), 52-73. According to Nanos, Paul uses *πωρόθηναι* and *πόρωσις* in Rom 11:7, 25 rather than *σκληρόναι* (cf. Rom 9:18; Exod 9:12, 16) to refer to a temporary division between the remnant and the rest of Israel aimed at protecting Israel as a callus protects an injury until healing can occur, rather than any type of "hardening": "The forming of a callus is a positive development undertaken by the tree to sustain the health of the injured part as well as the health of the overall plant, which is naturally affected by an injury to any part of it" (71; cf. 59-60).

²³ E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983) 44-5 (emphasis original).

and grace he proclaims in accordance with the gospel do not nullify the law, deny its holiness, or promote sinful behavior, and that Israel has not been abandoned by God or fallen into ruin (3:3–6, 30–1; 6:1–2, 15–16; 7:7, 13; 9:14–15; 11:1–2, 11). In one way or another, all of these passages respond to the accusations of Paul's real or imagined opponents that he disparages Israel and its law and teaches others to do the same, thereby betraying his own people, their God, their Scriptures, and other things that they regard as sacred.

Throughout Romans, therefore, Paul expresses in no uncertain terms and as persuasively as he can that the gospel he proclaims promotes none of the things just mentioned and even attempts to show that it does the opposite. Because those who would be offended or angered by the ideas from which he attempts to divorce himself would almost exclusively be Jews, his letter should be seen as addressing a Jewish audience. Nevertheless, he addresses the letter primarily to the gentiles in Rome for several reasons. First, as one whose authority in the eyes of both the Jewish and gentile believers in Christ derives from his commission to be "apostle to the gentiles," it would be out of place for him to address himself to anyone but gentile believers. In fact, for Paul to address himself directly to Jewish believers in order to respond to the scandalous conclusions that some appear to draw from his gospel would result in a letter that would come across as defensive, confrontational, and perhaps even aggressive, which is precisely what he wishes to avoid.

Second, Paul does indeed wish to lay out precisely what he proclaims and teaches, not only for the sake of the Jews in Rome, but for the gentile believers there as well. They too may have certain doubts and concerns regarding Paul and his gospel. By means of his letter, however, he will justify their full inclusion within the ἐκκλησία and reinforce their status

there as equals in relation to the Jewish believers in Christ, despite the fact that they do not submit to all of the commandments of the Mosaic law. By defending that status and even providing them with compelling arguments that may help them do the same, Paul will strengthen their position within the ἐκκλησία, thereby generating greater support there for his work.

And third, Paul wants to demonstrate convincingly to any Jews in Rome who might view him as an enemy of his own people and their faith not only that they are mistaken, but also that his gospel in reality brings gentile believers in Christ to hold in respect and esteem that which Jews value as sacred. In other words, Paul not only wants to distance himself as far as possible from the censurable ideas that some Jews attribute to him, but he also wants the Jews in Rome to *see with their own eyes* and *hear with their own ears* the manner in which he teaches the gentiles among whom he works to repudiate those ideas as well. In fact, one might even infer from some of the things he writes in his letter, most specifically in chapters 9–11, that Paul seeks to convey the idea that he assumes the task of serving as apostle to the gentiles not merely for their sake but especially for the sake of his fellow Jews, who will be benefited and ultimately even saved by means of his ministry to the gentiles.

Summarizing Paul's Argument in his Letter to the Romans

Despite the many differences and disagreements among them, most interpreters of Romans would agree that Paul's understanding of justification plays a central role in his argument in the epistle. At the heart of this understanding are Paul's allusions to the righteousness of God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) and the faith of Christ (πίστις [Ἰησοῦ] Χριστοῦ), as well

as his claim that believers are justified by faith (ἐκ πίστεως).

According to most interpretations of Romans, when Paul speaks of the righteousness of God, he has in mind either a righteousness imputed to believers by God that is purely forensic or else God's "covenant faithfulness."²⁴ As I have argued elsewhere, however, in most of the passages in which Paul uses that phrase, he should instead be understood as referring to the righteous way of living, thinking, and behaving that is brought about through faith in Christ.²⁵ The reason that Paul qualifies the righteousness of which he speaks with the genitive (τοῦ) θεοῦ is that he wishes to distinguish it from the

righteousness that is attained through obedience to the Mosaic law apart from faith in Christ. I have also argued that, when Paul uses the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ, he is referring not simply to faith in Christ (objective genitive) or to the faith or faithfulness of Christ himself (subjective genitive), but to the entire constellation of beliefs that he associates with the conviction that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah and the Son of God.²⁶ He speaks of "Christ-faith" to distinguish that faith from the faith in the God of Israel that was common to Jews in general. According to this understanding of these two phrases, what Paul wishes to stress in the passages in which he uses them is that the righteous way of life that God desires to see in all people is brought about through the faith he associates with Christ or "Christ-faith." As believers in Christ live "out of" that faith (ἐκ πίστεως), they come to practice the righteousness of God and on that basis are declared righteous by God. Nevertheless, both that faith and the life of righteousness that is brought about by it are a free gift of God, as is the forgiveness of sins that God grants believers on the basis of that faith and the new life that results from it.²⁷

I would argue that these are the ideas behind Rom 1:17, traditionally considered to be part of Paul's statement of the main theme of his letter. There he writes: "For the righteousness of God is revealed as proceeding 'out of faith into faith' (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν), as it is written: 'But the righteous person will live out of faith' (Ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται)" (cf. Hab 2:4; Gal 3:11). Because Paul associates here the

²⁴ For a summary of this discussion, see Hultgren, *Romans*, 605-15; Barry D. Smith, *The Meaning of Jesus' Death: Reviewing the New Testament's Interpretations* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 77-97.

²⁵ See David A. Brondos, *Jesus' Death in New Testament Thought* (Mexico City: Theological Community of Mexico, 2018), 2:724-30; *The Parting of the Gods: Paul and the Redefinition of Judaism* (Mexico City: Theological Community of Mexico, 2021), 256-59. As is common among many New Testament scholars, Raymond E. Brown insists that, when Paul uses δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as a subjective or possessive genitive, "Paul's notion implies activity" rather than "constituting a stative description of an attribute of God's being"; yet when he considers the possibility that the phrase represents a "genitive of source or origin, describing the state of uprightness communicated to human beings as a gift from or by God," he understands this "state" in purely forensic terms, failing even to consider the possibility that the genitive of source or origin refers to *the divine gift of a righteous way of life, that is, righteous activity, which constitutes the basis upon which one is justified or declared righteous* (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997], 576-77).

²⁶ See Michael Wolter, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 75-77; Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 243-44; Brondos, *Jesus' Death*, 2:730-33; *Parting of the Gods*, 259-60.

²⁷ See Brondos, *Parting of the Gods*, 246-48.

δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ with the life of the righteous person (ὁ δίκαιος) and affirms that both that life and the righteousness that characterizes it are produced by faith (ἐκ πίστεως), there are good reasons to conclude that Paul understands δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in this verse as a righteous way of living that is brought about in believers in Christ as a product or fruit of their faith.²⁸ Such an interpretation of Paul's words also clarifies the very simple idea behind his affirmation that the righteousness of God is revealed ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν: the revelation that the righteous way of living that God desires to see in all is produced by living "out of faith" (ἐκ πίστεως) leads people "into faith" (εἰς πίστιν), since once they come to know that one becomes righteous and is accepted by God as such merely by living "out of faith," they embrace that faith and begin to live in it or "out of it."²⁹

²⁸ To attribute to Paul the idea that God brings about his righteousness in believers as a fruit is by no means to ascribe to him the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of δικαιοσύνη as "an ethical quality infused or transferred into the believer" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 53). Rather, in Paul's thought, God brings about that righteousness in many different ways (see note 31 below).

²⁹ Pointing in part to the work of John Ziesler, Richard N. Longenecker rightly observes that, while there are some passages in the Hebrew Scriptures, Second Temple Jewish literature, and the New Testament in which δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ should be understood as a subjective genitive and others in which it refers to a status or standing before God, there are also passages in which it refers to God's "transformation of people by his enablement" and "a person's ethical 'uprightness,' 'righteousness,' or 'justice'..." (*The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 173-4). In the only other New Testament passages outside of

A number of passages from Romans and other of Paul's epistles make it clear that Paul, in accordance with Second Temple Judaism in general, does not understand δικαιοσύνη merely in terms of a status that one may possess in God's sight, but also as something that one *does* or *practices*. In Rom 6:13-22, Paul tells the believers in Rome to present the members of their body to God as "instruments of righteousness" (ὄπλα δικαιοσύνης) rather than to sin as instruments of unrighteousness and speaks of the Roman believers as "slaves of righteousness" who offer God their members as "slaves to righteousness for sanctification" (δοῦλα τῆ δικαιοσύνης εἰς ἁγιασμόν). This involves serving God so as to produce "fruit for sanctification" (δουλωθέντες δὲ τῷ θεῷ, ἔχετε τὸν καρπὸν ὑμῶν εἰς ἁγιασμόν). In these instances, as in Rom 8:4, where Paul affirms that the righteousness (δικαίωμα) of the law is fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit, he clearly has in mind human conduct and activity. The same must be said with regard to his use of δικαιοσύνη in other passages in his epistles, some of which also relate righteousness to fruit (2 Cor 6:7, 14; 9:10; 11:15; Phil 1:11).

It must be stressed, however, that both in Second Temple Judaism and in the New Testament in general, to be δίκαιος is not to be *perfect* or *sinless*, but to be committed to doing

Paul's epistles that allude to God's righteousness, the phrase clearly denotes human activity that is in accordance with God's will (Matt 6:33; Jas 1:20). Following a circular argument, however, it is commonly claimed that this usage is distinct from Paul's because, unlike Matthew and James, Paul teaches that justification is not by works but by faith. I would insist that, in reality, all three teach that the righteousness of God—that is, the righteous manner of living that God demands, desires, and gives as a gift, on the basis of which he will judge all people—is the product of "Christ-faith."

God's will obediently—a commitment that will by definition manifest itself spontaneously in one's conduct, "works," or "fruits."³⁰ This means that there is inevitably a forensic component to human righteousness, since God regards as righteous those who are not perfectly so, since they continue to fall into sin. Nevertheless, in contrast to the unrighteous, the righteous *acknowledge* their sin, *repent* of it, seek God's forgiveness, and *on that basis obtain it*.³¹

³⁰ So E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 93, 107–8, 137–41. According to Sanders, Jews in antiquity would have recognized that in a sense not even the patriarchs were righteous: "the righteous man was not characterized by perfection—as one baraita has it, if God judged strictly, not even the patriarchs could stand his reproof—but by the earnest endeavour to obey the law and by repentance and other acts of atonement in the case of transgression" (203). On this point, see also Kent L. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 105 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 62, 166–67, 181.

³¹ Simon J. Gathercole represents Paul's thought faithfully when he affirms that, in accordance with the rest of the New Testament, Paul regarded obedience as the basis or criterion for final vindication at the last judgment, while at the same time seeing God's action as "both the source and the continuous cause of obedience for the Christian" (*Where Is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1–5* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 264; cf. 130–35, 265). I would argue that he errs, however, in claiming that Paul did not regard obedience as the basis or criterion for the *initial* justification as well, since in Paul's thought, as soon as one comes to faith so as to begin to live *ἐκ πίστεως* or "out of Christ-faith," God declares one righteous because from that moment on he has assurance that the obedience and righteousness he desires and

In accordance with these ideas, Paul understands the plight of both Jews and human beings in general *not* in terms of their inability to obtain the forgiveness of a God whose righteousness prevents him from forgiving sins freely, but in terms of their inability or failure to attain in life the degree or type of righteousness that God demands and desires of them for the good of all. Where Paul differs from Second Temple Jewish thought is in his conviction that, while the law is able to produce a certain degree or type of righteousness, that righteousness is not the "righteousness of God," that is, the righteous way of life that God ultimately desires to see in all. For Paul, such a righteousness is brought about by living "out of Christ-faith." He expresses this conviction explicitly in Rom 3:21–30 and 9:30–10:10, as well as Phil 3:6, 9. In these passages, he contrasts the righteousness that proceeds from living "out of" or "in the law" (*ἐκ νόμου* or *ἐν νόμῳ*) with the righteousness of God (*δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ*) which is the fruit of living "out of faith" (*ἐκ πίστεως*)—or, in the language of Phil 3:9, the life of righteousness that God graciously brings about in believers "through Christ-faith" as they base their life on that faith

demands will *proceed spontaneously* from that faith. In both cases, *God justifies those who have Christ-faith because of the fruit of righteousness that it produces in the present and will also produce in the future*. Of course, initially that faith precedes the fruit it will produce, yet nevertheless it is that fruit which constitutes the *basis* upon which God declares the believer righteous. As I have argued repeatedly in my own work, this also means that Christ's death or blood is *not the basis upon which believers are justified*, but rather the *means* by which God has brought into existence the community or *ἐκκλησία* in and through which God produces both Christ-faith and its fruit in believers, and on that basis justifies them and forgives them their sins (see, for example, Brondos, *Jesus' Death*, 2:734–44; *Parting of the Gods*, 241–60).

(τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει).³² This righteousness is equivalent to the "obedience of faith" (ὕπακοή πίστεως, Rom 1:5; 16:26), the "obedience in word and deed" (15:18), and the "obedience that leads to righteousness" (ὕπακοῆς εἰς δικαιοσύνην, 6:16) which God works to bring about among all the nations through Paul.³³ Conversely, Paul defines as sin anything that does *not* proceed from faith (πᾶν δὲ ὃ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἁμαρτία ἐστίν, 14:23).

These ideas lie at the heart of Paul's argument in the first eight chapters of Romans. After stating his main theme in 1:16–17, Paul immediately makes it clear that his practice of

³²In his discussion of Phil 3:9, Witherington recognizes that passages such as Ps 71:1–2 LXX and the *Epistle of Aristeas* 280 speak of human beings receiving righteousness in the sense of being "enabled to act in a righteous or just manner," and observes that in this passage "Paul is not talking about an attribute of God but rather a gift from God to believers" (*Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 53). However, he fails to capture the fact that for Paul this "gift" consists not only of forgiveness and justification but also *the righteous way of life that constitutes the basis for that forgiveness and justification*.

³³ For reasons already considered above, I would insist that Paul's phrase "the obedience of faith" should not be understood in the sense of an obedience that takes the form of faith, but rather in the sense of a faith that spontaneously and by definition takes the form of obedience. This understanding of the phrase runs contrary to that proposed by interpreters such as Mark Seifrid, "The Near Word of Christ and the Distant Vision of N. T. Wright," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54 (2011), 279–97 (280), who affirms the first of these two alternatives and claims: "The obedience of faith is not 'faithfulness.' It is passive. It is not an obedience of action, but an obedience of reception."

including within the ἐκκλησία non-Jews who do not live subject to the Mosaic law does not involve condoning the impure, lawless, and promiscuous lifestyle that Jews commonly associated with non-Jews by expressing his condemnation of that lifestyle in the strongest of terms (1:18–32).³⁴ In subtle fashion, however, he then brings the Jewish people into the discussion by affirming that all persons who judge others for practicing the lifestyle characterized by the long list of vices he has just mentioned condemn themselves as well, since they do the same things (2:1–3). While here he may be alluding to the notion that all people do such things in their heart or mind (cf. 1:24, 28; 2:21–22, 29; Matt 5:27–28), it is rarely noted that in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Septuagint all of the seventeen vices that Paul mentions at the end of the preceding section (1:29–31) are attributed not only to gentiles but also to Israel or certain persons or groups within Israel.³⁵ In any case, what Paul criticizes in the following verses is not the practice of the vices he mentions per se but the failure to respond to God's kind and merciful attempts to bring all to acknowledge their sin and repent of it (2:4–5, 17–24). Paul appears to be thinking particularly of those Jews who simply condemn all gentiles as lawless sinners without recognizing that, even though they possess God's law and do their best to keep its commandments, they too

³⁴ As Tobin observes, "Romans 1.18–32 is a fairly traditional and uncontroversial piece of Hellenistic Jewish critique of pagan religion" ("Paul's Letter," 402).

³⁵ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch point out that Jews in Paul's time would readily have recognized the list of vices that he mentions in Rom 1:29–31 "as a disguised version of the [ten] commandments" (*Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006], 232).

are guilty of sinning and are equally in need of repentance.³⁶

Throughout 2:1–3:20, Paul continues developing these ideas. The fact that even the righteous who submit to God's law fall into sin shows that they too are subject to the power of sin. Therefore the law cannot resolve the problem of human sinfulness. Once again, it must be stressed that in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, the terms "righteous" and "righteousness" are not used in an absolute, categorical sense, since even the righteous must acknowledge that there is a sense in which they are *not* righteous. Due to his thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, when in Rom 3:10–12 Paul points to Ps 14:1–3 and perhaps Eccles 7:20 as well to argue that no one is righteous and that there is not a single person who does good, at the same time he would have known perfectly well that the very next Psalm—which is also a Psalm of David—refers to those who walk "blamelessly," do "what is right," and commit "no evil" (Ps 15:2–3), and that only a few verses prior to Eccles 7:20, the same author speaks of the "righteous person" who does "righteousness" (Eccles 7:15). Paul himself echoes these ideas when he discusses his own righteousness in Phil 3:5–9. There, as in Rom 10:1–6, Paul "distinguishes between two righteousnesses, the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of or from God which comes by faith in Christ," and regards as "good"

not only the latter righteousness but the former as well.³⁷

It is also important to recognize that in Rom 2:1–3:20 Paul is not discussing the question of who can and cannot be saved. According to Paul, the problem is not that all are condemned or lost for eternity because all have sinned and no one is perfect, but that all are "under sin," that is, under its power (ὕφ' ἁμαρτιαν, 3:9). Paul's point is precisely that the Mosaic law cannot resolve this problem (cf. 7:14–23; 8:1–8; 10:3–4). Nevertheless, as Paul insists here and in the following chapters, the law still plays an important role in salvation in that it contains the λόγια of God and thus attests to the righteousness of God which God intended to bring about in believers through Christ (3:1–2, 21). The law also exposes human sinfulness and shows the extent to which it has spread so as to lead people everywhere to recognize their need for the gracious gift of righteousness which God now offers to all through Christ (3:20; 5:20–21). Because the law or Torah is not merely a list of commandments but also a narrative, by means of its account of Abraham's life it reveals that what brings God to accept one as righteous is neither the observance of the law nor circumcision but faith, since God reckoned Abraham's faith as righteousness while he was still uncircumcised and long before he gave the law through Moses (Rom 4:1–22; Gen 15:6). Thus, as Paul is keen to insist, even though he teaches that one cannot attain salvation or the righteousness God desires by submitting to the law and circumcision, he does not *abolish* the law but *confirms* it, since he ascribes to it a vital role in God's plan of salvation (3:31).³⁸

³⁶ In my opinion, Thomas H. Tobin is correct to claim that the idea that Jews and gentiles are equally sinful would have been offensive to many Jews, but mistaken to ascribe this idea to Paul in 1:18–3:20 (*Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Arguments of Romans* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004], 99–100). To say that both Jews and gentiles sin and are "under sin" (3:9) is not the same as saying that they are equally sinful.

³⁷ Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 44–5.

³⁸ The typological and figurative use of the law that we find in passages such as Rom 5:14–19, 1 Cor 9:8–14, 10:1–11, 2 Cor 3:7–18, and Gal 4:21–31, as well as Paul's allusions to the law elsewhere in his writings, indicate that Paul certainly did not set

It cannot be stressed enough, however, that the *reason* why God reckons faith as righteousness is that it brings one to *live* in the righteous manner God desires, as Abraham did.³⁹ As he does elsewhere, in Rom 2:6–16 Paul affirms that all will be judged by their works (cf. Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10). Yet, as Paul states here, this is because one's actions reveal "the things that are hidden" in human hearts and

aside the law but considered that it continued to be of great importance for believers in Christ. As Paul insists, all that appears there was "written for our sake" or "for our instruction" (1 Cor 9:10; 10:11) and thus plays a vital role in the salvation of believers. His allusions to the yeast and to Christ as the sacrificed lamb of Passover in 1 Cor 5:6–8 suggest that he may have taught gentile believers to celebrate Jewish feasts, while at the same time resignifying them in the light of Christ (see Brondos, *Parting of the Gods*, 185–87). Rather than interpreting Paul's affirmations in 1 Cor 7:19 and Gal 6:15 that "circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing" in the sense that both are now meaningless, I understand him to be saying that both are now meaningful in different ways, as he implies in Rom 4:11–12: both can serve as a sign or reminder of the "righteousness of faith" that was Abraham's and now belongs to believers (see Brondos, *Parting of the Gods*, 215).

³⁹ Don B. Garlington rightly insists that "Gen 15:6 is not "forensic" as postulated by Protestant theology (*Faith, Obedience and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 79 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1994], 50). According to Garlington, "Rather than being Abraham's 'justification' in the sense of his 'conversion,' this declaration serves to confirm the patriarch's already existent faith in God's promise concerning an heir. Genesis 15 is hardly the beginning of God's dealings with Abraham, because a trusting relationship between the two has been operative since Gen 12:1–9."

consciences (Rom 2:15–16; cf. 1 Cor 4:5).⁴⁰ This passage also makes it clear that Paul's argument in Rom 2:1–3:20 is not that, because all human beings sin, they are all subject to eternal condemnation, since he explicitly declares that those who do good and practice the righteousness commanded in the law will attain eternal life and be justified (2:7, 13). According to Paul, what God had always planned and intended to do, and what he has now done, is to bring about through his Son *something new*, namely, the *righteousness of God*, and to do so not only among his people Israel but among people of all nations everywhere through a worldwide community, the ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ (3:21–30; cf. 1:5, 16–17; 5:15–19; 15:15–18; 16:16, 25–26).

Towards the end of chapter 3 and from the end of chapter 4 to the beginning of chapter 7 of his letter, Paul alludes repeatedly to Jesus and his death or blood as the means by which God liberates believers from the power of sin and brings about in them by pure grace and through faith the righteous way of life that in his love God desires for all. That liberation or redemption from slavery to sin and the flesh and from confinement under the law is now available to all in and through the crucified and risen Christ thanks to the fact that he gave up his life after dedicating it to making such a liberation or redemption possible (3:24; 5:15–21; 6:2–23; 7:4–6, 25).⁴¹ In Paul's thought, at the

⁴⁰ As Yinger has argued at length, when the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish literature (including the New Testament) speak of judgment according to deeds or works, "one's entire pattern of life is in view, one's 'way'" (*Paul and Judgment*, 284). Elsewhere he adds: "It is the standard Jewish expectation that one's outward behavior (one's *works* or *way*) will correspond to, and be a visible manifestation of, inward reality" (290).

⁴¹ On these and the following points, see Brondos, *Parting of the Gods*, 284–311.

same time that Jesus sought to save others from their sinful ways as God's chosen agent or instrument, he also sought and obtained God's forgiveness and acceptance for all who would live under his lordship when God raised Jesus and exalted him to his right hand so that all that he had sought in life and death might now become a reality through him (3:24-26; 4:24-25; 5:18-19; 8:32). Thus, through his faithfulness and obedience in doing what was necessary for God's righteousness to be brought about in both Jews and gentiles everywhere, those who now receive that righteousness through faith can say that they have been justified and reconciled to God through Jesus' death or blood (5:6-11).

In Paul's thought, what defines and brings about this new righteousness that the law could not produce is precisely the total commitment to doing God's will that Christ manifested in life and especially in his death, as well as God's willingness to give his Son over to death (4:25; 8:32). In this way they brought into existence a "community of communities" whose primary characteristic is that same commitment to loving and serving God and others in accordance with God's will. Had Christ not been willing to give up his life so that this community might exist, or had God intervened to spare his Son from the cross, there would be no such community. The reason for this is that neither God nor Christ could demand or expect from others total dedication and commitment to God's will had they not themselves been fully dedicated and committed to paying whatever price was necessary to form such a community; nor could they bring about in believers freely as a gift the dedication, commitment, righteousness, and love that are now theirs had God and Jesus not both been willing to give up what was most precious to them to see these things (re)produced in the life of others (5:3-8, 15-18; 6:10-13; 8:29, 32). Now that they have done so, however, by definition it is impossible to address God as *Abba*, "Father" (8:15), and to call

Jesus "Lord" (10:9), without loving and serving God by loving and serving others, since any who refuse to do so are in fact *rejecting* God and Jesus and demonstrating by that refusal that they do *not* truly believe in and trust in God as their Father and consider Jesus their Lord.

Having developed his argument that Jews and gentiles are equally dependent on the grace that God has shown in Christ to both groups, neither of which was deserving of the gift of the new life of righteousness that all may now receive thanks to Christ's willingness to give up his life to make that gift theirs, in chapters 6-8 of his epistle Paul responds to the conclusions some mistakenly draw from the gospel he proclaims. In chapter 6, he explains that the reason why believers will not continue in sin is not that they live under a law that prohibits it or constrains them, but because by definition their reception of God's gracious gift in Christ involves placing themselves, their bodies, and all their members at God's disposal to live freely and willingly as his "slaves," practicing the righteousness that brings them true life both in this world and the next rather than the sin and unrighteousness that destroy such a life. When they were baptized at their own request, they committed themselves to living as the new persons God always wanted them to be for their own good by identifying fully with the crucified and risen Christ so as to walk in the "newness of life" that results from "living to God" together with him. This meant putting their old person or self to death so that it might be forever "crucified with Christ" and buried once and for all (Rom 6:1-23).⁴² Paul begins chapter 7 affirming that, through their identification with Christ and his body, believers die not only to sin but to the law as well, since they no longer need to be restrained by it now that they have become Christ's own so as spontaneously to produce the

⁴² On this interpretation of Romans 6, see Brondos, *Jesus' Death*, 2:825-27.

fruits that both they and God desire by serving in the newness of the Spirit (7:1-6). Paul then clarifies that the problem is not with the law, which is holy, righteous, and good—as all faithful Jews (including especially Paul himself) have always affirmed—, but with sin, which uses the law to incite sinful behavior and prevents people from obeying the law and doing the good they desire by virtue of its presence in the flesh (7:7-24).

Paul then explains that in his love God has resolved the problem of sin and the flesh, together with the death to which they lead, by sending his Son and working through his Spirit so that believers may enjoy life and peace as God's children both now and in the future, when their redemption from sin and death and that of creation as a whole will be consummated (8:1-27). Thanks to all that God has done and continues to do through Christ and the Spirit, believers can be sure that, even though they do not live under the law, no one can condemn them, because God has shown that he loves and accepts them and will accomplish in them his purpose and plan, bringing them to conform to the image of his Son (8:28-38).

Paul cites the Scriptures extensively in chapters 9-11 of his epistle to explain that God's plan was to harden Israel for a time to open the door for gentile believers to enter in by coming to practice his righteousness through faith in Christ. In this way, many Jews will eventually be brought to adopt the same faith so that ultimately "all Israel" may be saved. Paul then addresses a long series of exhortations primarily to his gentile readers in 12:1-15:12. Once again, in both of these sections he makes it clear that all along God's intention has been to bring about in all nations—including Israel—the obedience and righteous way of life he desires by means of Jesus rather than through the law. Nevertheless, Paul continues to hold up Israel as God's special and unique people while at the same time instructing the gentiles among whom he works

to view Israel in the same way, demanding that they act with kindness and consideration rather than with arrogance (11:17-24; cf. 15:27). In particular, he stresses that they are to show understanding and love to those who choose to live out their faith by continuing to observe commandments related to food, drink, purity, and days they regard as special or holy without judging them or doing anything that might lead them to stumble or waver in their faith (14:1-15:6).⁴³ All of these passages demonstrate to any Jews who will see Paul's letter not only that Israel continues to enjoy the same special place in his heart that it does in God's,⁴⁴ but also that he insists that gentile believers abandon their previous immoral lifestyle and live in a way that

⁴³ Although I would not necessarily accept the claim of Mark Nanos that the "weak" to whom Paul refers in Rom 14:1-15:6 were "non-Christian Jews," I would agree with him that Paul did not intend the designation "weak" as a pejorative term designating deficiency in faith, since otherwise none of Paul's readers would have been willing to identify with that term (*The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 118; cf. 88, 119-21). Kümmel also presents reasons why the "weak" may be not only Jewish and possibly gentile believers in Christ who are observing Jewish practices, but also gentile believers who continue to adhere to certain pagan customs (*Introduction to the New Testament*, 310-11).

⁴⁴ Lloyd Gaston in particular has argued that "Paul must insist that the gentiles acknowledge the priority of Israel as recipients of the grace of God because their own standing depends on God's faithfulness to his earlier commitment to Israel," and that "Paul also makes very explicit that he writes as *Jewish* Apostle to the Gentiles" ("Romans in Context: The Conversation Revisited," in *Pauline Conversations in Context: Essays in Honor of Calvin J. Roetzel*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson, Philip Sellew and Claudia Setzer, Library of New Testament Studies 221 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002], 125-41 [127, 130], emphasis original).

actually fulfills the law (13:8-14), even though they do not submit fully to that law. Paul's long list of admonitions in chapter 12 appears to respond at least in part to the same concern, since it includes nothing that any believer in Christ would not already have known or learned. Those admonitions underscore once more to the Jewish readers or hearers of his letter that he exhorts the gentiles among whom he works to live godly and pious lives using the gifts they have received to serve one another in love, harmony, and humility, rather than giving them free license to sin by not subjecting them to the commandments of the Mosaic law.

In the end, there are good reasons to conclude that, while Paul addresses his letter to the gentile believers in Rome, his reasons for writing the letter have more to do with his concerns about how he will be received by the Jewish communities in Rome. Undoubtedly, just as the student preacher in the illustration offered above has a message that she wants to address to the congregation she is serving, Paul does indeed have many things that he wishes to convey to the gentile believers in Rome, and thus is not merely using them as a pretext to address the Jewish communities there. However, just as the student preacher will ultimately care more about how her supervising

committee will receive and evaluate her sermon than about how the congregation itself will react to her message, so also Paul's primary concern is the manner in which the Jewish believers in Rome will receive and respond to his letter. By demonstrating to them that the accusations many Jews make against him are untrue and that the reputation he has among many Jews as one who denigrates the Jewish way of life and the law they cherish so deeply is unfounded, he can hope that they will receive him favorably when he arrives in Rome and that he will subsequently be able to tell those in Spain, not only that he enjoys the full support of the ἐκκλησία and ἐκκλησίαι in Rome, but also that it is they who have sent him on his way there.

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April 8, 2021

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