

## Notes on Romans 5

This is a synopsis with minor modifications and additions of the relevant section of NT Wright, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections: New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume X (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2002).

### II. Adam restored to glory 5.1–8.39

Paul's argument in Rm 5–8 continues from the previous section (Rm 1–4), without the deep breath that we see between Rm 8 and 9 or between Rm 11 and 12. The two main paragraphs of Rm 5 (5.1–11 and 5.12–21) sum up what has gone before, while setting out material to be further explored. For example,

- 5.9 looks back to 3.24–26 and to the 'wrath' of 1.18;
- 5.12–21 refers back to the 'Adamkind' theme in 1.18–25;
- 5.20 picks up 2.17–24 and 3.19–20.

If Romans had concluded with personal greetings after 5.21, nobody would suggest that 5.1–21 belonged to a different thought-world than Rm 1–4.

Nevertheless, the subject matter of 5.1–11 and 5.12–21 contains so many differences from that of Rm 1–4 that they belong more naturally with what follows than with what precedes. Paul speaks of God's love, not (principally) his righteousness. He does not mention Abraham or (apart from 5.1–2) faith (6.8 is not part of a discussion of 'faith' per se, but refers to a particular thing that Christians believe). The 'Jew-plus-Gentile' theme, strikingly, is never mentioned and the Torah is a major theme, but 'works of the Torah' are not. Jesus, hardly mentioned in 1.18–4.25, is everywhere in 5.1–8.39. Equally telling, Paul says a good deal in Rm 5–8 about 'we' and 'you', whereas in the preceding section the 'you' passages were rhetorical, addressing imaginary interlocutors, whereas here he is speaking to his own actual audience, and he has not spoken of 'us' until the very last verses.

Instead of expounding passages of Scripture, Paul develops his own line of thought, alluding to Scripture fre-

quently, and indeed retelling one of Scripture's greatest stories, but without much quoting of specific passages. And instead of the diatribe style and its rapidfire verbal tennis match, addressed to imaginary debating partners, we have a sustained line of thought, addressed to 'my brothers'<sup>1</sup> (7.1,4; 8.12), building from one point to the next in an extraordinarily complex argument.

This sequence of thought opens with four paragraphs of very similar length (5.1–11, 12–21; 6.1–11, 12–23), each rounded off with a christological formula that is not just added on for effect but sums up the paragraph. This then gives rise to two larger expositions. The first, introduced in 7.1–6 and developed in 7.7–8.11, concerns the Torah. The completion of this subject, 8.1–11 also introduces 8.1–30, concerning the Spirit and Christian and cosmic hope. And finally, 8.31–39 repeats the themes of 5.1–11, with all the rhetorical stops pulled out, concluding once more with an emphatic christological summary.

Rm 5–8, then, is a carefully crafted unit. We have to find out how the train of thought in these chapters develops the larger argument that Paul is actually mounting in the letter— as opposed, unfortunately, to the argument that various traditions have assumed that he is mounting. If Rm 1–4 are held to be about 'justification by faith' (although we've seen that it really has more to do with Abraham, his God, and who belongs in the covenant people), this section is often taken to be about what follows from justification. Since the Reformers' exposition of justification regularly led to the question of Christian behavior, often framed in some way as in 6.1 or 6.15, and since the word 'sanctification' occurs twice in Rm 6.19,22, some concluded that Rm 1–4 were 'about' 'justi-

<sup>1</sup> Some translations, wishing to avoid the gender-specific 'brothers', use 'friends', but for Paul the family identity and consequent unity of God's people is paramount.

fication', and Rm 5–8 were 'about' 'sanctification'. However, though there is indeed a sequence of thought from justification to something else in these chapters, this particular reading is inaccurate. The word 'sanctification' appears *only* those times, and when Paul sums up the argument in 8.30, his final line reads, 'those he justified, them he also *glorified*'. If 1–4 is in any sense 'about' justification, we might expect 5–8 to be 'about' glorification.

Of course, it's always unwise to suggest that a given section in Romans has one topic and only one. The writing is more complex and symphonic than that. But the sense that the present section is at least in some sense 'about' glorification is strikingly confirmed by the last phrase of the introductory sentence (5.1-2— 'we boast over the hope of God's glory'), and by the argument of 8.18-25 (eg, 'the freedom of the glory of God's children', 8.21), which has a good claim to be the point toward which the rest is moving. Of course, 'glorification' here serves as a shorthand for the entire Christian hope, to which Paul can equally well refer by such phrases as 'eternal life' (e.g., 2.7)— although it actually has a much more specific, Adamic meaning, as we will see; but the point seems to be, throughout, that what God has done in Jesus the Messiah, and what he is already doing through the Spirit, guarantees that all who believe the good news, and are thus 'justified by faith', can be assured of a final hope that includes Adam's restoration in glory. They will be delivered from wrath (5.9), in other words, 'saved'. They will be given the new bodies of resurrection life that will correspond to that of Jesus (8.11). And, since 'glory' is another way of speaking of the presence of God, dwelling in the wilderness tabernacle or the Jerusalem Temple, the line of thought that runs from 5.2 ('we boast over the hope of God's glory') to 8.30 ('those he justified, them he also glorified') involves specifically the indwelling of God, by the Spirit. The whole passage thus emphasizes that what God did decisively in Jesus the Messiah is now to be implemented through the Spirit. The Christian's present status and future hope determine life in the present, but the real theme is the glory guaranteed by God's unshakable love— demonstrated in the death of Jesus (5.6-10; 8.31-39). This is the argument that emerges most obviously from the surface of Rm 5–8.

Beneath the surface, however, and poking out like the tips of a huge iceberg at various key points, there runs a different theme, not so often noticed. A word is necessary about the detection of apparently submerged themes. For centuries nobody minded when exegetes declared that Rm 1–4 was 'about' justification and 5–8 'about' sanctification. These were regular topics that sustained many churches and preachers; it seemed reason-

able that Paul should develop his argument along such lines, and some sense could be made of the text on that basis (with little exceptions like the *crucial* 7.7-25 and 8.18-25!) The fact that Paul nowhere said that this was how he was dividing his material, and that so far as we know 'justification' and 'sanctification' did not function in his mind (or anyone else's in the first century) in the same way as they did in the church, did not seem to matter. But because some are used to certain readings, when people today propose alternatives that are far more plausible within Second Temple Judaism, they are often howled down. 'How can you be so sure? Why doesn't Paul say it more openly if that's what he meant?'

The argument for all such interpretations is cumulative. As in much scientific procedure, a proposal is to be verified or falsified not by the knockdown 'proofs', but by the overall sense that results. There are times when the answer comes from looking at the forest, not just the trees.

We need a reading that allows for the integrity and distinction of this section in its own right and for its careful integration with those that precede and follow— in other words, for the advancement of the overall argument of the letter.

*Paul, it turns out, is telling the story of the people of the Messiah in terms of the new Exodus. Jesus' people are the liberated people, on their way home to their promised land.*<sup>2</sup>

The theme of 'new Exodus' is a major topic in Second Temple Judaism, a central way that Jews in Paul's day expressed, symbolized, and narrated their hopes for the future— for the time when, as the prophets had foretold, their God would repeat, on their behalf, the great acts whereby their forebears were liberated from Egypt.<sup>3</sup> One biblical passage in particular stands out as carrying the themes of Rm 1–11 as a whole:

Jr 23.5-8 The days are surely coming, says Yhwh, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'Yhwh is our righteousness'.

Therefore, the days are surely coming, says Yhwh, when it shall no longer be said, 'As

<sup>2</sup> A detailed account of this proposal is found in Wright, 'New Exodus', 26-35.

<sup>3</sup> Eg, Isa 11.11; 35.3-10; 51.9-11; 52.4-6; Jr 16.14-15; 23.7-8; Ez 20.33-38; Ho 2.14-23.

Yhwh lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt', but 'As Yhwh lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where I had driven them'. Then they shall live in their own land.

*The Messiah, God's righteousness, and the new Exodus.* Allowing for Paul's new perspective, in which the promise of the 'land' has been redefined into the promise of inheriting the 'cosmos' (4.13; 8.18-25), the pattern is exact. Like many other Second Temple Jews, Paul longed for the day when God would fulfill the promises he made to Abraham by bringing Israel back from exile, repeating what had been done at the Exodus. Only this time, through the work of the Messiah, it would be on a different scale. This time the whole cosmos would be involved. This would be the revelation of God's righteousness before the whole world. Paul's mind has already been moving in this way in Rm 2 and 4; now he will develop the picture far more extensively. If he is talking about salvation, he is talking about the new Exodus. In fact, when he uses 'salvation' terms (from the root *sōzō*) in 5.9-10 and 8.24, he does so as another way of talking about the 'glorification' and 'eternal life' that he has already mentioned (see below).

This reading of Rm 5–8 is perhaps easiest to see by working backward from its most obvious point, Rm 8.12-25. Paul speaks of those who are led by the Spirit of God being God's children (8.14); the phrase is very similar to that of Dt 14.1, looking back (as do all such ascriptions of divine parentage) to Ex 4.22 (see also Isa 1.2; Ho 1.10; Si 1.10). The contrast between 'the spirit of slavery' and 'the spirit of adoption' (8.15) can well be construed as the contrast between Egypt and the wilderness; Paul's appeal is that his readers should not think, as Israel sometimes did, of going back to Egypt rather than on to the land of the promise. And the crowning point of the paragraph is that God's children are also 'heirs'. Paul's word here (*klēronomoi*) occurs dozens of times in the OT, not least in Deuteronomy, in reference to the promised land, or part of it, as the 'inheritance' God's people would acquire when their wilderness wandering was complete. For Paul, as we saw in Rm 4.13, the promise to Abraham concerning one particular piece of land has been transformed into a promise concerning the *kosmos* or, as here, 'creation' (*ktisis*).

This answers to the deepest level of the problem outlined in the description of Adamkind in 1.18-32. God fulfills the promise to Abraham by redeeming the human race; when the human race is redeemed, all creation will be set free. In Rm 8, Paul applies to creation as a whole

the Exodus language he uses of God's people in Rm 6 and elsewhere: creation itself 'will be set free from its slavery to corruption, into the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (8.21). Not only God's people but all creation are set free from 'Egypt'— that is, sin, decay, and death. God's redeemed are given the 'glory' that humans lost at the fall (3.23), receiving the *kosmos* (4.13), or 'creation' (8.19-21) as their inheritance.<sup>4</sup> God's creation currently shares the futility and corruption of the human race; when humans are set free, creation will be liberated as well.

Within Romans, the motif of slavery and freedom begins at least with 'redemption' in 3.24, but is highlighted especially in Rm 6. In 6.16, Paul personifies 'Sin' and 'Death' as the slave-masters who have kept the human race captive, and 'Obedience' and 'Righteousness' as the new owners under whom humans find freedom. He then continues the metaphor, recognizing its limitations (6.19a), through to the end of the chapter, and builds it in to the theme of the next section (7.6,25). This clearly anticipates the 'Exodus' passage about slavery and freedom in Rm 8. But 6.16-23 is the development of the earlier part of the chapter, where the key event is baptism, uniting the Christian with the Messiah in his death and resurrection. Baptism, it appears, is the event through which, by means of this uniting, those enslaved to Sin and Death are now set free. But baptism, elsewhere in Paul, is a symbolic crossing of the Red Sea (1Co 10.2— a passage in which Paul is urging his readers to think of themselves as in the same position as the wilderness generation, set free from Egypt and on the way home to their inheritance).<sup>5</sup> The journey that began in Rm 6 with the new covenant crossing of the Red Sea, through which the slaves are set free, ends in Rm 8 with their glorious inheritance.

This gives narrative coherence to 7.1–8.11, the central section of Rm 5–8. It's not just that Paul must now address, head on, the problem of the Torah to which he has referred several times (3.19-20; 4.15; 5.20; 6.14). The deeper reason for writing Rm 7 is that he is following the storyline. After the Red Sea, and before the journey to the promised inheritance, comes Mt Sinai and the giving of the Torah.

Paul is not thinking in terms of 'typology'— a popular way of viewing him especially in Orthodox circles— in

<sup>4</sup> See also Matt 5.5, where the meek shall 'inherit' the 'land' (*gē*). This word could of course refer to the land of Israel (as in Dt 4.38) or the whole world. Cf Acts 1.8, where 'to the ends of the land' (*gēs*) could mean 'Israel', but in the light of Acts is better taken as 'ends of the world'.

<sup>5</sup> See R.B. Hays, 'The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians', *NTS* 45 (1999) 391-412.

which a pattern just repeats itself over and over: Noah = Red Sea = baptism, etc. He is setting forth a *continuing narrative* in which the new sequence gets its meaning from what it repeats, but also in some senses *replaces* and even *undermines* it. Take Torah and Spirit, for example: the Torah was good, and in Rm 7 Paul exonerates it from blame, but demonstrates that its underlying intention— to give life— can be realized only in the Messiah and the Spirit. So the Spirit is the new Torah, replacing the old. This makes sense in the context of an overarching narrative in which the events of the Exodus are recapitulated in the Messiah and by the Spirit, in which the promises of the Torah and the prophets are fulfilled 'apart from the Torah', and leads naturally into 8.12-25, the passage we have already drawn attention to as the most obvious 'new Exodus' allusion.

At the head of this whole sequence of thought stands 5.12-21, where the Messiah is set in parallel, and also sharp contrast, with Adam. Adam, of course, was the one to whom, in Scripture, all creation was given as his inheritance. His 'glory' consisted partly in the fact that he imaged forth God, and partly in his rule over God's world. In the fall, he lost both his glory and his inheritance. This is the picture Paul drew in 1.18-32, and summed up in 3.23 ('all sinned, and come short of God's glory'). Now, in the Messiah, glory and inheritance are given back to the human race. Adamkind is to become truly human at last. Rm 5.12-21 functions as a programmatic statement of this, awaiting the fuller explanation of 8.12-30.

Israel was itself called to be the people through whom this should happen. Israel's failure, expounded in 2.17-3.20 and presupposed here, has left a double task to be performed— not only to reverse Adam's fall, but also to fulfill Israel's redemptive work. The Messiah has accomplished both. His 'obedience' (5.19), which means almost exactly the same as 'faithfulness' (3.22), has accomplished what God called Israel for in the first place. Torah was not, then, the means of redemption, but rather a further part of the problem, a further twist of the knife; and God has dealt with that as well. Rm 5.12-21, summing up where the argument of the letter has gotten so far, plants the seeds that will bear fruit for the rest of 5-8.

The theme of 5.1-11 is clear, introducing the line of thought that will be summed up at the end of Rm 8: those who are justified are also glorified, because of the love of God effective through the death of Jesus. It's the move from faith to hope; from the one-off work of the Messiah to the inaugurated, but not yet consummated, work of the Spirit. This is Paul's other great theme, here and in 5-8 as a whole: those who are on this pilgrimage know the presence of the living God, not now in the pil-

lar of cloud and fire, but in the Holy Spirit, who pours the love of God into their hearts, so that 'reconciliation' (5.10-11) is not merely a fact but an experienced fact.

What contribution, then, does Rm 5-8 make toward the developing argument of the letter as a whole?

At one level, it functions as the natural sequel to Rm 1-4. The argument for the the restoration of glory and the assurance of salvation— the argument, that is, on the surface of the text— answers to one of the main strands of thought in the opening chapters. All sinned, came short of God's glory, and faced wrath. However, 3.21-4.25 (not by works, circumcision, or Torah, but by faith) is not Paul's main answer to this problem, as commonly thought, but rather the groundwork for the answer. Those who are in the Messiah will escape God's wrath and inherit his glory. The justified are also glorified. The human race is renewed, to bear God's image afresh in the Messiah (8.29).

Chapters 5-8 also set out most fully the achievement of Jesus, especially in his vicarious messianic death. The dense and cryptic statement in 3.24-26 ('Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood'), vital though it was, pointed ahead to the fuller statement in 5.6-11 and 5.15-21, which are then developed in key summaries throughout the following chapters (6.3-11; 7.4; 8.3; 8.31-39). The death of Jesus functions as the ground of Christian life and hope because it's first the ground of justification. Once more, Rm 5-8 completes the train of thought in Rm 1-4.

The themes of assurance, salvation, and glorification in the Messiah are given power and depth by the underlying Exodus-narrative. When, in Genesis 15, God promised Abraham a family, he explained the promise in terms of the Exodus. Now the human race as a whole has its Exodus: its rescue from slavery to Sin and Death, the indwelling presence of God by the Spirit, the present journey through the wilderness, and the hope of the final inheritance.

*As in 1 Corinthians, one of Paul's aims, particularly when writing to a largely Gentile church, is to implant in their worldview the scriptural narrative through which they will discover their own place on the map of God's purposes. The good news unveils God's righteousness (that is, his covenant faithfulness): as God's people in the Messiah, we must learn to tell the story of his faithfulness and to live within it.*

The theme of 'Jew first and also Greek', so prominent in 1-4, may be absent from the text of 5-8, but it's not forgotten or left behind. What Paul says in 5-8 he says to, and of, the church as a whole. But only his Jewish and proselyte readers had been 'under the Torah'. The free-

dom from the Torah that looms so large in the middle of this section (7.1–8.11; anticipated in 5.20–21 and 6.14–15) and that gives rise to Paul’s central statement of the death of Jesus, the indwelling of the Spirit, and the promise of resurrection (8.1–11), belongs to the story of how Israel’s history reached its climax in the Messiah, and did so for the benefit of the whole world. In each case, however, the completion of one line of thought raises a further question. If salvation is assured because of Jesus’ messianic death and the work of the Spirit, what about the people to whom the promises were first made? If God has accomplished the true Exodus, what about the people of the original Exodus? How can their story be truly told in the light of the full unveiling of God’s righteousness in Jesus the Messiah? The opening of Rm 9 indicates that Paul is raising exactly these questions in exactly this way. The problem addressed in Rm 9–11, therefore, is precisely the dark side of the new Exodus. Paul’s account of Israel’s privileges in 9.4–5 lists the very things that throughout Rm 1–8 have been attributed, through the Messiah and the Spirit, to the wider family of Abraham described in Rm 4–8. In other words, the first eight chapters of the letter raise particular questions about God’s faithfulness to ethnic Israel that must be addressed for the sake of completeness.

But it would be a mistake to see Rm 9–11, or for that matter Rm 12–16, just as necessary outworkings of an inner logic latent within Rm 1–8. That would be to collapse back once more into regarding Rm 1–8 as ‘the things Paul really wants to say’ and Rm 9–16 as ‘the things he is now forced to deal with because of what he has said’. Without sliding into the opposite mistake (supposing that Rm 9–11 and/or Rm 12–16 are the ‘really important’ parts, and Rm 1–8 a mere preliminary), it’s vital to see that one of the reasons Paul has set his argument out like this is precisely so that he can move forward from here to address the major issues that face the church in Rome. We will examine this point in more detail in the introduction to Rm 9–11.

We can read Rm 5–8 without reference to what has gone before or what comes after. It stands as one of the most central and majestic statements of all that Paul most passionately believes and articulately expounds. But to take it out of its context is like looking at a tree without considering its roots or its fruits. What Paul says here grows out of Rm 1–4 and is designed to bear fruit in Rm 9–11 and 12–16.

## A. From faith to hope<sup>6</sup>

### 5.1-11

The first paragraph (5.1–11) of Rm 5–9 states and develops the theme that overarches the next four chapters: *those whom God justified, he also glorified*. In typical fashion, this is stated densely to start with (5.1–2). It’s then developed with two new elements, suffering and the Spirit (5.3–5), explained and grounded (in the death of the Messiah) (5.6–9), and finally further explained and celebrated (5.10–11).

As usual, Paul’s successive explanations do not add new points to the opening summary, but rather explore what is contained by implication within it.

The theme is inaugurated eschatology. God has accomplished the justification of sinners; he will therefore complete the task, saving those already justified from the coming wrath, for when God begins a work, he will complete it (cf Ph 1.6). God’s decisive disclosure of covenant faithfulness in the death of the Messiah (3.21–4.25) is now expressed in the equally covenantal language of love (5.8).

*‘Love’, in covenant parlance, does not mean a warm feeling towards someone. It means the loyalty that a family member has for another family member.*

The argument is simple: if God loved sinners enough for the Son to die for them, God will surely remain loyal to them and complete what was begun at such cost. Those who have left Egypt will be brought to Canaan, even though suffering awaits them on the journey. Part of Christian assurance is learning to tell this story and to understand its inner logic.

The three tenses of salvation (as they are sometimes called) are thus unveiled. Paul presupposes and builds on his exposition of justification by faith in 3.21–4.25, though in 5.9–10 he will unveil its further depths: being ‘justified by (the Messiah’s) blood’ (5.9) is functionally equivalent to ‘being reconciled to God through Jesus’ death’ (5.10). This is the past tense of God’s action in the Messiah. The future tense is supplied by the words ‘salvation’ and ‘glory’ (5.9–10); this means ‘rescue from the coming wrath’ (5.9; cf 1Th 1.10) through Jesus’ life. The present tense, held between these two, consists of peace, celebration (‘boasting’), suffering, hope, love, reconciliation and (once more) celebration (‘boasting’).

*‘Hope’ in this context means not just a possibility that something might come true, but the utter confidence that it will.*

<sup>6</sup> At several points in this section I am supplementing Wright’s commentary with material from Christopher Bryan, *A preface to Romans: notes on the Epistle in its literary and cultural setting* (Oxford, 2000), pp 120–124.

Paul is not describing a formal or legal transaction. The relationship is one of love on both sides, in which reconciliation has replaced enmity (5.5,10). This comes about through the gift of God's Spirit, the presence of God within the newly constituted community and within the redeemed person, not least in their present wilderness sufferings. Rm 5.1-11 thus unveils something that was at the heart of Rm 1-4 all along, though often hidden underneath Paul's legal imagery and the long tradition that emphasized it: all that God said to Abraham, all that God accomplished in the Messiah, was done out of love/loyalty, and designed to call out an answering love/loyalty.

### 1. Peace, access, and the certainty of glory 5.1-2

Justification results in peace with God, access to his loving favor, and confidence (*elpis*, 'hope') that Adam's participation in God's glory will be restored. Thus Paul opens the paragraph and section with a characteristically dense statement of the past event, the present result, and the future promise. The whole thing is built on what has gone before: 'therefore' (*oun*), as often, provides a key transition.

The emphasis of 5.1 falls on 'we have peace'. Many good manuscripts read *echōmen*, 'let us have peace' (subjunctive), rather than *echomen*, 'we have peace' (indicative), but the indicative is more likely, above all because 'peace' at the start of the paragraph relates closely to 'reconciliation' at the end, and there Paul refers to reconciliation not as something we have to strive for, but as something 'we have received'.

God's justice has led to peace. Augustus Caesar had established the Roman *Pax*, founded on Roman *Iustitia* ('Justice').<sup>7</sup> The emperors after him, calling themselves 'Lord' and 'Savior', maintained the powerful imperial myth through emperor worship and military might. Paul is unveiling to his Roman audience a different justice, a different peace, in virtue of a different Lord and Savior: a different God, the God of Abraham, the world's creator, has now established peace 'through our Lord Jesus the Anointed [King]'.

Peace (*eirēnē*) is an end to war, in this case the war upon God declared by Adamkind described by Paul, and the 'wrath' which is 'being unveiled from heaven' against sinners (1.18-3.20). The biblically astute would recognize here the messianic 'peace' promised by Isaiah—

His rule shall be great,  
and of his peace there shall be no end,  
on the throne of David and his kingdom,  
to set it right and to take its part  
in justice and in judgment from now on and for ever.  
(LXX Isa. 9.6)

—and particularly by the psalmist, who saw God offering his people the ancient salutation in connection with the dwelling of God's *glory* in Israel:

for [the Lord] will speak 'Peace!' upon his people.  
Indeed, his salvation for those who fear him is near,  
that glory may dwell (*liškōn kabōd*) in our land.  
(LXX. Ps. 84.9-10 [MT 85.9-10])

In our sentimental, individualistic way of reading the Bible, we tend to regard this peace, the first characteristic Paul mentions of the present tense of salvation, as referring to the reconciliation of believer and God. We may even recognize that Paul is already pointing here to the communal peace he wishes to see in the Roman church (14.1-15.14; see esp. 14.17,19), which is the work, indeed, of 'the God of peace' (15.33; 16.20). But we usually miss the messianic and temple overtones conveyed, for instance, in the above passages, which is more to the point of what Paul had in mind. This peace, embracing alike each person and the whole community, unveils to the wider world the existence and nature of the alternative empire, set up through the true Lord, the Messiah. In one short verse Paul articulates both the heart of Christian personal experience, the politically subversive nature of Christian loyalty (and of God's loyalty to us), and its focus in the new temple which is God's renewed Israel.

To explain this peace, Paul uses the language of the temple: we have obtained, he says, 'access' to grace, the same root being used as the regular verb for approaching the altar with a sacrifice.<sup>8</sup> 'Grace' is another way of pointing, not so much to God's action on behalf of undeserving sinners, but to the sphere of God's favor, that is, of his continuing loyalty/love. The metaphor of 'standing' envisions grace as a room into which Jesus has ushered all who believe,<sup>9</sup> where they now 'stand'. Just as the Temple was the point where Israel met her gracious God, so now Jesus has effected 'access' (*prosagōgē*) to this God for all who approach by faith.

<sup>7</sup> For this whole theme, see esp. D. Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 79-104; reprinted in R.A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1997) 148-57.

<sup>8</sup> The word *prosagō* ('bring near') can mean approaching the emperor's throne as well, but it occurs very frequently in temple contexts in the LXX. Of course, the temple is often seen as the place of God's throne anyway. The verb is also often used of bringing the sacrifice, not the worshiper, into God's presence, but in the light of 12.1 and 15.16, these would again be the same.

<sup>9</sup> See previous footnote. Some mss., followed by the NRSV mg., omit 'by faith', whether or not it stood in the original text, it certainly says what Paul meant.

The result of past justification and the present status of grace is confidence or 'hope' (*elpis*) regarding the future: 'we boast over the hope of God's glory' (5.2). Paul has spoken of wrongful 'boasting' in 2.17 and 3.27. We think of 'boasting' as self-advertisement, which we find distasteful. In Paul's world it wasn't so bad to 'blow your own horn', but in any case, his Greek has to do with the grounds for confidence when facing both present and future. We might translate *kauchometha* ('we boast') as 'we celebrate'. What could not be attained through Torah—namely, a secure confidence in being God's people—is available through Jesus the Messiah (see at 8.3-4).

The content of the hope is 'glory'. This is an advance statement of the theme developed in 8.18, 21, 30 (cf Col 1.27). Adam's lost glory (3.23) is regained in the Messiah: not just dazzling beauty, but the status and task of being God's vicegerent over creation. If anything, this would be Paul's word for what the later fathers call *theosis*. That this is what Paul has in mind becomes clear in 8.18-27, where the revelation of God's children and their glory leads to the liberation of the whole created order. When Adamkind is restored as they were intended to be, then all creation will be renewed under their lordship. The temple context, and the mention of the Spirit at the end of the next sentence, suggests that Paul has in mind also the *Shekinah* or 'Cloud', and the *Kabod* or 'Glory' of God dwelling in the Temple. His glorious presence, at work already in the hearts of believers, will one day flood their whole being. This, too, is borne out by the development of the subject in Rm 8. This is the hope that supplies confidence and joy.

## 2. Suffering and the Spirit 5.3-5

Paul now approaches the same result from a different angle. Present Christian existence is not just a matter of peace with God, but also, paradoxically, of suffering. This suffering, though, is part of a larger story that again ends with hope. This time, instead of characterizing the hope by 'glory', Paul speaks (not surprisingly, given the temple context) of the indwelling Spirit, who elsewhere, especially in the climax (8.12-30) of Rm 5-8, as the one who guarantees the future hope for the suffering people. In early Christian thought, as at Qumran, the Spirit is a sign of the inbreaking new age.

So, then, we celebrate our sufferings. In our day as in Paul's, suffering was/is more likely to be regarded as a sign of God's displeasure. Paul tells a different story: Suffering produces patience. The point of this is not just that patience is a virtue worth cultivating, but that out of patience grows 'character'. The Greek has the overtone of 'tried and tested', what we mean when we speak of

someone as 'firm as a rock'. This, too, is valued not so much as a virtue in its own right but because from it springs hope. On the surface, there is no obvious logic in this. The Stoicism popular in Paul's day valued patience under suffering and prized a tried and tested character, but came up with little or no hope as a result. Within Paul's narrative world, however, there was plenty of point: the long journey through the wilderness leads to the promised land. In addition, Paul had personal evidence, from his own life and that of friends and colleagues, to back up the story and theology. When the patience is Christian patience, and the tried and tested character a Christian character, the result is neither shallow optimism nor settled fatalism, but hope.

The suffering of which Paul speaks, endured in union with Jesus Christ (compare 8.17), offers a new possibility. Such suffering, he says, can form in those who experience it qualities of endurance and proven character (*dokimēn*)—qualities that are the basis of that self-control which was the ideal of the ancient world, and which are also, of course, the complete opposite of that 'reprobate (*adokimon*) mind', dominated by passions and leading to moral chaos, that he described in 1.18-32.

This hope does not make us ashamed. Why is that? 'Because' (*gar*) 'God's love is poured out in our hearts by the holy Spirit' (5.5). The word for 'love' here and in 5.8 and 8.35,39, is *agapē*. This word does not seem to have been very common in pre-NT Greek, but it attained a new lease of life in early Christianity, quickly becoming used to denote the self-giving love of God in Jesus the Messiah, and the answering love, for God and one another, of those grasped by the good news. Its earlier meaning had to do with the loyalty of hospitality, which was taken very seriously in the ancient world.<sup>10</sup>

Again and again we find in Scripture the picture of God 'pouring out' like water signs both negative and positive of the divine presence. The psalmist begs God to 'pour out wrath' on his enemies.<sup>11</sup> Zechariah asks him to pour out 'a spirit of grace and mercy' (12.10); Sirach, 'wisdom' and 'mercy' (1.9, 18.11). Yet the most striking use of 'pour out' is surely in Joel:

And it shall be after these things,  
I will also pour out from my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters will prophesy,  
and your elders dream dreams  
and your youths see visions. (LXX Jl 3.1; Ac 2.17)

<sup>10</sup> A good example is found in the actions of Lot toward the men of Sodom in Gn 19.

<sup>11</sup> LXX Ps. 68.25 [MT 69.25]; compare 78.6 [MT 79.6], Ho 5.10.

God's Spirit is the mark of God's presence, the divine breath and power, at work in the human heart; and the presence of that Spirit in the Christian community is the surest sign that what 'God promised beforehand' (1.2) is being fulfilled.

As regards the love of God, certainly it is God's love for us that has been poured out upon us like life-giving water, and so constitutes the basis and guarantee of our hope (compare 8.39; 2 Cor. 13.13). Yet at the same time, 'the meaning of this very fundamental statement is not simply that we become aware that God loves us, but that in the same experience in which we receive a deep and undeniable assurance of His love for us, that love becomes the central motive of our own moral being (cf 1Jn 4.19: We love because he loved us first).<sup>12</sup> The Spirit's work, to which Paul ascribes the pouring out of this love in the heart, is precisely within our innermost being, and he often refers to the Spirit's work as the sign, foretaste and guarantee of eventual salvation. But the parallel passage in 8.24-28 indicates that Paul is well capable of speaking, precisely at this point in the argument, of 'those who love God', just as in 1Co 2.9; 8.3, the latter in an explicit invoking of the *Shema*, the daily Jewish prayer ('Hear, O Israel: Yhwh our God, Yhwh is one; and you shall love Yhwh your God', Dt 6.4-5.) It seems preferable, then, to read 'the love of God' in 5.5 as a similar allusion to the *Shema*, and to take it therefore as the objective genitive: our love for God. After all, why else would Paul suggest that God's love for us was poured out into, and thus thereafter located in, our *hearts*?<sup>13</sup>

This then links up with two previous programmatic passages in the letter: 1.5, where Paul speaks of 'the obedience of faith' as the result of the good news, and 3.30, where the monotheism of the *Shema* undergirds justification itself. Rm 5.5 is thus tied closely to the exposition of the worldwide family of Abraham in Rm 4: the *Shema* is now fulfilled by all those who love the God unveiled in Jesus the Messiah. This fits well with several other passages in the letter (e.g., 2.25-29; 8.4-9; 10.6-11), and provides a striking reason for not being ashamed to be living in hope, which is after all what the present passage is about. To find in one's heart a Spirit-given love for God is itself more than consolation. To realize that this love fulfills the central command of Torah is to discover oneself to be a member of the renewed people of God.

As in 8.23, this love is the first-fruits and guarantee of God's ultimate saving work (see 2Co 1.22; 5.5). At 10.11-13, 'not put to shame' is equivalent to 'saved'.

<sup>12</sup> CH Dodd, *Romans*, 74.

<sup>13</sup> Not the emotional faculty, but the vital center of both body and intellect.

### 3. The Messiah's death and God's love

5.6-9

Paul now describes how Jesus' death, by unveiling God's love for sinners and by accomplishing their justification, assures those who are justified that they will be saved and glorified. This is the explanation (*gar*, 5.6) for the whole of 5.1-5, rather than for one particular part of it. It's also part of the overarching theme of the whole section, since Paul returns to the same point in 8.31-39.

The structure of this unit is—

- 5.6 basic premise
- 5.7 comment
- 5.8 conclusion.

The Messiah died for the ungodly; people do not normally die even for worthy people; the Messiah's death is thus the measure of God's extraordinary loyalty/love. 'For still the Messiah— when we were without strength— still at the right time he died for the ungodly' (5.6)— Paul emphasizes the recipients' unworthiness: we were weak, even ungodly.<sup>14</sup> This links with God 'justifying the ungodly' in 4.5, and prepares for 5.8— 'when we were still sinners'.

God's love thus appeared on the scene 'at the right time'. There's no evidence that Paul is referring to a particular chronological scheme, even though such things were reasonably common among educated Jews looking for the coming of God's regime.<sup>15</sup> Nor is he suggesting that the Messiah's death had happened at a moment of particular weakness or sinfulness on the part of Israel and the world. Rather, with hindsight, he recognized, as in Ga 4.4, that 'the time had fully come' (cf Tob 14.5). He believed that God had brought his plan to fulfillment 'at the right moment'.

One would be unlikely to die even for worthy people, but God gave the Messiah for the unworthy. But 5.7 also contains a contrast between two types of worthy people: a 'righteous' person, for whom, he says, one would scarcely die, and 'the good person' for whom, he says, one might even brave death. Commentators have sometimes tried to portray the 'righteous' here as the cold, legally correct person, in order to contrast such qualities with a warmer, more appealing 'goodness'. But the posi-

<sup>14</sup> Paul says 'still' (*eti*) twice in 5.6. This is hard to bring out in English, and neither the NRSV nor the NIV succeeds. KJV has 'For when we were yet without strength, in due time [the Messiah] died for the ungodly', wrongly placing the first *eti* with 'we' (it actually goes with 'Messiah'). Some mss. omit, and some alter, the second occurrence of the word; presumably it was felt odd even in the original.

<sup>15</sup> See Roger T. Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian: Biblical, Intertestamental and Patristic Studies*, AGJU 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).



tive overtones of the word 'righteous' in Paul hardly allow for that. It seems better just to take it as an exception in the case of someone who is superlatively good/righteous.

But God freely and gladly demonstrates a really superlative loyalty/love. We were, after all, not merely weak or ungodly, but actually sinners (5.8). And here Paul includes himself and his fellow Jews, in a word that technically described 'those outside the Torah', the pagans who, not possessing the Torah, were inevitably sinful (cf Ga 2.15, where the word is used in this technical sense). That was our condition, Paul says, when 'the Messiah died for us'— apparently a kind of creedal statement from the very first (cf 4.25; 1Co 15.3).

God's loyalty/love towards us seen in action in the death of the Messiah is then the basis for a 'how much more' argument: if God has done something hard and unthinkable, how much more will he now do what is easy and (given that he's done what's hard) obvious! Paul opens up this thought in two stages, first (5.9) offering a conclusion in terms of justification and salvation, and then (5.10) explaining it in terms of God's reconciling love. This, too, like so much in the present paragraph, is picked up at the end of the section (8.32).

The first stage indicates that Paul is still consciously addressing the problem of 'wrath' stated in 1.18–3.20. Paul has the coming day of wrath in mind, not just the individual fate of unbelievers after death (cf 2.5,16). Those already justified by Jesus' sacrificial death, he says, will be rescued from this coming wrath ('by his blood', picking up 3.25, clearly refers to Jesus' death as a sacrifice; see there and at 5.2; the only other Pauline references to the blood of Jesus are 1Co 10.16; 11.25, 27; Ep 1.7; 2.13; Col 1.20). This is the negative side of the promise whose positive side is 'sharing the glory of God' (5.2).

Just to be clear: 'salvation' describes the future of God's people in terms of rescue from a terrible fate; 'glorification' in terms of the status they will enjoy; 'resurrection' in terms of their new embodiment the other side of death; 'justification', when applied to the future as in 2.13, in terms of their acquittal in the last judgment. In each case the event is the same, the connotation different.

Hope for 'salvation' (etc) is securely based, Paul says, expanding 5.8, because God has already effected reconciliation when we were not just weak, ungodly, or sinful, but actually his enemies (cf 2Co 5.18-19; Ep 2.16; Col 1.19-22). The fact that this deeply personal notion is offered in explanation of, rather than in addition to, the mention of justification in the first half of 5.9 indicates

that the meaning and effect of justification is to bring Adamkind into the forgiven, reconciled family of God.

#### **4. Reconciliation, salvation, and boasting 5.10-11**

Upon whose side was the enmity? At one level, clearly, on ours; we were, says Paul, 'god-haters' (1.30), though this word would hardly apply to many pious Jews, or even to the Gentile 'god-fearers' who probably made up a significant proportion of the Roman converts. Objectively, though, Paul sees all humans as being at enmity with God through sin. Reconciliation is, after all, effected from God's side, by the initiative of love.

However, Paul has just mentioned God's wrath (as in 1.18 and 2.5-11). This wrath stood over against us, and God's love has saved us from it. God's settled and sorrowful opposition to all that is evil included enmity against sinners. The fact that God's rescuing love has found a way of deliverance and reconciliation is part of the wonder of the good news.

Paul elaborates the christological basis of both reconciliation and salvation: 'we are reconciled to God through the death of his son' (5.10). This is the first mention of Jesus' divine sonship since the programmatic 1.3-4, and it looks forward to 8.3 and 8.32 in particular. Paul uses the title, it seems, for especially weighty statements. Though 'son of God' is still a messianic title for Paul—not the 4<sup>th</sup>-century christological expression we usually take it to be the logic of this whole passage, in which Jesus' death unveils God's reconciling love, requires that he express some identity between Jesus and God, and this is how he does so. As in 8.3 and Ga 4.4, Jesus as 'son of God' is the one sent from God to accomplish what God alone must perform.

As in 4.25, Paul here sees the cross accomplishing one task, and the resurrection, or at least the risen life of the Messiah, accomplishing another. However, whereas in 4.25 the resurrection was associated with justification, he here assigns reconciliation (in parallel with justification in 5.9) to the cross, and salvation to Jesus' 'life'.<sup>16</sup> Being saved in the life of the son of God looks ahead to Rm 6, where the baptized are brought to new life, indeed to the life of the messianic age precisely 'in the Messiah'.<sup>17</sup>

The final point of the paragraph is perhaps less expected: not only are we reconciled, not only are we saved (5.10), but 'we even boast in God!' (5.11). What was impossible

<sup>16</sup> This is the first mention of 'salvation' in the letter; 'salvation' and 'justification' are not the same thing in Paul's mind, however much they are confused in popular parlance.

<sup>17</sup> NRSV says 'by' and NIV 'through'— and thus both obscure how this takes place 'in' the Messiah.

under the Torah (2.17), a boasting in God that reflected pride of race and culture, is strangely possible under the good news. The good news has already reduced all human boasting to nothing (3.27-30; cf 1Co 1.29-31); the Christian status and hope may look foolish in the world's eyes, and is clung to in the teeth of suffering (5.3-5); but when looking at 'our Lord, Jesus, the Messiah', and celebrating the reconciliation with God that he has effected, the Christian can say, with the psalmist, 'this God is our God, for ever and ever; he will be our guide unto death' (Ps 48.14). Or, indeed, with Paul at the climax of the present section: 'if God is for us, who can be against us?' (8.31). Those who believe in Jesus the Messiah are the true people of the creator God, the God of Abraham. That is what it means to 'boast in God', to celebrate the reconciliation between the creator and those who bear his image. The paragraph ends, as do most in this section, with a christological summary: We boast in God through our Lord, Jesus the Messiah. Other lords, Paul implies, should take note.

### Reflections

1. This knowledge and love of the true God is evoked and sustained most chiefly, as here, through meditation on the death of Jesus. It's possible to get imbalanced—either emotionally, to concentrate morbidly on Jesus' suffering in the same frame of mind that lures people to drool over some great natural or human disaster; or theologically, to concentrate on the cross at the *expense* of the resurrection—but abuse does not detract from reality. Those who allow themselves to be caught up in the stories of the gospels will discover their life-changing power. Here their entire narrative is boiled down to a single sentence: God's love is demonstrated in that, while we were yet sinners, the Messiah died for us. For Paul himself, the language of the law-court was a powerful metaphor, but the language of God's loyalty/love spoke literal truth.

2. It's ironic that, when many Western Christians are flirting with the idea that everybody will be saved, there is some nervousness about the security of believers. It's almost as though everyone else may be saved but that we can't be too sure about ourselves. This may, no doubt, express a proper reaction against triumphalist arrogance, but nothing is gained by ignoring Paul's central argument, here and throughout Rm 5-8: believing and baptized Christians are assured that, by the indwelling Spirit, they will be brought to resurrection life at the last. Paul was well aware, as his other letters show, of the problems of professing Christians whose behavior seemed to make a mockery of their faith (1 Corinthians wrestles with this problem on almost every page). But one of his greatest, most securely grounded, most sus-

tained arguments is precisely this: Those whom God justified, he also glorified. To fail to grasp this, and be grasped by it, is to miss not only the heart of Paul, but, Paul would say, the heart of God.

3. Celebrating suffering might sound masochistic. And we easily imbibe from our culture an inclination to regard happiness as an inalienable right. Paul is not specific about which sufferings he means (he is more explicit in 8.35), but he is steady and realistic: suffering produces patience, and patience produces a tried and tested character. To the extent that we agree with the hype, we should not be surprised that we're in many respects a society without hope. Those who believe in Jesus the Messiah are called to model communities, families and personal lives in which the sequence of faith, peace, suffering, patience, character and hope is lived out, sustained by the Holy Spirit's work of enabling us to know God's love and to love God in return.

4. We should ponder the political challenge of this passage. God has established the true peace and justice, so different from the Roman *Pax et Iustitia*, through the Lord Jesus, so different from lord Caesar. This challenge, of course, had more than a little to do with the sufferings Paul endured. Not just we individuals, but the church has to take allegiance to this Lord seriously, who established divine justice and peace through his own death, rather than through the death of those who stood in his way. We have to translate this into action in the world. How might God's reconciling action in the Messiah become the ground and model for the reconciliation of human enemies? Too often those who focus on the saving death of Jesus concentrated only on its relevance for current spiritual growth and final salvation, while those who have wanted to make the good news politically relevant have ignored Paul's theology of Jesus' death.

### B. From Adam to the Messiah 5.12-21

The next paragraph is as terse and cryptic as the previous one was flowing and lucid. It's like Paul is drawing a diagram or an outline of his whole argument up to this point; and in Rm 6-8, he will stand in front of it, to show us where his different themes belong and how they fit together. As we've seen, the overall argument of Rm 5-8 is outlined in 5.1-11, so that in summing up where he's gotten to, Paul isn't making the first in a sequence of logically ordered points, but rather setting up the grid on which all that follows will be plotted.

The paragraph outlines the way in which the creator and covenant God has successfully dealt with the problem of Sin and Death. We saw Adam hiding under the argument of 1.18-25 and in isolated statements such as 3.23, and Paul summarizes the same here, not (as has sometimes

been thought) adding a fresh point or just providing an illustration. The opening *dia touto* should thus be read not just as ‘therefore’, but ‘so it comes about that’: not a new point to be deduced, but a summary, a conclusion that can be drawn because of what has been said briefly, in advance, in 5.1-11. We have seen, in miniature, that the death of Jesus, the great act of obedient covenant faithfulness, has dealt with sin, that God’s love unveiled on the cross will certainly bring those who are justified to salvation and glorification, and that the Spirit has poured the love of God into the hearts of believers, transforming them so that they become God’s true humanity. This enables us to line up the problem outlined in 1.18–3.20 (sin and death) with the solution articulated in 3.21–5.11 (justification and life) and draw the conclusions. That is what Paul does here.

The shape of the argument needs clarifying. The main point Paul is making is begun in 5.12, but broken off to allow for two different sorts of explanation and modification (5.13-14, 15,17). He then returns to his main statement in 5.18, further explained and restated in 5.19. Verse 20 adds a further complication, showing how the Torah fits within the Adam-the Messiah picture; 5.21 restates the point of 5.18-19 allowing for this further dimension. Thus the shape of the paragraph is like this:

- 5.12 Opening statement, awaiting completion:  
Just as Sin entered and brought Death....
- 5.13-14 Explanatory ‘aside’: Sin and Death between Adam and Moses
- 5.15-17 Explanatory ‘aside’: The imbalances between Sin and Grace
  - 5.15 The gift far outweighs the trespass
  - 5.16-17 After one sin, condemnation; after many trespasses, justification, with explanation
- 5.18 Initial completion of opening statement:  
Just as the trespass, so the act of righteousness
- 5.19 Explanation and filling out of 5.18: disobedience and obedience
- 5.20 Torah intensified the problem, but Grace dealt with this too
- 5.21 Triumphant conclusion: The regime of Grace triumphs over the regime of Sin and Death

Within this, Paul introduces a theme almost unique in his writings, but very important within early Christianity: the clash of the regimes. Five out of the nine occurrences in his writings of *basileuō*— ‘rule as a king’ or ‘reign’—

come in these verses; one of the others picks up this passage at 6.12.<sup>18</sup> Paul does not speak here of the regime of Satan, but instead personifies ‘Sin’ and ‘Death’, speaking of each as ‘reigning’ (5.14, 17a, 21a). He does not speak here, either, of God’s reign, or even that of Jesus; rather, as in the admittedly ironic 1Co 4.8, he speaks of believers as reigning (5.17b), and then finally of the reign of Grace itself (5.21b). The last, clearly, is a personification for God. This theme of kingly rule, coming so soon after the grand statement of justice, peace, and lordship (5.1), cannot but be seen as a further indication of Paul’s overall mission: to announce God’s regime in the face of the principalities and powers of the world, especially those of Rome itself (cf 8.38-39 and the pregnant conclusion of Acts 28.30-31).

The other themes work in groups. Sin (*Hamartia*) and Death (*Thanatos*) obviously belong together, and are joined by trespass,<sup>19</sup> disobedience, and condemnation. On the other side are grace, righteousness, free gift (*charisma*), gift (*dorea* or *dōrēma*), act of righteousness/justification/acquittal (*dikaiōma*, *dikaiosis*, and *dikaiosynē*). It isn’t always necessary to make fine distinctions between these terms; Paul’s reason for choosing different words, in some cases at least, is to avoid repetition. To grasp the main thrust of the argument, it helps to see these two groups as solid blocks, from which Paul can draw the particular nuance he wants at any given point.

The substance of 5.12-21 is the parallel and contrast between Adam and the Messiah. Paul alludes more briefly to this in 1Co 15.21-22, and develops the theme in one direction in 15.45-49. The context of his thinking is the fairly widespread Second Temple Jewish belief not merely about Adam as the progenitor of the human race, and indeed the fountainhead of human sin (e.g., Ws 2.23-24; 2Bar 17.3; 23.4; 48.42; 54.15 [but cf 54.19]; 4Ezr 3.7; 3.21; 7.118), but about Israel, or the righteous within Israel, as the new humanity, the inheritors of ‘all the glory of Adam’. This theme is particularly prominent in the Dead Sea scrolls.<sup>20</sup> Adam, in other words, points forward to God’s ultimate intention for the human race; reflection on Adam gives a particular shape to eschatological hope. In particular, as will be important in Rm 8, Adam’s sovereignty over creation and God’s own glory will be giv-

<sup>18</sup> The other three are 1Co 4.8 (twice), which belong with the occurrence in Rm 5.17, and 15.25, which speaks of the messianic reign of Jesus.

<sup>19</sup> In its basic meaning, ‘sin’ just means wrongdoing, whether or not the sinner is aware of it; and ‘trespass’ or ‘transgression’, disobedience to a known command. But as will be discussed, Paul personifies ‘Sin’ as a malevolent force that infests and inhabits Adamkind.

<sup>20</sup> Eg 1QS 4.22-21; CD 3.20; 1QH 4.15 [= 17.15 in, eg, Vermes]; 4Q171 3.1-2. See also Wright, ‘New Exodus, New Inheritance’, 34 n 13.

en/restored to the true Adam at the end. This lies at the heart of Paul's view of Jesus' lordship (e.g., 1Co 15.27, quoting Ps 8.7), and also of the kingly rule of Jesus' people (5.17). This paragraph, then, demonstrates that, by fulfilling the covenant promises to Abraham, the creator God has addressed and dealt with the problem of Adam; a new humanity has come into being for whom Sin and Death have been conquered. 'The age to come' has arrived in the present with the death and resurrection of the Messiah; those who belong to the Messiah already share in its benefits. What Israel, or groups within Israel, thought to gain has been appropriately attained by the true Israelite, the Messiah, the obedient one. He now shares this status with all his people.

The balance between Adam and the Messiah, which is the main point of the paragraph, is not absolute. Rm 5.15-17 inserts two notes of imbalance, where Paul insists that the Messiah's act and its result far outweigh what was Adam did and lost. The Messiah did not begin where Adam began: His task was actually Israel's vocation as outlined (but not acted upon) in 2.17-24 and 3.2— to take the weight of the human catastrophe upon himself and deal with it. Nor did this just bring about Adam's restoration to where he was before: the human project begun in Adam but never completed, has been brought to its intended goal in the Messiah. In both senses the Messiah has done what Israel was called to do.

What then of Israel itself? Would Israel not say that the Torah was given in order to enable it to escape the entail of Adam's sin? Paul takes a very different line. Following his earlier statement in 2.25-29, 3.19-20, and 4.15a, he sees the Torah as entering the picture with disastrous consequences (5.20). God has, however, dealt with this too. Through Jesus the Messiah, God's righteousness, attested by the Torah but now unveiled apart from it, has become the means by which grace can usher in the age to come (5.21, with an oblique echo of 3.21). The main statements of the paragraph, holding the subsidiary and explanatory additions in place, thus come in 5.12, 18, and 21 (see the outline of 5.12-21 above).

Jesus' 'obedience' is thus the means by which God's faithfulness to the covenant has been *effected*. This theme, picking up on Jesus' 'faithfulness' in Rm 3, echoes Isa 53, as already hinted at in 4.25. As in Ph 2.6-11 ('have this mind in you which was in the Messiah Jesus... who became obedient unto death...'), Paul draws together his view of Jesus as the true Adam and the true Israel. Both themes are focused on Jesus' obedient death, seen as the act of grace by which the true God is unveiled.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See Wright, *Climax*, chap 4.

This paragraph is not only the thematic statement out of which Rm 6-8 are quarried; it provides, too, the groundwork for Rm 9-11 and 12-16. Paul's basic thesis about Israel according to the flesh is that they, too, are 'in Adam'. This, worked out in agonizing detail in 7.1-25, is then thought through in 9.6-10.21: Israel recapitulates Adam's trespass (5.20; 7.7-11; 9.32; 11.11-12). But God has dealt with Adam's sin, and also with that of Israel; there is therefore life and hope for Israel, too, not because Israel is God's 'chosen people' in a nationalistic sense, but because of the victory of grace. Israel, even 'according to the flesh', remains the Messiah's people (9.5); thus their 'casting away' means 'reconciliation for the world' (11.15, echoing 5.10). Key elements of the discussion thus grow from the thematic statements in Rm 5.

The great appeal of Rm 12-16 is for unity in the church: 'We, the many, are one body in the Messiah'. This is worked out through the argument of 14.1-15.13 in particular. There, working backward, we find the clue to the way in which 5.12-21 draws out the theme so prominent in 1.16-4.25— namely, the coming together of Jews and Gentiles in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. This subject, so far from being ignored between Rm 4 and 9, should actually be seen as highlighted in 5.12-21, through Paul's repeated emphasis on 'one man... for many/all'. 'Many' and 'all', in the light of the whole thrust of 1.18-4.25, must clearly be seen as meaning 'Jew and Gentile alike'. The problem was universal; the solution is universal. Torah's entry into the picture (5.20) did not create a special race; rather, it exacerbated the problem. The solution is the same for all: grace, working through God's covenant faithfulness, resulting in the life of the age to come, through Jesus, Israel's Messiah, the Lord of the world, appropriated by faith; God's love, responded to with answering love inspired by the Spirit. The appeal for the unity of the church in the letter's closing chapters (see especially 15.7-13) is firmly rooted in this same crucial paragraph. With this, we are ready for the details of the text.

### 1. Just as Sin entered and brought Death....

### 5.12

Paul begins a great comparison between Adam and the Messiah, but breaks it off halfway through, to insert two explanations. On the face of it, 5.12 seems fairly straightforward, granted the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3 and its interpretation in the Judaism of Paul's day. Given a commandment, to break which meant death, the unhappy pair broke it and (eventually) died. Sin and Death are personified, 'characters' in Paul's narrative through to Rm 8, and accordingly, I will capitalize them from now on. They are forces that must be defeated if

the Christian is to be sure of life and glory in the messianic age. In terms of Paul's new-Exodus story, Sin and Death play the role of Pharaoh: alien powers, given access to God's world through the action of Adam. Once in, they seized royal power. Linked together as cause and effect, Sin and Death now stride through their usurped domain, wreaking misery, decay, and corruption wherever they go. No one is exempt from their commanding authority.

This is all straightforward in one way, but it has created huge problems for subsequent readers eager to press Paul for solutions to problems he was not addressing, as for instance, Did sin really enter the world through one man? Was there no death until the first *Homo sapiens* 'worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator'? And in what sense did 'all sin' (3.23) when Adam sinned? These are questions more of interpretation than of exegesis, but unless they are addressed they threaten to derail the contemporary reader before the paragraph has even properly begun. And since this passage constitutes the driving heart of the letter, it's vital to stay on the track.

Paul certainly believed that there had been a single first pair who had been given a commandment and had broken it. He was also aware of what we would call the story's mythical or metaphorical dimensions, but he would not have regarded these as throwing doubt on the existence, and primal sin, of the first historical pair. But that doesn't commit us to a world in which there was a primordial sea monster, combat with whom was part of the world's foundation (cf Ps 74.13-17).

We may understand 'death' here as more than just the natural decay of the created order. God's good creation was always transient: evening and morning, decay and new life, autumn and spring, pointed on toward and were to be part of a future, a purpose, which the human race was to bring about in royal, priestly, and prophetic service. What lived in God's world would decay and perish, but 'death' in that sense carried no sting. The primal pair were, however, fell into a 'Death' that resulted from Sin, involving their expulsion from the garden (Gn 2.17). This Death is a darker force, opposed to creation itself, unmaking what was good, always threatening to drag the world back toward chaos. Thus, when Adamkind turned away from the creator whose image they were, this darker 'Death' siezed them.

It is easy enough to speak of physical death. 'First we ripen, then we rot', as a biologist once put it. It is not possible, though, to speak of the *human meaning* of death without resorting, as I just did in the previous paragraph, to mythic language. All our words about some

things are symbols. At their best (and the Bible would be a definition of that 'best'), they are transparent to the mysteries they convey. But they do not convey *information* so much as *wisdom*.

Paul said that death came because Adamkind turned away from the source of life toward lifeless idols (1.18-32). If we are prepared to understand this, we will see that it's true. If we debate it with science, we will still be left with the mystery. If there were no mystery, you would probably not be reading this.

The final clause in the verse is deeply controversial. Most interpreters take the opening phrase (*eph' hōi*) to mean 'inasmuch as', or 'because'; death spread to all, 'because' (or 'inasmuch as') all sinned. The question is, does the verb refer to sins committed by all people (as in the 'many sins' of 5.16), or was Adam's primal act the moment when 'all sinned'?<sup>22</sup> A similar case seems to exist here:

Hb 7.9-10 Levi also, who receives tithes, payed tithes (*dedekatōtai*, perfect) in Abraham, for he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.

Paul of course recognizes that all humans have committed actual sins (1.18–3.20), but he seems to be interested in their Adamic solidarity, especially when, for instance, he sums up his argument about human sin with an aorist at 3.23— 'all sinned, and came short of God's glory'. There is one Adamkind which fell when Adam fell, just as Levi paid tithes when Abraham paid them.

It's not necessary to espouse along any particular theory of how sin is transmitted through the generations of Adamkind. In fact the need to come up with such a theory arises from assuming Adam and his descendants must be viewed as individuals to begin with. Obviously Hebrews does not quite espouse that theory regarding Abraham and Levi, though obviously they are distinct. The point is that when we human individuals sin, we are not just *imitating* Adam's sin but acting from within a human nature, and indeed within a world, radically conditioned by Adamkind's prior disobedience.

For Paul, sinfulness has spread throughout the human race from its first beginnings, and each individual has contributed their own share to it.

#### a. Sin and Death from Adam to Moses

5.13-14

Paul said 'just as' in 5.12, but there was no corresponding 'so'. As most translations do, we must insert a dash

<sup>22</sup> The verb is actually in the aorist, as the NIV rightly sees ('all sinned'), not the perfect ('all have sinned'), as the KJV, NRSV, and most others have it.

or bracket at the end of 5.12; 5.13 breaks in to the train of thought, and not until 5.18 is it begun again and finally completed. Paul pauses to address the problem of the generations between Adam and Moses, who lived before the coming of the Torah. How did they know what was sinful and what was not? If Paul were to tie sin too closely to the Torah, he would not only have a theoretical difficulty with the period between Adam and Moses, but would also run into a more pressing problem about the status of Gentiles ‘without the Torah’ (cf 2.14). So he stops to explain that sin did indeed spread to all people, even if it did not involve breaking the Torah. Sin must have been there (5.13a) because Death was there, ruling like a king (5.14a). However much *Sin* might have been there, though, *sins* were not being reckoned up, not logged in any register, in the absence of the Torah. As a result, the subjects over whom Death ruled, though they were sinners, were not the same type of sinners as Adam had been, that is, sinners against a specific known commandment. They did not sin ‘in the likeness of the trespass (*parábasis*) of Adam’ (5.14). *Parábasis*— ‘trespass, transgression’ means sinning against a commandment.

*Let us note here how important it is to recognize nomos— usually, ‘law’— as the Mosaic Torah. The context makes it quite clear that Torah is what Paul has in mind, but generations of readers not in touch with Paul’s Jewish context have taken it to mean ‘law’ in a general sense, to the great detriment of their understanding. This is a good lesson to take to heart for the following chapters.*

This is important for what it implies as well as what it denies. It denies that the generations between Adam and Moses, being Torahless, were also sinless. But it also implies that those who come after Moses, and who do have Torah— in other words, the Jews— do in fact imitate Adam. This will be further stated in 5.20, echoed in 6.14-15, and will become a major theme in Rm 7.

Adam, he says, is ‘a type (*typos*) of the one who was coming’. This is one of only two places where Paul uses ‘type’ in this technical sense (the other being 1Co 10.6; see also 1Co 10.11). Originally this word meant the mark of a nail, or of a die or stamp that leaves its impression in wax: Adam prefigured the Messiah in certain respects, notably in that he founded a family that would bear his characteristics. Thus we may hear another hint of the coming argument. Sinning ‘according to the likeness of Adam’s trespass’ is balanced by God’s plan to bring Christians ‘to conform to the *image* of his son’ (8.29). The middle term in this story is supplied, evocatively, by 8.3: ‘God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh’.

Paul has clarified a potential problem but he is not quite ready to resume the train of thought begun in 5.12. Before he can set out the parallel between Adam and the Messiah, he needs to head off the idea that they are *merely* or *solely* parallel.

**b. The imbalances between Sin and Grace 5.15-17**

**1. The gift far outweighs the trespass 5.15**

‘But it’s not “as the trespass, so also the grace-gift” (5.15a). Paul isn’t, as NRSV and NIV do, just denying a *similarity* between the gift and the trespass; he is denying that there is a *balance* between them.

The gift far *outweighs* the trespass; the Messiah has not merely restored what Adam lost, but has gone far beyond.

The remainder of 5.15 explains (*gar*) what Paul means. The many died because of the trespass (*paraptōma*) of the one (Adam); but God’s grace, and the free gift through the one (Jesus), abounded for the many. The imbalance is the simple progression from sin to death and the astonishing reversal in which God’s grace flourished in what had seemed a hopeless situation. The two sequences are all out of proportion to each other: in the one case, Sin bred Death because that’s what Sin does; in the other, the Grace is nothing short of new creation, creation not merely out of nothing but out of anti-creation, out of death itself.

**2. After one sin, condemnation; after many trespasses, justification 5.16-17**

A second imbalance is then presented in 5.16, with one of Paul’s most tortuous shorthand sentences: literally, ‘and not “as through the one man sinning, the gift”’. Again Paul is denying not just *similarity*, but *balance*, this time in terms of the conditions and judicial result: *one* sin brought a sentence of condemnation; after *many* trespasses, the gift brought the verdict ‘righteous’.<sup>23</sup> In other words, God’s action in the Messiah did not start where Adam’s started, and, as it were, merely get things right this time. God’s action in the Messiah began at the point where Adam’s ended— with many sins, and many sinners. The result in each case is hardly comparable; condemnation and acquittal may seem equal and opposite, but only from the point of view that they are the two alternative results from a trial. In terms of what they ac-

<sup>23</sup> The term *dikaïōma*, usually ‘decree’ or ‘righteous deed’ here has the sense, according to BDAG, of *dikaiosis*, ‘justification’, ‘vindication’, or ‘acquittal’. Perhaps the form Paul used brings with it the sense of this verdict as an action of the judge.

tually mean for the people concerned they are different sorts of things: the one a denial and ending of life itself, the other an affirmation, opening up new possibilities.

Paul offers in 5.17 a further explanation of the imbalance between Adam and the Messiah, this time in terms of the two 'reigns'. But it's not, as we might have expected, 'Death' or 'Sin' on the one hand, and 'God' on the other. The reign of Death is far outweighed by the reign of—believers! Those pronounced dead under the haughty and usurping regime of Death are themselves to be the rulers in God's new world. Paul describes them as 'those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness'. Paul has spoken of 'the many' on both sides of the equation (5.15) and will do so again (5.19); he will speak of 'all humans', on both sides, in 5.18. Here, however, he presents a significant modification: it's those who 'receive this gift' who will reign in life in God's regime (cf 1Co 4.8)—in other words, believers.

They will reign, he says, 'in life'—in the resurrection and the life of the age to come. God will exercise his final rule through his people. When the Ancient of Days takes the throne, sovereignty is given to 'the people of the saints of the Most High' (Dan 7.27). The blessings promised for the age to come are achieved by the Messiah and shared with his people. (This, of course, will make 9.1-5 so poignant....)

**c. Just as the trespass,  
so the righteous act** **5.18**

Paul is ready at last to resume his argument where he broke it off at 5.12. The opening phrase (*ara oun*) is resumptive as well as consequential: 'so, then', not just 'therefore' (KJV etc). The key sentence, however, in which Paul at last says what he has been waiting to say for five verses, possesses neither subject, verb, nor object in either half. Literally it reads 'as through the trespass of the one unto all people unto condemnation, so also through the righteous act of the one unto all people unto acquittal of life'.<sup>24</sup>

The balance he is asserting, after all the imbalances of the previous verses, lies in the universality. Adam brings condemnation for all; the Messiah, justification for all. Does he mean every last person will be saved, no matter what? No, but the Messiah is the way for all. 'Condemnation' and 'judgment' have been important themes in the letter since the second chapter; Paul here, as usual, refers to the final coming judgment, when there will be wrath for some and life for others (2.5-11). The theme remains

<sup>24</sup> The words 'of the one' in each case (ἐνός *henos*, a single word in Greek) could, instead, be an adjective modifying the noun, 'through the one trespass' and 'through the one righteous act'. But this is less likely.

central in the coming chapters, reaching its dramatic climax in 8.1 ('there is therefore now no condemnation for those in the Messiah Jesus') and 8.33-34 ('God justifies; who will condemn?'). By referring to Jesus' messianic action on the cross (this, of course, is what the second half of the comparison in each verse has been about) in terms of an 'act of righteousness' or 'act of acquittal' (the word is *dikaiōma*, as in 5.16), Paul again draws on the thought of 3.21-26 and 5.9-10. The Messiah's *dikaiōma* in the middle of history leads to God's *dikaiosis* on the last day. What was accomplished on the cross will be effective at the final judgment.

Paul at once explains further (*gar*), and elaborates his meaning this time in terms of disobedience and obedience (5.19). With audible overtones of Isa 53.11, he declares that, as Adam's disobedience gave 'the many' the status of being 'sinners' (see at 5.8) so the Messiah's obedience has given 'the many' the status of being 'righteous'. The Isaianic echoes whisper that Jesus is the servant of Yhwh, whose obedient death has accomplished Yhwh's saving purpose. He has 'established' or 'set up' his people with a new status.

To be a 'sinner' of course involves committing actual sins. But it's the status that interests Paul here. Likewise, to be 'righteous', as will be apparent in the next chapter, is more than just status, but again it's the status that matters here. Justification, rooted in the cross and anticipating the verdict of the last day, gives people a new status not apart from, but *ahead of* appropriate deeds.

**1. Disobedience  
and obedience** **5.19**

What does Paul suppose the Messiah was obedient to? A long tradition in one strand of Reformation thought has supposed that Paul was here referring to Jesus' perfect obedience to the Torah.<sup>25</sup> In this view, the Messiah's 'active obedience' and his 'passive obedience' work together. His active obedience acquires 'righteousness', which is then 'reckoned' to those 'in the Messiah'; his passive obedience, culminating in the cross, deals with his people's sins. Powerful though this thought is, and influential though it has been (even in Western liturgy, where 'the merits and death of the Messiah' are sometimes mentioned in this double sense), it's almost certainly not what Paul has in mind here.

The Isaianic servant, to whom reference is being made, was obedient to the saving purpose of Yhwh, the plan marked out for Israel from the beginning but that,

<sup>25</sup> See R.N. Longenecker, 'The Obedience of the Messiah in the Theology of the Early Church', in *Reconciliation and Hope (LL Morris Festschrift)*, ed. R. Banks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 142. 52.

through Israel's disobedience, only the servant, as an individual, can now accomplish.

The Messiah's 'obedience' in 5.19 therefore corresponds closely to the Messiah's 'faithfulness' in 3.22. It refers to his obedience to God's commission (as in 3.2), to the plan to bring salvation to the world, rather than his amassing a treasury of merit through Torah obedience.

In fact obedience to the Torah would be beside the point; the Torah has a different, and much darker, function in the argument than is often supposed. That, indeed, is the subject of the next verse.

## 2. Torah intensified the problem, but Grace dealt with that as well 5.20

*This verse and the next are so important throughout the rest of the section that you will really need to memorize them for instant recall. Paul refers back to them in one way or another in just about every unit of what follows.*

If a devout Second Temple Jew were telling the story of Adam and the Messiah— from, we may assume, a pre-messianic point of view— the Torah would be bound to play a large and positive part in the narrative. As Paul says in 2.17-20, reflecting the attitude he himself would have had before his conversion, the Torah provides the form of knowledge and truth. He would say that it's what, above all, enables Israel to escape the entail of Adam's sin, to be different from the pagan world around. Not so, he says here. When Torah came in, its effect— apparently *deliberate*— was 'to increase the trespass'.

Each part of 5.20 is tricky. The word that describes the Torah's entrance is *pareiserchomai*, 'came in alongside'.<sup>26</sup> The result was that the trespass increased; was this the intention, or just the unintended result of God's introducing the Torah?<sup>27</sup>

The clue is to link 'the trespass' with its previous occurrences in the passage, where the trespass is of course Adam's. The Torah, so far from delivering its possessors from the entail of Adam's sin, actually appears to exacerbate it for them. This is more or less, after all, what Paul already said in 3.19-20. To sin outside the Torah is still to sin; Paul has made that clear in 5.13-14; but to sin under the Torah— in other words, to transgress, to break a known commandment— is to make the problem worse. Just as in 2.17-24, which follows on from 1.18-32, Adam's sin is writ large in Israel.

<sup>26</sup> Paul uses it in Ga 2.4 of false brethren secretly sneaking in; though the word need not have a negative connotation, it certainly could carry one. The NIV 'was added' seems to reflect Ga 3.19, which is after all similar in topic, but it is not Paul's word here.

<sup>27</sup> KJV and NRSV opt for result; NIV for purpose.

But why would God *intend* trespass to increase? This half-verse anticipates the whole argument of 7.7-25, where both the Torah itself and the effect it had were mysteriously intended to do just that.

The problem of Adam's sin was magnified by the Torah, but God has done what Torah could not. Grace has superabounded where Sin abounded— that is, in Israel itself, where the full effects of Torah's magnification of Adam's sin were felt. The superabundance of Grace in Israel refers to the Messiah's work, and particularly his death, in which Jesus offered to Israel's God the faithful obedience that Israel had not. In the Messiah, God has come to where the Torah has magnified Sin, and has dealt with it. This points ahead to 8.3-4.

## d. The regime of Grace triumphs over the regime of Sin 5.21

All this leads to the full and climactic statement of the Adam-Messiah balance in 5.21. When we stand back and look at the two regimes, they are those of Sin on the one hand and Grace on the other; and if 'Grace' is a way of saying 'God', 'Sin' is a way of saying 'Satan'. Paul is once again summarizing the whole train of thought of 1.18-5.11, and doing so in a way that will launch the next phase of the letter's argument: Sin's reign is matched, and outmatched, by Grace's reign, and Sin's offspring Death is beaten by Grace's offspring Life, working through 'righteousness' (*not* 'justification', as in the NRSV).<sup>28</sup> Give these words their full Pauline value, and the sequence of thought becomes clear, despite all the technical terms. Grace (God's favor and his sovereign, loyal/loving purpose) is ruling through covenant faithfulness and saving justice (God's accomplishment in the Messiah of what had been promised to Abraham), and the result is the ushering in of the life of the messianic age.<sup>29</sup> And all has happened, of course, 'through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord'. The outstretched arms of the crucified one, embodying the loyalty/love of the creator God, provide the ultimate balance of the paragraph, the place where Sin's regime did its worst and Grace's regime its triumphant best.

### Reflections

1. The overwhelming impression left by these verses is the superabundance of grace. However much theologians and preachers know this with their heads, and can explain it as a theory, it remains strange and surprising that it should actually be true, that it should be the cen-

<sup>28</sup> Important to correct your bible if it doesn't say 'righteousness'.

<sup>29</sup> The phrase 'eternal life' (*zōēn aiōnion*) is a natural one for translators to choose, but it's misleading. Paul is not speaking of an endless disembodied bliss in 'heaven', but of a far more this-worldly life in the messianic age (*aiōn*), which sits better with, eg, 8.18-27.



tral characteristic of the world in which we— even theologians and preachers!— are called to live. Surrounded as we are day by day with so many signs and symbols of sin and death, and living in a culture that has reinvented a secularized version of the doctrine of Original Sin under the guise of the hermeneutic of suspicion (see below), all our instincts tell us that life is hard, cruel and unfair. If there are signs of life and hope, they tend to be those we make for ourselves. Our culture thus oscillates between despair and self-salvation.

Into this world the news of grace, of the undeserved gift of abundant life, bursts again and again, in the message of Jesus, offering a radical alternative, an entirely different way of construing reality, a new way of conceiving our whole experience of the world and indeed of God. At every point where the seeds of wickedness have been planted, bearing deadly fruits of all kinds, there the grace of God has been planted alongside, a vibrant plant that will take over the soil and produce a life-giving harvest. Of course, it takes faith to believe this and act on it; precisely the faith that believes that God raised Jesus from the dead, and that therefore his cross was indeed 'the free gift following many trespasses', 'the one man's obedience'. But once the world has been glimpsed in this light, everything is different, not least Christian mission and the prayer that accompanies it.

2. At the center of the picture, and always worth further exploration and meditation, is the achievement of Jesus himself. Though the word 'cross' is not mentioned, and though Jesus' own death is not spoken of explicitly, we should not miss the fact that in this passage we have one of Paul's fullest statements of what in shorthand we call atonement theology. People often try to glean a full theology of the cross from 3.21-26, where Paul is writing about several things at once and drawing on a dense statement of the meaning of Jesus' death in order to do so. We would do better to see that passage, together with the further statements of 4.25 and 5.6-10, as leading to the present argument, which is admittedly still terse and clipped. This is the high mountain ridge from which we look back to the earlier statements, and on to subsequent ones (6.3-11; 7.4; 8.3-4, 31-39).

Central to Paul's understanding of the cross, therefore, is the belief that it's the free gift of God to a wicked and corrupt world. This point, stressed again and again in these verses, was and is offensive to those who want to make their own unaided way through life, or who suppose that nothing much is wrong with the world or the human race, or indeed themselves. Free grace is obviously correlated, here more than anywhere else, with a radical view of human wickedness and the threat posed by death. For those who want to remain independent,

being ruled by grace appears almost as much of a threat as being ruled by sin and death. But this is, of course, absurd. Grace is undeserved love in powerful action; and love seeks the well-being, the flourishing, of the beloved, not their extinction or diminution.

But this free gift is offered through the obedience, the faithfulness, of Jesus himself. Here, as in Ph 2.6-8, Paul sees the voluntary death of Jesus as the messianic act *par excellence*, the triumphant accomplishment of that covenant plan for which Israel was called in the first place, the completion of the purpose for which God called Abraham. Not for Paul the currently fashionable idea that Jesus had not intended to die but that the church— Paul himself included!— used theological hindsight to impose upon that death a meaning Jesus himself had never envisioned. Paul's allusions in this passage to the fourth servant song, highlighting his own reference to Jesus' obedience, tell the story of one who knowingly went to the place where Israel's and the world's sin and shame were heaped up together, and took the full weight on himself. How this could be, theologically speaking, is hinted at in 5.20, and will be explored further in the explosive 8.3-4.

3. Paul's personification of Sin and Death, and his highlighting of these forces as the deepest problem of humans and of the world, will win him few friends among those for whom sin is merely an outdated neurosis and death an unfortunate problem that the medical profession has not yet solved. One might have thought that the twentieth century, which elevated sin to a technological level previously unimagined, and meted out violent death to more people, more efficiently, than ever before, would have been only too glad to embrace Paul's analysis of the problem, and eager to rediscover his solution. But, as so often, the patient is fearful of hearing the true diagnosis, not least because the treatment may be humiliating.

Part of the problem, of course, is that traditional Christianity has frequently operated with a truncated view of sin, limiting it to personal, and particularly sexual, immorality. These things matter, of course, but there are other dimensions too often untouched by traditional preaching. Equally, those preachers who have focused attention on structural evil within our world, on systematic and politically enshrined injustice, have often left the home base of Pauline theology in order to do so, not realizing that there were resources there from which to launch not only critique but also promise and hope. This passage invites us to explore a reintegrated view of Sin and Death, rebellion and consequent dehumanization, as the major problem of humankind, and thereby to offer diag-

noses of our world's ills that go to the roots of the problem and prepare the way for the cure.

4. The left and the right are trying to re-erect ethical frameworks in the wake of perceived failure. A true analysis of Sin, structural and personal, should lead to a true discovery of grace, again both structural and personal. Applying the Pauline doctrine of grace to the larger questions faced in our culture would mean rediscovering, beyond proper and necessary suspicion, that there is such a thing as trust, and that healthy societies, as well as individuals, thrive on it.