

## **Now to Him who Is Able to Establish You Stability in Romans**

What was Paul's main purpose in writing Romans?

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Just about any Christian who has spent time studying the Christian way of life has spent times in Romans chapters five through eight. These chapters reveal some key truths for the Christian life. They explain the existence of the sin nature, God's design for dealing with the sin nature, God's warning about the law and the sin nature, and God's ultimate plan for the believer. Yet many struggle to see the connection with the first four chapters and chapters nine through eleven. The first four chapters address universal guilt and God's work to provide salvation through faith. Chapters nine through eleven address God's present plan for the nation Israel. Are these sections connected? If so, what is the tie between the salvation of the lost and the believer's sin nature? How does the sin nature and God's plans for the believer tie to God's present plans for Israel? In a letter this size it is possible that Paul dealt with separate themes. It is also possible that these sections of Romans are connected and God planned a logical presentation of an essential truth for the Christian.

Paul wrote Romans while staying in Corinth late in AD 57 or early 58<sup>1</sup> (Romans 16:23; 2 Timothy 4:20). He had not yet visited Rome, though chapter sixteen indicates that he knew many of the people in the Roman assembly. He wished to visit them, confer a spiritual gift upon them and be sent on his way to Spain by them (Romans 1:10-11; 15:24, 28). It is likely that Phoebe carried this letter to the Romans saints and they were instructed to present themselves to her for whatever need she might have (Romans 16:1-2).<sup>2</sup> Phoebe would exercise her gift among the Roman saints, and that gift may have played a role in addressing Paul's primary purpose.

While Paul expressed his longing to come and see the Romans in 1:10, his purpose was to impart some spiritual gift so the Romans might be stabilized. This would result in mutual encouragement of the Romans and Paul. Paul mentioned this stability again in 16:25. Is the means of this stability mentioned elsewhere in this letter? According to 1:10, the impartation of a spiritual gift would provide the means for this stability. This spiritual gift could be gift for service or another provision, e.g. a truth or truthful perspective regarding known truths..

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the connection between these varied sections in Romans. We'll consider the intent of each section to better understand the tie between sections. Understanding the first and third sections of Romans will provide the reader a grasp of that unique fabric which is Scripture, knit by the Holy Spirit. Seeing Paul's intended connections between these sections will inform us regarding what Paul meant by stability.

### **The uniqueness of Romans**

Romans is a letter to believers. Paul addressed his readers as those among the called ones

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<sup>1</sup> This is tentative, for a brief summary of dates see Bruce Corley and Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Paul called Phoebe a minister, a servant of the church in Cenchræa, the area of Corinth. She had the gift of organization and had used it for many, including Paul. Organization is the gift to see needs and point out those needs to those with the gift or ability to meet the needs.

of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6). He wrote that they are loved ones of God, called ones, saints, and objects of God's grace and peace (Romans 1:7). Paul closed the letter with a long series of personal greetings. Consider the following as examples of the saints. Phoebe was a sister and servant of the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1). Priscilla and Aquila were Paul's co-workers in Christ Jesus (Romans 16:3). Epaphroditus was the first believer (firstfruit) of Asia (Romans 16:5). At the beginning we know that this letter is for saints. Paul closed the letter by addressing many saints by name. Romans is a letter for believers.

Romans also includes several sections in which Paul converses with an imagined individual or opponent. The Greeks called this a diatribe<sup>3</sup> described by F.F. Bruce, "In which questions or objections are put into the mouth of an imagined critic in order to be answered or demolished."<sup>4</sup> In 2:1 Paul used the Vocative case (the case of address), "You are inexcusable, O man." He continued addressing this individual in the second-person singular, "For in what you judge the other." In the remainder of chapter two, Paul used nine second-person pronouns, two vocatives, and twenty second-person verbs. Now, this in itself is not remarkable. Paul frequently addressed his audience in the second-person. However, these vocatives, pronouns and verbs are singular, that is, "You." Paul normally used plural pronouns, vocatives, and verbs to address an assembly (Romans 1:8, 11, 12). The exceptions are when his letters were written to an individual rather than a whole assembly, or a brief comment in a letter to an individual (e.g. 1 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 10, 11; Philippians 4:3).

What is remarkable is that to this individual in Romans two, Paul made such statements as, "But according to your hardness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up for yourself wrath in a day of wrath and revelation of God's righteous judgment" (Romans 2:5). Elsewhere, Paul assured believers that we are not the objects of wrath and have been saved from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9; 1:10). Even in this very letter, Paul assured his readers that they would be saved from the wrath (Romans 5:9). Therefore, in this context, the statements addressed to this second person must be either an unsaved individual in the Roman assembly or a fictional individual created by Paul for the purpose of making a point. Unlike modern churches, the unsaved were not frequently or normally present among the assembly of believers (cf 1 Corinthians 14:24-25). It is not likely that Paul was addressing an unsaved individual in the Roman assembly, because such an individual would not be considered part of the assembly.

### **I am eager to evangelize for you in Rome (Paul wished to evangelize)**

So, why does Paul address an unsaved individual in this letter addressed to saints? Paul planned to come and evangelize in Rome. If the verb "evangelize" refers to the presentation of Christ's saving work for the unsaved, and verse sixteen appears to support this, then the pronoun  $\acute{\upsilon}\mu\acute{\iota}\nu$  is a Dative of Advantage.<sup>5</sup> Verse fifteen can then be translated, "In this way, as far as I'm concerned, I am eager to evangelize for you in Rome." Paul didn't evangelize believers with the good news for initial salvation. Paul would have carried out evangelization for the benefit of the Roman saints. As F.F. Bruce noted, Paul would then be speaking with an imagined unsaved individual. Paul's imagined conversation demonstrated for the sake of the Roman believers, how

3 Matthew S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) p. 46. This must be distinguished from the modern use of diatribe which is a harsh argument or castigation of a point of view.

4 F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1978 reprint) p. 86.

5 James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, MA.: University Press of America, 1979) p. 31.

he dealt with unsaved people when presenting the good news of salvation. Paul's presentation agrees with Luke's record of Paul's message in Acts 13.

Many commentators on Romans assume Paul's main focus is evangelization. John Witmer noted that Paul had three purposes in writing: to inform the Romans of his hope to visit them, to "present a complete and detailed statement of the gospel message he proclaimed," to address tensions between the Jewish and Gentile believers.<sup>6</sup> So, while Witmer sees some of Romans as a statement of Paul's gospel, he recognizes other purposes. In the same paragraph, Witmer wrote that Paul did in Romans what Jude had hoped to do, though circumstances required Jude to write a different letter. This assumes that Jude's "common salvation" (Jude 1:3) was primarily about the gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:3&4 summarizes the good news for initial salvation. It states that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again. This was done according to the Scriptures. In Acts, Luke recorded two gospel presentations in some detail. In Acts 10 he recorded Peter's message to the household of Cornelius. In Acts 13, he recorded Paul's message in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. Both messages were addressed to people who had some background in the Old Testament. Cornelius had connections with the Jews and Paul's audience were synagogue attenders. Both men presented the good news in such a manner that it tied Christ to an historical people, with the God of their history, and real historical events. Both men presented a hope with this good news: forgiveness and justification. The hope became the object of faith. Both messages confronted the hearers with the guilt of Christ's crucifixion. Luke's account in Acts provides an expanded look at the gospel summarized in 1 Corinthians 15.

In Acts 14, Luke recorded Paul and Barnabas' arrival in Lystra. Unlike Paul's previous message, this one was shorter. He was no longer speaking to Jews but Gentiles. He charged them to turn from their god's which could do nothing,<sup>7</sup> and turn to the living God who had made all creation (Acts 14:15). This God, though allowing the Gentiles to go their own way, left a witness of His goodness. Paul's words to Gentiles bear resemblance to his words to Gentiles on Mars Hill (sans philosophical distraction). In this context, Paul said he was evangelizing them.

Since, Paul did elaborate on the gospel, it is possible that Paul wrote Romans as a pre-evangelistic letter, intending to come to Rome and evangelize. Chapters one through four could present the points Paul used. Certainly Paul would have engaged in evangelism upon arriving in Rome. According to Philippians, he did evangelize even when chained. Yet, Paul listed many individuals in chapter sixteen that he already knew. These would likely have already heard how Paul approached evangelism (e.g. Prisca and Aquila Romans 16:3; Acts 18:1-4, 24-26). Therefore, while Paul had some evangelistic intentions in the first chapters of Romans, many of the Roman believers had little or no need of such work.

### **That I might impart a spiritual gift (Paul wished to impart a gift.)**

Paul's wish to evangelize in Rome and beyond was not his first wish. Two sentences earlier, in 1:11, he wrote, "For I long to see you, that I might impart a spiritual grace gift to you, that you might be stabilized." His first longing was for the Roman saints themselves. Paul was

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6 John A. Witmer, *Romans* in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983) pp. 436-437.

7 This is the emphasis of Paul's *μᾶταιος*, vain or empty regarding result, or unable to produce.

balanced, he won people to the Lord, but he also then longed for their growth and stability.

To stabilize the Roman believers, Paul wanted them to have a gift. Commentators are not agreed as to the nature of this gift. Some have concluded that as an apostle, Paul might lay hands on an individual or individuals and confer a supernatural ability to serve, and this is what he intended to do. Others believe that Paul's presence as an apostle was a gift, and that with the passing of Paul, the Scriptures now serve this purpose.<sup>8</sup> Some give little attention to the statement about stability, and focus only on Paul's wish to evangelize and appear to make that the gift.

Paul used the word *charisma* [χαρισμα] and the word *pneumatika* [πνευματικα], which our English Bibles translate "spiritual gift." The first word emphasizes a result or product of grace.<sup>9</sup> We might translate it "grace gift." In Ephesians 4 Paul used this word of the gifts of the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors even teachers (v. 11). He also used it in Romans 12:6 of seven areas of service. The second word is an adjective which means that which is characterized by or expresses spirit. Whether spirit is the Holy Spirit or human spirit must be determined by the context (cf Galatians 6:1 and Romans 7:14). Paul wished to impart a benefit of grace which is related to the Spirit/spirit.

The word *charisma* occurs in sixteen passages. The word describes serving gifts, popularly known as spiritual or charismatic gifts, in ten of these passages (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Peter 4:10). Four of the remaining passages are in Romans. In 5:15 and 16 the *charisma* is the reversal of spiritual death. This idea is again described in 6:23 with the clarification that eternal life is the gracious gift of God. Paul explained that God's gracious gifts are given without regret<sup>10</sup> (11:29). Therefore, though most of the occurrences of this term refer to service gifts, four occurrences in Romans refer to the work of God. So, in Romans most of the occurrences of *charisma* involve New Testament salvation.

The second word *pneumatikos* is more frequent and diverse in usage. *Pneumatikos* is used of service gifts only in 1 Corinthians 12:1 and 14:1. The other twenty-four passages do not plainly refer to gifts of service. Besides Romans 1:11 it is used in Romans of the law (7:14) and the benefits or provisions ministered by the Jewish believers to the Gentiles (15:27). Outside of Romans it describes the personal character of believers (1 Corinthians 2:15; 3:1; 14:37; Galatians 6:1), God's truths and words (1 Corinthians 2:13; Ephesians 1:3; 5:19), of the believer's future body (1 Corinthians 15:44, 46), among other uses. *Pneumatikos* has diverse meanings.

To what spirit the word *pneumatikos* refers must be determined by the context. The law pertains to or appeals to the believer's spirit, as opposed to his soul (Romans 7:14). The believer's future body will be characterized by the human spirit rather than the human soul (spiritual versus soulful (natural); 1 Corinthians 14:37). Paul applied to fallen spirit beings "spiritual evil" in the heavens (Ephesians 6:12). The good things God says about the believer appeal to or are appreciated by the believer in the realm of his spirit (Ephesians 1:3). The Holy Spirit gives character to certain believers through His work, hence they are spiritual: taught by the Spirit

<sup>8</sup> William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse* (Chicago: Grace Publications, 1943) pp. 12-13

<sup>9</sup> The -μα ending emphasizes product or result. See Chamberlain on the .

<sup>10</sup> The NASB, ESV, NIV and NRSV translates this "irrevocable"; KJV, AV, and Darby use some version of repent. ἀμεταμέλητος is "not repented of, unregretted" G. Abbott-Smith *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1948) p. 24.

(1 Corinthians 2:15; 3:1); expressing His fruit (Galatians 6:1); possessing an ability for service (1 Corinthians 12:1; 14:1). Spiritual does not automatically refer to the work of the Holy Spirit, context must determine which is meant.

I propose that Paul desired to give the Roman believers a benefit of grace which they could appreciate and benefit from in the realm of their spirit. His goal the stability of the Roman saints. According to his statement in Romans 16:25, that stability or firmness would be accomplished by God in accord with Paul's gospel. The impartation of a service gift would not bring about this stability. This interpretation fits the theme in the book of Romans and the historical situation we observe regarding serving gifts. The gift which they could apprehend in their spirit and by which become firm, was a truth, set of truths, or connection of truths.

### That you may be established

Two Greek words are used in the New Testament to express stability. The βεβαιος family was used in New Testament times of that which was sure, valid or legally guaranteed.<sup>11</sup> Paul used this word twice in Romans to describe the certainty of God's promise and the good news announced to the fathers (Romans 4: 16; 15:8). In both cases, it the firmness of a legal promise which God has made. The word we are examining is part of the στερεος word family. The NASB, ASV, NKJV, Darby and Wuest translate this word "establish", the A.V. "stablish", the ESV "strengthen", the NIV "make you strong" and "establish." In Romans 16:25 A.T. Robertson translated it "to stablish" and explains, "to make stable."<sup>12</sup> described that which is solid, hard or stiff, as in the foundation of God (2 Timothy 2:19).<sup>13</sup> Paul used this word twice in Romans and in both occurrences, he applied it to individuals. It occurs as the verb στηρίζω in Romans. J. Stegenga classified this verb under ἵστημι a verb meaning to stand.<sup>14</sup> The ἵζω ending of this verb is active causative.<sup>15</sup> G. Abbot-Smith's definition reflects the causative idea, "to fix, set fast, make fast."<sup>16</sup> Mounce's Expository Dictionary adds the metaphorical idea, "to render mentally steadfast, to settle, confirm."<sup>17</sup> The derived idea is to cause to stand with the added idea of strength or firmness. We can translate it with some idea of standing firmly or solidly.

στηρίζω occurs in Romans 1:11 and 16:25. Both passages appear to involve mental stability. The statement in 16:25 agrees with 1:11, that Paul desired the stability of the Roman saints and knew how it could be accomplished. In 16:25 God is "the one who is able to establish you." The preposition κατά occurs twice in this verse. Paul used it in connection with the Accusative case, thinking of a standard, as we would think of building by a metric standard. Three things are the standard by which God would establish them, Paul's gospel, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and the revelation of a mystery.

11 H. Schlier in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* ed. Geoffrey Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing, 1985) p. 103.

12 A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931) p. 430.

13 W.E. Vine *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (McLean Virginia, MacDonald Publishing Company, nd) p. 443.

14 J. Stegenga *The Greek-English Analytical Concordance of the Greek New Testament*, Jackson, MS: Hellenes-English Biblical Foundation, 1963) p. 376

15 Though this classification is not recognized by all, A.T. Robertson noted that verbs in this form sometimes have a causative idea. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915) p. 149. Without attempting to force causation upon every occurrence it does appear frequently to be valid.

16 Abbott-Smith, op cit. p. 418.

17 Mounce's *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, ed. William Mounce, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) p. 1275.

### According to my gospel

Bible interpreters tend to generalize. While warned to consider words in their context, larger theological themes are often treated in an homogenous manner. The word gospel is a good example. A survey of commentators on Romans demonstrates the idea that gospel nearly always refers to the message announced to the unsaved, imploring them to believe. However, the New Testament mentions gospels in several passages which do not fit the idea of initial salvation.<sup>18</sup> Jesus Christ and John the baptizer announced two gospels, one about the kingdom of God and another about the kingdom from the heavens (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15). God announced a good news to Abraham about his future seed (Galatians 3:8). Israel heard a good news about entering the land (Hebrews 4:6). We now have good news promising us rest from our efforts to approach God (Hebrews 4:2). Believers can know the good news which provides peace between saints in the body (Ephesians 6:15). Paul had time in Thessalonica to also announce to them the gospel of God (1 Thessalonians 2:1-2, 8). Three references to a gospel are related, the stabilizing gospel in Romans 16, a mystery gospel for which Paul desired boldness (Ephesians 6:19), and the gospel of the happy God (1 Timothy 1:11). Because several gospels are mentioned, it is necessary to discern by context which message is intended.

Paul's gospel is related to a mystery. The gospel in Ephesians 6:19 was a mystery. That gospel can not be the good news announced to unsaved men. That message was no mystery. That message was revealed in prophetic passages such as Psalm 22, 69; and Isaiah 53. The week before His death and resurrection, Christ announced that gospel to His disciples (Luke 18:31-34). Paul announced Christ's death and resurrection with great boldness, but he asked for boldness to announce the mystery good news in Ephesians 6:19. His gospel and that for the unsaved, are two distinct messages for separate audiences.

Paul's gospel combined several truths to affect the Christian's way of life. It combined the truth that the believer is in Christ, that God makes no distinctions between believers in Christ, that God will finish the work in the believer which He began, that the believer is to live with respect to God's grace (not law), and that God is a happy God. These realities and others should result in a different attitude toward life, and therefore, a different way of life.

### According to...the proclamation concerning Jesus Christ

"Preaching" is often associated with style and pulpit presence. For many, good preaching means the speaker modulates his voice, uses appropriate gestures, cries when necessary, tells us joke when necessary, and pounds the pulpit when necessary. Yet the Greek word laid emphasis on the content and the approach to the content. κήρυγμα is the message or the result (μα ending noun) of authoritatively announcing. The verb is κηρύσσω. These words express the work of a herald, one who officially announces. Duly authorized, a herald announces and makes no apology for the announcement; he does not present options nor does he enter into dialogue. None of this involves the issue of technique, but lays emphasis upon the content of the message being accurately presented. The herald is not free to digress, or take liberties with the message. He must set before his audience exactly what the one sending him has given to him. This is why the "preacher" must give adequate time and attention to knowing what the Bible says. Biblical "preaching" is primarily if not solely about the content or message announced.

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<sup>18</sup> See L.S. Chafer *Systematic Theology Vol. VII*, (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948) pp. 175-177 in which he mentions multiple gospels and cites C.I. Scofield's explanation of four of these gospels.

The content of Paul's message in Romans 16:25 is Jesus Christ. The interpretation and implications of 2 Corinthians 4:4 & 6 is that the unsaved have some deficiency in their understanding of who Jesus Christ is. As a result they are those who are perishing, coming to ruin. Sadly, many believers also have deficiencies in their understanding of who Jesus Christ is. While the gospel announced to the unsaved clarifies what one must know about Jesus Christ, it does not say everything about Christ that can be said. The believer must have the former but may lack the latter. The New Testament reveals much more which has value for the believer, truths by which he may grow. The believer isn't coming to ruin for lack of this knowledge, but he may not grow and may lack stability.

Paul wrote several truths about Jesus Christ to the Romans. The Old Testament prophets prophesied of Him (1:2). In His humanity (flesh) Jesus Christ is descended from David (1:3). Boundaries were set down to make Him known as the Son of God (1:4). His status as Son of God is seen by *the* Spirit of holiness from a resurrection out from dead ones (1:4). Through Him, Paul had received grace and his apostolic gift and commissioning (1:5). God will judge the secret things through Jesus Christ (2:16). God has provided a liberating redemption [ἀπολύτρωσις] in Christ (3:24). Christ is the location where God is satisfied regarding sin (3:25). He was delivered for our trespasses (4:25). He was raised that we might be declared righteous (4:25). We have peace facing God through Him (5:1). He is our access to grace (5:2). Christ died for us while we were still ungodly and sinners (5:6, 8). We will be saved through Him from the wrath (5:9). We have been reconciled to God through His death (5:10). We will be saved by His life (5:10). He is the means by which God extended to us His grace and the gift by grace (5:15). Grace reigns through Him because of (causal εἰς, 5:21). He is the sphere into which the believer has been placed (baptized): placed into His death, buried with Him, connected with His resurrection (6:3-4). We have died to the sin *nature* in close union (σύν) with Christ (6:8). Since He rose from the dead, death has no authority (lit. can not lord over, κυριεύω) over Him (6:9). Jesus Christ died (while physically alive on the cross)<sup>19</sup> to the sin *nature*, but now lives to God (6:10). The believer is logically count himself to be a dead one to the sin *nature* and a living one to God, and this is true of him in Christ (6:11). In<sup>20</sup> Christ Jesus God extends to the believer His gracious gift of eternal life (6:23). The believer died to the Law through the body of Christ (7:4). There is no condemnation for the one in Christ Jesus (8:1). Christ is in the believer (8:10). We are joint-heirs with Christ (8:17). We are being conformed to His image (8:29). Christ Jesus died, is raised, is at God's right hand, and intercedes for us (8:34). God loves the believer in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:39). Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for the one believing (10:4). Jesus is Deity (Lord, 10:9, 10). The believers are one body in Christ (12:5). The believer can put on the Lord Jesus Christ (13:14). The believer should live to/for the Lord (14:6-8). Jesus Christ became Lord of the living and dead<sup>21</sup> (14:9). Christ died on behalf of/in place of (ὑπερ) all believers, even one

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19 "The sin here does not refer to acts of sin. ...Here he speaks of the relation of Christ's death to the sinful nature of the individual. *Our Lord's death not only paid the penalty of human sin, but it was used of God to break the power of indwelling sin in the believer's life.*" Kenneth S. Wuest, *Romans in the Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955) p. 104. William R. Newell distinguished this passage from Paul's words in chapter three. "Christ is seen dying to sin, not for it, here" He then correctly ties it to 2 Corinthians 5:21. *Romans Verse by Verse*, (Chicago: Grace Publications, 1943) p. 221.

20 1 John 5:11 explains that eternal life is had by having the Son. Therefore, εἰς may be used in two ways. Paul may that the life is in Christ, and by having Christ in us, we share in that life. If Paul is using "in Christ Jesus our Lord" with the common idea of our position, then he is contrasting the believer operating in his sin nature with its pay of death, versus the believer operating in Christ Jesus our Lord and experiencing God's gracious benefit. Eternal life can only be experienced as the believer set his frame of mind to his position in Christ. This is Christ's words about the Vine and branches in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who is abiding in Me and I in him, this one bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

21 Verses 8 & 9 indicate that "the living and the dead" both refer to believers.

who is experiencing ruin (ἀπόλλυμι, 14:15). One can serve Christ as a slave by pursuing righteousness, peace and joy as opposed to his individual rights (14:17-18). Christ did not please Himself (15:3). Christ received the believer without regard to his issues (15:6). Christ has become a servant with reference to the circumcision to confirm the promises made to the fathers (15:8). Paul had a boast in Christ Jesus (15:17). Christ can work through the believer (15:18). There are good things said (about the believer?) regarding Christ (15:29). Believers can be co-workers, and approved in addition to simply being in Christ (16:3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13). This extensive list is compiled only from facts Paul mentions in the letter to the Romans. These facts are part of the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

These truths have several effects for the believer. He is free from the law because of his relation in the body of Christ (7:4). The Spirit works out real freedom for the believer from the frustrating principle [law] of the sin nature and *spiritual* death (8:2). He does this in Christ Jesus, that is, as the believer sets his mind to who he is in Christ Jesus. The believer should present his body to God as a sacrifice (12:1-2). The body is the avenue through which the believer will serve others. The believer should have the same frame of mind towards other believers, measured by the standard of Christ who didn't please Himself (15:5). Believers should receive one another like Christ received them (15:6). Christ received believers with no strings attached. They simply believed what He had accomplished. Believers who guard their personal rights over the needs of brothers are not serving Christ and cause unnecessary divisions (16:17-18). This again indicates that a believer can and should be a slave of Christ by putting the needs of others before his own personal wishes or rights.

### **According to the revelation of the Mystery**

A mystery is a truth which was planned by God in eternity, but was kept silent or secret until the time God chose to reveal it. Romans 16:25 agrees with this, "having been kept silent in times in eternity." Paul repeats this idea with variation in Ephesians 3:9 and Colossians 1:26. From man's perspective, when the mystery is revealed, that mystery is a new truth.

The New Testament reveals several mysteries. Jesus spoke mysteries regarding the kingdoms. John revealed mysteries regarding the Churches and God in Revelation. Paul revealed mysteries about the relationship of the Church to Christ, the believer's future transformation, God's plans for Israel, and the future man of lawlessness. Paul said that he was like a manager (steward) of the mysteries (note the plural) from God (1 Corinthians 4:1). The Bible student must discern by the context the content of each mystery he finds mentioned in Scripture, for more than one mystery exists.

In Romans 16:25, one of these mysteries plays a key role in stabilizing the believer. Paul combined his gospel and the proclamation with one **κατα** preposition and the conjunction **και** (and). Paul used a separate **κατα** preposition with "*the* revelation of *a* mystery." The mystery summarizes the point of Paul's gospel and the proclamation of Christ.

One of those mysteries explains that all believers today are on equal footing in Christ. This mystery is related to the dispensation of grace, which itself is a mystery (Ephesians 3:2, 9). Paul called this "the mystery of the Christ" (Ephesians 3:4). In the context of Ephesians 3, "the Christ" refers to Jesus Christ and His body seen as one (cf Ephesians 2:15 "one new man"; 1 Corinthians 12:12). All distinctions are erased or are of no effect in that new man. It is in



Christ that there is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no male or female, but all the believers are one man (the seed, Galatians 3:28). In Ephesians 3:6 Paul explained the significance of this mystery. Gentile<sup>22</sup> believers are equal heirs with the Jewish believers. They are all joint-members of the body. They are joint-partakers of the promise of access to God in Christ (cf. Ephesians 3:12). While the Old Testament prophesied of God's future work among Gentiles, it never hinted at Gentiles being treated as equals with Israel. This agrees with the definition of a mystery; it was a new truth. Now, under God's present work all believers are equal, without regard to their ethnicity or former religion.

### **Stability by the application of these three truths.**

God stabilizes the believer. The believer does not stabilize himself. However, the believer does play a part in that stabilization. He must learn and relate to these three sets of truths. Paul's gospel tells him that God has made all believers (since Pentecost) one body and equal. The proclamation of Jesus Christ emphasized who He is, what He has accomplished, and who He is now for the believer. This all has the quality of being a mystery. It was new. The Jewish element of the Roman Church (or all the Church) could not turn to their Scriptures (the Old Testament) and find these truths revealed. The Old Testament did not present Jesus Christ in the manner under consideration. If a believer will be stabilized, it will come about by knowing that all believers stand on equal footing in Christ, that Jesus Christ is his righteousness and standing, and that the believer is therefore, not condemned, and not in danger of being condemned. His conduct or the conduct of other believers will not alter his salvation. He cannot find this in the old revelation. It was new given through Paul.

This message is what Paul wished to impart to the Romans (1:11). This is the benefit of grace. It is mentally apprehended by the believer in the realm of his spirit, so Paul called it spiritual. It is not a sensory truth which may be observed or felt. It is a reality which God says exists and the believer must accept as true. This benefit of grace is the standard by which God would stabilize the Romans saints.

### **The Rest of Romans in Light of Paul's Goal**

After Paul introduced his goal for the Romans, he began an extended section in which he portrayed the lost state of man. Leon Morris states the common opinion regarding Romans 1:18-3:20, "Paul is about to expound a wonderful salvation. But first he established the need for it by showing that all people are sinful."<sup>23</sup> Morris and many others are correct in part. Paul did express his intention to evangelize, and the following section certainly establishes the guilt of all men. However, this section also serves a part in his first purpose of stabilizing saints.

Believers are forgiven their sins and trespasses (Colossians 1:14; Ephesians 1:7). However, not all believers have grasped the magnitude of their previous state. They know that they would have perished apart from faith in Christ. Just as believers may not know all they should about Jesus Christ, so they may not fully know the seriousness of their state prior to salvation. Robert Gromacki approached the issue of eternal security with two opening chapters. The first answers the question What Does it Mean to be Lost? and the second What does it mean to be saved?<sup>24</sup>

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22 The descriptions "Gentile" and "Jewish" refer to the individuals' pre-salvation origin, not the current status, for they are neither in Christ.

23 Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988) p. 73.

24 Robert G. Gromacki, *Salvation is Forever*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973).

Some believers struggle with eternal security because their response to these two questions is inadequate. Some believers think they were perhaps better than others, that it may have taken less to save them than to save others, or that because of their heritage, they had a better start. The opening chapters of Romans demonstrated that humanity in general, the moralist and then Jew in particular are all guilty. Paul did not establish their guilt in connection with Adam as he did in chapter five. He demonstrated their guilt by their actions.

Paul broke his argument into three parts: the remainder of chapter one, 2:1-16 and 2:17-3:20. The first section established universal guilt in an historical setting. The events to which Paul referred were at a time when men experientially knew (γινώσκω) God, but did not give Him His reputation (glorify, 1:21). Paul traced man's downward spiral into idolatry, immorality and eventually not even finding it acceptable to have God in their experiential thoughts (ἐπιγνώσις, 1:24, 26, 28). Paul stated that at each stage, God turned them (mankind) over, until eventually they had filled full all areas of unrighteousness (1:29-31). In Noah's day God stated that His Spirit would not always strive [judge, ἰν] with man. God's Spirit was striving or judging mankind so as to restrain their unrighteousness. He ceased and after the flood mankind began this quick descent. God did not force man down into depravity, for each step involved man's willful strain against God's restraint. Therefore, Romans 1:17-32 covers the time from the flood up to or contemporaneous with the call of Abraham. This first section then encompasses all of humanity before God made any distinctions by calling Abraham.

### **Therefore, you are without excuse**

The second section begins in Romans 2:1. Commentators are divided as to whether this section addresses Jews or moral, religious hypocrites. Corley & Vaughn, Denney, Morris, Pettingill, Stifler, Vine, and Wuest take the first position. Bruce, Newell, Phillips, and Witmer take the second. Dale Spurbeck outlined the 2:1-16, "The Account Concerning The Condemnation of the Gentiles." and 2:17-3:8 as dealing with the Jews.<sup>25</sup> F.F. Bruce saw this as addressing the moralist in general and as 2:17 indicates, the Jewish moralist in particular.<sup>26</sup> Newell classified these two groups of "respectable sinners." The first consider themselves better based on "race, civilization, environment, education, or culture"<sup>27</sup> and the second are better "because of their religion."<sup>28</sup> This latter group he considered to be Jews. In a similar fashion, Witmer looks at these through God's truthfulness (2:1-4) and impartiality (2:5-11).<sup>29</sup> John Phillips handles 2:1-16 as referring to all hypocrites, and 2:17-3:8 as the Hebrews specifically.<sup>30</sup> This second section does address hypocritical moralists, which leads naturally to addressing the Jews.

In Paul's second section, we come across 2:7-10. These verses are both important and confusing to the average reader. "This is one of the most difficult sections in Romans, because on the surface it seems to teach that salvation is by works; that eternal life can be earned by patient

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25 Dale R. Spurbeck, introduction and outline for Bible Analysis 224, 1988 at Dispensational Theological Seminary.

26 Bruce, op cit. pp. 86-87.

27 Newell, op cit. p. 53.

28 ibid.

29 Witmer, op cit. pp. 444-445.

30 John Phillips, *Exploring Romans* (Chicago: Mood Press, 1969) p. 35.

continuing in well-doing.”<sup>31</sup> Most evangelical commentators pause here to address this question. W.E. Vine reminds the reader, “Now (1) the subject of the whole passage is not the means of obtaining eternal life, but the righteous judgment of God against man’s sin, and in this respect what is mentioned in verses 8 and 9, as to the punishment of those who do not obey the truth, is perfectly consistent with the rest of Scripture on the subject. “He that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on Him” (John 3:36).”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Paul wrote these verses under the heading of judgment, and judgment is how they must be interpreted.

Many attempt to make Paul’s comments refer to the character of those who have believed (i.e. post-conversion) versus those who have not. A simpler interpretation agrees with Romans 3:9-18 where Paul drew the conclusion that there are none righteous, not even one. No one does the good mentioned in verses seven and ten. Verses seven and eight indicate that more is involved than just the good works versus disobedience. God also judges motives as the basis of works. He asserted in 2:16 that God will bring the hidden things of men to light when He judges.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the good works are done in the context of patience, while seeking God’s glory (reputation), honor and incorruption (Romans 2:7).<sup>34</sup> This is contrasted to those in chapter one who did not give God His due reputation and honor, and worshipped the corruptible as God. Even the moral good works of man are done from selfish ambition (Romans 2:8). No one seeks anything for God. Paul’s conclusion is that no one does good works based on proper motivation.

God’s judgment is impartially applied to both Jew and Greek (Romans 2:10-11). Jews who flagrantly violate the law are judged. Moral Jews are also judged, because their moral good works are rooted in selfish motives. Greeks who flagrantly act in disobedience to the Truth are judged. Moral Greeks are also judged, for the same reason as the moral Jew. The moralist, whether Jew or Greek, stands just as guilty before the bar as the openly depraved people of chapter one.

When God judges mankind, He will do so by the standard [κατα] of Paul’s good news (2:16). We have briefly considered Paul’s good news mentioned in 16:25. He also used the expression “my gospel” in 2 Timothy 2:8, in which he said that Christ is raised. The resurrected living Christ is the common denominator in Paul’s messages. The modern evangelical emphasizes Christ’s death for sins, and perhaps due to the thrust of Reformation theology, appears to think that our job is to convince the unsaved of his totally lost and depraved state. Reading Acts, one finds that Paul (present text excepted) spent most of his time presenting the resurrected Christ as did Peter. It might be said that the resurrection is what rendered this a good news. When Paul stood on Mars Hill, he tied the resurrection of Christ (the point of contention) with God’s plan to judge mankind (Acts 17:31). The standard is that of a resurrected man who is the judge of the living and dead, and Lord of the living and dead saints.

### **All are under sin**

Beginning in 2:16 Paul addressed the Jew directly. The Jews were persuaded that they were guides to the blind (2:19). Paul, having been a Jew and knowing a chief weakness, pointed out that they failed to practice what they taught (2:21-22). The Jew (by birth), who is a Jew within his heart, is a real Jew (2:28-29). Like 2:7-11, 3:9-17 could be applied to prove that no such Jew

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31 *ibid*, pp. 41-41.

32 W.E. Vine, *The Collected Writings of W.E. Vine*, Vol 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson 1996) p. 338.

33 Compare this with 1 Corinthians 4:1-4 in which God (Jesus Christ) will also evaluate the motives of believer’s good works.

34 These could also be that which the man seeks for himself.

exists. Paul concluded that both the Jew and Greek are under sin (3:9).

All of this, 1:18-3:20, demonstrated God's righteousness regarding His judgment of sinful man. At every step, man's actions, motives and attitudes reinforced that God is righteous to judge them (3:5-8). God is righteous. The judgment against mankind is righteous and deserved (3:8).

Beginning in 3:21 Paul drew attention to another facet of God's righteousness.<sup>35</sup> This facet of God's righteousness is through faith concerning Jesus Christ (3:22). It is acquired by all who believe, with no difference. Because Paul had already demonstrated that all mankind, Jew or Greek, are under sin, it is natural to see that if God extends righteousness, it too can be on an equal basis. In this context, 3:23 looks back at the single unified sin of humanity<sup>36</sup> and man's ongoing lack with reference to God's glory. The sin is not that of each individual at some point in time, but that which took place in Adam. Newell explained, "While it is true, as both the old Version and the Revised translate, that "all have sinned"; yet I am more and more persuaded that in as much as the Spirit of God uses in verse 23 the same Greek word and tense as in Chapter 5.12. *hēmarton*: that is, "all *sinned*" (aorist, not perfect tense), God is looking back even here at Adam's federal headship involving us all."<sup>37</sup> Regarding God's glory, Witmer points out, "This single Greek verb is in the present tense, stressing continuing actions. It can be translated "keep on falling short."<sup>38</sup> Unsaved men, without regard to culture, religion, or morality still do not give God His proper weight or reputation. In fact in chapter five Paul pointed out man's hostility toward God (5:8, 10). For this reason Paul could say there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. All who are declared righteous as a gift by God's grace started on the same guilty footing. No one was less guilty, no one was more, and all were declared righteous through faith.

God redeems and justifies the believer in Christ. We are not declared righteous separate from Christ but in Christ. "In Christ" is the great leveling position of believers. We noted above the many earthly positions which do not exist in Christ. The believer is made God's kind of righteousness in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). That righteousness is the same for all believers in Christ. No mention is made of varying degrees of righteousness. The price was paid, applied, and God's righteousness given.

Paul elaborated on faith in chapter four. It is faith alike for all. God declares righteous the ungodly who believe rather than work (4:5). The word ungodly (*ἄσεβής*) meant one who does not honor God or even dishonors God.<sup>39</sup> God doesn't justify good, righteous, or godly people, but people who dishonored Him. In reality, there are none of the others apart from salvation. This is why God operates through faith alone. The ungodly have nothing else.

Paul used three situations from three different times to illustrate the appropriateness of faith. Abraham was declared righteous through faith before the Law (4:1-5). David was declared righteous apart from works while living under law (4:6-8). We, who have believed on the one who

35 In both 1:17 and 3:21 *δικαιοσύνη* is anartharous.

36 He does this by use of the Aorist as again in 5:12. See Witmer, p. 450.

37 Newell, op cit. pp. 112-113.

38 Witmer, op cit, p. 451.

39 The noun *σεβω* and its cognates *εὐσεβεια* and *εὐσεβέω* describe the activity of honor a deity. We honor God by living out what God has given to us as part of our salvation, cf 1 Timothy 3:16.

raised Jesus our Lord, are also counted righteous through faith (4:23-24). God declared Abraham righteous when Abraham was not circumcised. Circumcision added nothing to faith, therefore, God extends this righteousness through faith, so that it can be by the standard of grace (4:16). Stability is based on understanding faith alone.

### **That you may be established...I am eager to evangelize Paul's Two Purposes in Romans 1-4**

In the opening chapters of Romans, Paul's primary purpose was to prove to believers, that we were all on the same ground coming into salvation.<sup>40</sup> None needed saving more than others, or less than others. Man's guilt is in actions and attitude equally born by all. Grasping this contributes to stability, because God stabilizes believers. Believers do not stabilize themselves. To be stabilized one must come to grips with the fact that we brought nothing into our relationship with God. No one "gave his life to Christ." Apart from accepting this fact, the believer will always attempt, at least in part, to base his stability on who he was coming into salvation. This stability was Paul's main purpose, and "You, o man" need to know where you started.

### **We have peace facing God**

Romans 5 opens with a tie between justification [declaration of righteousness] and peace with God (v. 1). From Romans 3:20 to 5:1 Paul explained that faith is the human avenue through which God declares men righteous. No one is righteous by their works, even law type of works. Therefore, since God declares men righteous through faith, it is by a grace standard. This is a basis for peace.

The believer has<sup>41</sup> peace with God. The preposition "with" is *προς* [*pros*]. It is "with" in the sense that one is facing another. Paul is not speaking of a general peace with God. Thomas Schreiner has described this peace or its result as friendship. "Apparently, Jesus must die in place of sinners to satisfy God's justice before friendship can be restored."<sup>42</sup> However, this is more than friendship, it involves a relationship before God. 5:2 reveals this peace to involve access through Christ into grace and having a boast through Christ.

The words "through Christ" look beyond the believer's position. The believer is in Christ. Both the grace and the boast are facing God. The believer is able to face the Father because he is in Christ and this by grace. This is the believer's access into<sup>43</sup> grace. Some commentators do not take the noun *τὴν προσαγωγὴν* to refer to access but introduction.<sup>44</sup> These interpreters struggle with the believer having access to God, seeing such an access as emphasizing the believer's role over Christ's. Yet Paul is clear that the access is through Christ, and the believer's boast is that he

40 Chapters 1-4 may also serve Paul's secondary purpose of evangelizing. The Roman assembly probably had few unsaved visitors. Being of "the Way," was unpopular and dangerous. Rome would eventually authorize persecution, imprisonment and death of confessed believers. For those who had not heard Paul evangelize, reading these chapters may have aided them when they announced the Lord Jesus Christ.

41 "We have peace" involves a textual problem regarding the verb *εχω* [have], whether it is indicative [*εχομεν*] or subjunctive [*εχωμεν*]. The former appears to fit the context best and is supported by the earliest known copy of Romans [0220 (a third century ms)] and a first corrector of Aleph and second corrector of B [Vaticanus]. The subjunctive has support of a few fourth and fifth century manuscripts: g, A, B, C, D. The alternative would be translated, "let us have" or "we may/should have." The manuscript evidence can be viewed as balanced. See the NET Bible's note 2 for Romans 5:1. The indicative fits better.

42 Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) p. 364.

43 The *εις* preposition could be causative in this case, "because of grace" with the focus of the access being God as in other texts.

44 Leon Morris does not take *τὴν προσαγωγὴν* to mean access but "introduction." He quotes Sanaday and Headlam, "The idea is that of introduction to the presence-chamber of a monarch. The rendering 'access' is inadequate, as it leaves out of sight the fact that we do not come in our own strength but need an 'introducer'-Christ." Morris op cit. p. 219.

can approach God in Christ. When the believer approaches God no hostility exists, but peace. Such a boast is acceptable, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31). The believer does not boast because of any merit on his part, but because he is righteous in Christ.

Yet the believer does not boast only in this access but also in the adversity he faces, for adversity faced properly results in approval, which in turn results in more hope. This is part of the reason God has chosen for believers to live this life here. By facing adversity, believers grow and are able to demonstrate something about God’s reputation as it is seen in their lives.

In Romans 5:10-11 Paul added reconciliation to his point about peace. The verb reconcile [καταλλάσσω] meant to affect a change. It was used in the New Testament times of the act of making peace or a basis of peace by means of a change. A cognate of this word is used in Ephesians 2:15-16, where Jews and Gentiles are made one new man and Christ removed the Law which divided men. Reconciliation is applied to the believer in Christ, with the result of peace. Christ is now our peace (Ephesians 2:14).

Paul anticipated an objection to this hope. Christendom is rife with assertions of uncertainty regarding our future. The Reformer asserts that there is no eternal security, only assurance for the believer who’s life meets the righteous standards of Scripture.<sup>45</sup> The Arminian warns that if the believer does not continue to obey, he may lose his salvation.<sup>46</sup> Both positions were present when Paul wrote and laid emphasis on the believer’s performance. Both positions warn of a false sense of security based on some experiences in one’s supposed “christian life.” Yet Paul assured the Romans that the hope produced does not leave one ashamed, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through means of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). God’s love in this context is not His love worked out through the believer’s life. God’s love is the presence of the Holy Spirit and His work within the believer. Paul used the same word for “pour out” in Titus 3:6.<sup>47</sup> The Spirit’s presence is the believer’s security and hope with reference to God. Stability rests on this.

### **Through one man the sin nature entered the world**

The opening verses of Romans five are concluded in Romans eight. Romans 5:12 through 8:14 address the issue of the sin nature. The sin nature entered the world through Adam. In this section, Paul did not use the noun sin for a series of acts but the sinful nature. William Pettingill wrote on this passage, “Before he had begotten a single child, Adam fell into sin, and, as a result, his nature became sinful and corrupt and death-dealing. And his offspring, which of course includes the whole human family, has inherited from him the poison of his **fallen nature** and the seeds of death.”<sup>48</sup> Throughout the next chapters the noun with the article ἡ ἁμαρτία

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45 Wayne Grudem asks three questions regarding genuine assurance under the larger heading *Perseverance of the Saints*. He asks, “Do I Have a Present Trust in Christ for Salvation?”, “Is There Evidence of a Regenerating Work of the Holy Spirit in My Heart?”, “Do I See a Long-Term Pattern of Growth in My Christian Life?” He then concludes with the warning, “In some evangelical churches, instead of teaching the full and balanced presentation of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, pastors have sometimes taught a watered-down version, which in effect tells people that all who have once made a profession of faith and been baptized are “eternally secure.” *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) pp. 803-804.

46 “If a justified person willfully refuses light on holiness, and deliberately refuses to seek entire sanctification when he knows God wants him to, he would lose his justification by disobedience to God-and would go into perdition if he were to die in that state.” J. Kenneth Grider *Entire Sanctification* (Kansas City: Beacon Press, 1980) p. 146.

47 The form in Romans 5:5 is ἐκχύνω which G Abbott-Smith notes is a “Hellenistic form of ἐκχέω the verb in Titus 3:6. op cit.

48 William Pettingill, *The Gospel of God: Simple Studies in Romans* (Findlay, OH: Fundamental Truth Publishers, nd) p. 59.

refers to the sin nature, the “indwelling in me sin” (Romans 7:20). “Every time the word “sin” is used in this chapter as a noun, it refers to the evil nature in the Christian.”<sup>49</sup> In the four previous chapters ἁμαρτία was used four times and only once with the article in which case it was plural referring to many acts of sin. Here Paul saw that spiritual death was the result of the sin nature, and all men possess a sin nature, therefore, all are spiritually dead and will die physically.

It is not within the scope of this paper to explain in detail chapters five through eight, but a brief sketch will be helpful. Paul first explained that the sin nature and death originated with Adam (5:12-21). Adam’s trespass brought condemnation (5:18). Christ dealt with Adam’s trespass as well as ours (5:18). Christ’s act has made it possible for grace to reign through righteousness in light of (causal εἰς) eternal life (5:21). Paul concluded that where the sin nature increased in activity, grace increased even more (ὑπερεπερίσσευσεν, 5:20) In chapter six Paul drew the application of Christ’s act to the believer’s relationship to his sin nature (6:1-13). God logically counts or credits him to be in Christ, and the believer is to do the same. He is to count himself dead to the sin nature and living to God (v. 11). Then in the remainder of chapter six and through chapter seven, Paul focused on how the believer’s relationship to the Law affects his relationship to his sin nature. God has released the believer from law so he may obey God (6:14-23). He released the believer from the law by placing him in Christ (7:1-6). Paul drew on his own past experience as a believer to demonstrate that the believer can not experience freedom from the sin nature by using the Law (7:7-25). Rather he needs to focus on his standing in Christ. In Christ, the sin nature does not bring condemnation on the believer (8:1). This is contrasted to the condemnation of all men due to Adam’s trespass (Romans 5:18). Additionally, the Holy Spirit apart from the Law affects freedom from the sin nature (8:2-5). The Spirit does this by directing the believer to frame<sup>50</sup> his mind with specific truths in Christ. Paul called this walking. Paul encouraged the Roman saints that this struggle was not permanent. God has promised the believer that he will be changed (8:15-30).

The Holy Spirit is the person who is working to conform the believer to the image of the Son (Romans 8:29). It is the Father who has determined this, but the Spirit affects it. The Spirit is the one who affected the resurrection. Romans 8:11 joins the Father and Spirit in this activity. While the believer awaits the full changing of his body when Christ comes for His Church, he can experience the Spirit’s work of giving life to his mortal body (Romans 8:11). Paul meant that the believer experiences the life of resurrection while still in this mortal body. Existing in this present body does not make Christian living impossible.

The Spirit in Romans 8:29 is tied to Romans 1:4. In Romans 1:4 Paul did not refer to the Spirit as Holy, but as “of holiness.” For this reason, some commentators have interpreted this to refer to Christ’s personal human spirit as opposed to the divine Holy Spirit.<sup>51</sup> By describing the Spirit in this way, Paul connected this to his statement about the Spirit’s work of making alive the believer’s mortal body. Additionally, the Spirit was involved in boundaries being set within which Christ was dealt with as the Son, and conformity to the image of the Son involves boundaries which were set out previously for the believer. The same Spirit involved in the Son’s earthly

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49 Wuest, op cit, p. 91.

50 This word was used of a fence. It can be illustrated as using certain truths to form a fence which keeps some things out and other things in.

51 So Wuest, pp. 15-16, Phillips pp. 14, Vine, p. 327, Lightfoot, p. 245, Denney, p. 586. Among those who understand this as the Holy Spirit are F.F. Bruce p. 73, Morris, p. 46, Corely & Vaughn, p. 18, Newell, p. 6, Witmer, p. 440. Newell has a note that he has never seen a convincing explanation of what Paul meant by this whole phrase of which “the Spirit of holiness” is a part (p. 6 fn).

ministry, is now ministering in the life of the grace believer.

Some believers lack stability because of their experience with their own sin natures. They lack stability because they do not understand how they can desire good things but produce evil things they don't desire. They lack stability because, like Paul, they sometimes or often times feel like a wretched man and may even worry about being condemned. They groan in this present body, sometimes to such an extent that they do not know how to worship. This experience alone, apart from solid teaching regarding God's plan for the believer, leads to instability.

Let's summarize Romans 5-8. All men died with Adam for all have a sin nature. All believers have a provision for living in newness of life rather than in their sin nature. All are released from the Law, and none will find freedom from the sin nature in the Law. The Holy Spirit gives the believer freedom in real time as the believer's mind is fenced in with the truths of who he is in Christ. The believer must also remember that this is temporary and one day he will be changed and freed from this struggle. This is true of every believer as a part of the all. Therefore, part one of Romans proves the equal guilt of all believers. All enter salvation on the same plain. Part two proves that all believers have a sin nature, and the presence of the law (if one is Jew) doesn't help. All believers can experience freedom from it, and will be fully freed when Christ appears for His own. The presence of the sin nature does not alter one's access to God and the peace one has before God. Understanding the sin nature is required for one to be stable.

### **Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord**

In the last verses of Romans eight Paul resumed what he began in Romans 5. The believer will not be ashamed because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Paul asserted that nothing can separate the believer from that love. Love always involves activity, it is never just a good feeling. God's activity toward the believer in this context is His logical counting of the believer to be in Christ. The believer's position assures him that he is not condemned, but also that he can walk by the Spirit and live free of the sin nature. Nothing can cause God to stop this logical activity. As a result, the perfect tense of "have had" in Romans 5:2 is fitting; the believer has been given access and still has access. It can not be cut off from the believer. For the believer to be cut off from God's love would mean that God would have to cease seeing or logically counting the believer to be at His right hand in Christ. The concluding point of Romans 5-8 is that despite the struggle with the sin nature, whenever the believer approaches God in his position through Christ, he still has peace! This is true for all believers, non excepted. Grasping the inseparable love of God is vital. The believer's stability rest upon it.

Twice towards the end of Romans eight, Paul asserted that the believer can not be separated from God's love. First in 8:35 it is the love of the Christ,<sup>52</sup> a reference in this context to the whole body in union with its head Jesus Christ (cf 1 Corinthians 12:12). 8:39 states this is God's love, the former is God's love directed at the whole Christ, not Christ's love for us.<sup>53</sup> Despite Paul's assurance that nothing could separate the believer from God's love, some may raise reasoned objections. Anyone familiar with Old Testament Jewish History could suggest that Israel was once the object of God's favor and love but are now cast aside. "What about Israel?" they may ask. If could cast them away, He could perhaps do that to the present group of

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<sup>52</sup> This is an objective Genitive, while in 8:39 the Genitive is the subject of the love.

<sup>53</sup> The title Christ occurs 65 times in Romans. Of these, only eight have the definite article, and of these, only two appear to refer to Christ the individual 9:5 of Israel's Messiah and 15:3. 8:15; 9:3; 14:18; 15:7, 19; 16:16 refer to the Christ, which Paul described as the one new man, the united body of Christ in Christ seen in union with Jesus Christ its head. The remaining 57 occurrences with articles refer to Jesus Christ.



believers. Could we be separated? Is Israel a precedent?

### **Israel: the Word of God has not failed**

Leaving Romans eight, we might think we could move directly to chapter twelve and miss nothing. F.F. Bruce put it, “We should have been conscious of no hiatus in his reasoning.”<sup>54</sup> He then commented on the modern reader viewing these chapters as a parenthesis. Indeed, William R. Newell explained, “IN ROMANS NINE, Ten, and Eleven, Paul turns aside from that glorious exposition of Grace, in the first eight chapters, to the explanation of God’s present dealing with Israel.”<sup>55</sup> Newell then went on to explain that these chapters serve to allow Paul to speak God’s message to all nations. Leon Morris appears to see the connection. He wrote, “Paul’s whole argument demands an examination of the Jewish question. Chapter 8 ends on a note of assurance. Those saved in the way of which Paul is writing have been foreknown and predestined by God, and they are assured that this brings them to glory and that nothing can separate them from the love of God. Then what about the Jews? Did not the same God give the same assurance to the Jews as His “elect”?”<sup>56</sup> Newell appears to get this by asking the question, “Where, then, is the Divine faithfulness?”<sup>57</sup>

Chapters nine through eleven demonstrate God’s present work with Israel. First, Paul demonstrated that just because one was a physical descendant of Abraham, that did not constitute him an Israelite spiritually (9:6-8). It is the context of God’s work with Israel in which Paul discussed God’s act of choosing (election). “So it is not the one wishing or running, but God showing mercy” (9:16). While Israel may have willed to stray after other God’s, those who did not, did so because of God’s purpose and work.

In verse 20, we again have an “O man” whom Paul addressed. This man is finding fault with God, claiming that since no one resists God’s will, God shouldn’t find fault in man (9:19). We remind ourselves of chapters one through three, that God allowed man to do what man desired, and it was not to recognize or honor God. Therefore, God has borne, withholding His temper (longsuffering) with those fitted for destruction, to make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy (9:22-23). Those vessels of mercy are both Jews and Gentiles. God kept for Israel a seed (9:29). Most of the nation stumbled over the stumbling stone of Christ (9:32). The remnant exists because God chose that remnant and kept them. Therefore, the case of Israel doesn’t disprove the certainty of God’s love, but proves it. Had God left them to their own choices, they would have been like Sodom and Gommorrah-nothing left! Paul concluded that the gifts and calling of God are not altered, God has not changed. Therefore, “O man” Israel is not cast away, and nothing can separate us from God’s love.

In chapter ten Paul addressed Israel’s failure within God’s plan. His explanation is also a good lesson for the believer. Paul agreed that his Jewish kinsman were zealous but not according to knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις; 10:2). They didn’t know in/by experience God’s righteousness and therefore, attempted to establish their own (v. 3). As a result, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. This functions as an illustrative admonition. Israel failed because they went about

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54 Bruce, op cit. p. 181.

55 Newell,, op cit. p. 352.

56 Morris, op cit. p. 344.

57 Newell, op cit. p. 352.

to establish their own righteousness. Paul made two points in verse four. While it appears that Paul addressed righteousness as part of initial salvation, he looked more directly at the believer. Christ is also the end of the Law for righteousness for the believer. It is as important for the believer as the unbeliever to grasp this point. Stability rests upon it.

Paul played off an Old Testament quotation to illustrate the problem of attempting to establish one's righteousness in Romans 10:5-8. He quoted from Deuteronomy 30:11-14, in which Moses challenged Israel to see that the commandment wasn't hard to know, it wasn't "to difficult for you, or out of reach" (Deuteronomy 30:11). First, the one who does law righteousness will live (future middle indicative) by them (v. 5). In contrast the righteousness from faith does not say or ask one to do what first: God has already done, and second: what only God can do. In keeping with the quotation, this isn't too hard to understand or grasp. Christ already came down in the incarnation, and the Father raised Him out from dead ones. If an unbeliever attempts to prove himself righteous by law works, or a believer attempts to live righteously by law, it is equivalent to one attempting to repeat the incarnation and resurrection themselves, unnecessary and impossible. Rather, the unbeliever is asked only to agree<sup>58</sup> that Jesus (the man) is Lord (deity, Jehovah of the Old Testament) and believe that God has raised Him. What one believes about Jesus in verses 9-10 corresponds to what one is not to say. One can't do, what God has done, one can only agree and believe.

The issue of the olive tree, and grafted branches in Romans eleven has given rise to many errors regarding the nature of Israel and the church. Yet Paul's point was not about salvation but that God has maintained a remnant among Israel. Paul himself, being a Jew, was part of the remnant, and proof that God has not cast away His people. Due to Israel's persistent unbelief, most of the nation had been broken out of the olive tree, a metaphor for the location of God's work. God had grafted in Gentiles and was not focusing primarily on Jews. Being in the olive tree is not synonymous with salvation. If that were the case, what are we to make of the warning, "for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you" (11:21)? Rather, Gentiles are warned that they will not always be the focus of God's work. The Gentile is warned against arrogance against Jews. Because this change of focus in God's work was not revealed, Paul called this truth a mystery (v. 25). If the believer is ignorant of this mystery, he may tend to frame his mind around himself, as though he were the focus of everything. The believer needs to keep in mind that God's plan is larger than just him. Failing to do so can lead to arrogance against Israelis and the thought that God is done with Israel. If God is done with Israel, then if we mess up bad enough, like them, perhaps He will cast us aside and be done with us. Yet Paul is clear that God has not cast away His people. The security of Israel in God's plan contributes to the stability of the believer.

### **I encourage you by the tender mercies of God**

Chapters twelve through fifteen can be summarized in Romans 12:1-2. Having concluded his thoughts on Israel's failure and God's purpose, Paul encouraged the Romans not to act like those Jews. They were conformed to the age by attempting to establish their own righteousness. Rather, the Roman believers are encouraged to present their bodies and be transformed. They have been saved in their spirit (cf John 3:6; Ephesians 4:17-18) which has renewed their mind. With their renewed mind, they are to be transformed. The Holy Spirit works through the mind

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<sup>58</sup> Confession is the verbal agreement with the claim that Jesus is God.

to manifest life in our mortal bodies (cf Romans 8:11). Conformation comes from outside influence, while transformation comes from within. The word “transform” is the same word used of Jesus’ transfiguration in the gospels (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2). When Jesus was transfigured, He was seen outwardly, what He was inwardly. Likewise, Paul encouraged the Roman saints not to allow the pressure of law in the age outside to conform them, but rather to allow their salvation worked by the Holy Spirit to change them from the inside out. Conformation does not lend to stability, but transformation does.

In the following verses, Paul demonstrated what a presented transformed believers looks like. He doesn’t frame his mind around himself (i.e. sees everything as revolving around him), but is to frame his mind<sup>59</sup> around the body of Christ (12:3-5). He is also to frame his mind towards the body so that he used his supernaturally provided gift (12:6-8). Paul elaborated on this in verses nine through thirteen with a series of verbless clauses, all of which demonstrate an unhypocritical love. The believer can have a proper response to adversity and evil, whether it comes from believers or unbelievers (12:14-21). The believer can have a proper attitude toward governmental laws and those who enforce them, including paying his taxes (13:1-10). He can obey secular law out of love for his fellow believers. The last five verses of Romans 13 remind the believer that now is the time to be transformed. The believer is surrounded by a dark fallen world, and his life should express his salvation. All this is God’s will for the saint, and contributes to stability.

### **Receive the weak in the faith**

It is when we reach chapter 14 that we see one of the areas where instability was affecting the Roman saints. The problem was introducing or receiving new believers into the assembly, and then entering into debates over certain activities (14:1). Paul mentioned three areas of doubt or question regarding one’s conduct: whether to keep a day, whether to eat meat or vegetables, whether to drink or abstain. These three were an issue between the strong and the weak believers. The strong knew every day is the same (there is no specified sabbath)<sup>60</sup>, any meat is acceptable to eat, wine was OK (in moderation). The weak questioned each. The strong looked down on the weak for struggling with these issues, while the weak judged the strong.

Paul encouraged both parties to cease their attitude toward the others. To the weak, he pointed out that a man stands or falls to his own master, implied, “Not to you” (14:4). Paul immediately added, “And He will be made to stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” “Be made to stand” is a future passive verb. Future means it will happen. Passive indicates that he does not cause himself to stand, for that is the Lord’s job. This agrees with the Paul’s goal of stability.

The believer can contribute to God’s work of stabilizing believers. He does not welcome such struggling, unstable believers and then debate with them over such issues. He frames his mind with those truths in which the Spirit leads him, i.e. who they are in Christ (cf Romans 8:4-6). The result is “righteousness, peace, and joy by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).

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59 Paul used two infinitives, the first “frame you mind” (φρονέω/φρονεῖν) and the second “frame your mind with salvation” or “frame it prudently” (σωφρονέω/σωφρονεῖν).

60 William R. Newell devotes a paragraph to the error that Sunday has become the Christian sabbath. He quoted Scofield, “The so-called Puritan teaching here has been rightly called ‘an adulterous theology’; because it sought to marry believers to both husbands, to the Law and to Christ.” op cit. pp. 504-505.

Therefore, the believers are to pursue the things pertaining to peace and the things pertaining to the edification of other believers (Romans 14:19). The strong believers bears the responsibility to bear the weaknesses of those who are not strong (Romans 15:1). Like Christ, the strong can forego pleasing himself (Romans 15:2-3). In this way, the believer can be a positive part in God's work of stabilizing believers.

It should be noted that a significant textual problem exists at the end of Romans 14. It involves the placement of 16:25-27. These verses, considered a closing doxology, occur in some manuscripts at the end of Romans 14, in one manuscript at the end of Romans 15, and some at the end of Romans 16 and in several at the end of both Romans 14 and 16.<sup>61</sup> The evidence favors in some form the inclusion of these verses at the end of Romans 14. It is hard to conclude why anyone would have moved the verses from the end of the book to this location. Some have gone as far as arguing that Paul wrote to versions of Romans, one a short edition which ended with Romans fourteen and a longer edition as we have the book. It is likely that due the doxological nature of Romans 16:25-27, a copyist moved the verses from the end of Romans 14 to the end of the letter, thinking this was to be Paul's ending. However, the words are not Paul's closing but Paul's recognition that the ultimate stability of believers would be accomplished by God, and not by any human efforts. These verses fit well at the end of Romans 14.

### **Now to Him who is able**

Paul had two goals for coming to Rome. He wished to evangelize for the benefit of the Roman saints, but he also wished to do his part in God's work of stabilizing the believers. The book of Romans contributes to both matters, but especially to the second, stabilization. It is necessary for believers to see that all believers come to salvation from the same lost condition; no one is more or less lost than another. Second, though all were ungodly, all are declared righteous by faith. Third, all have access to God, and despite the struggle with the sin nature, this privilege is always available for the saint who will avail himself of it, for nothing can separate him from God's love to him in Christ. In this regard, God's plans for Israel remain. Israel is no proof that God can or might separate one from His love. Finally, in light of this sure, unmoving position in Christ which is totally the work of God, the believer is encouraged to present himself and be changed, to allow God to work through him in the body, for the body, as a part of the body. In this way, the individual believer can be part of God's work of stabilizing saints, rather than part of the problem. Yet in the end, the stabilization of saints is God's work.

While God stabilizes believers, He does not stabilize them apart from instruction. As we have seen, and Paul explains in Romans 16:25-27, God stabilizes believers in accord with the standard of Paul's gospel, the authoritative announcement of who Jesus Christ is, and unveiling of the mystery of God's present design for the believers to be equal members of the body of Christ. When a believer grasps these truths, the issues which cause instability fall away. Rather than taking on the issues (as is so common in churches), the saints need the gracious benefit which affects their spirit, namely the teaching of Who Christ is for us today, and how God sees the body. On the basis of these, and by no other means, God will stabilize His saints for the Christian life God has set before them.

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61 <sup>⋈</sup> B C D 048 81 436 630 1739 1962 2127 have 16:25-27 only at the end of Romans 16. L <sup>ψ</sup> 0209 181 326 330 451 614 1175 1241 1877 1881 1984 1985 2492 2496 and the Majority texts have 16:25-27 only at the end of Romans 14. A P 5 33 88 104 460 have 16:25-27 at both locations. These verses are found at the end of Romans 15 in **¶**46. This is from the apparatus under Romans 14:23 of *The Greek New Testament Third Ed.* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1984).