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JUDGMENT, JUSTIFICATION, AND THE FAITH EVENT IN ROMANS

by

Raymond Foyer, MA

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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ABSTRACT
JUDGMENT, JUSTIFICATION, AND THE FAITH EVENT IN ROMANS

Raymond Foyer, MA

Marquette University, 2016

In this study, I identify two commonly perceived incompatibilities regarding judgment and justification in Romans. The first is between judgment according to works and Paul's negative teaching that justification does not come through "works of law" or "works." The second concerns judgment according to works and Paul's positive argument that justification comes graciously by faith. I attempt to resolve both of these problems. In the first chapter, I make the case that "works of law" and several similar terms in Romans do not all have the same meaning and do not pose a problem of compatibility.

In order to address the second alleged incompatibility, in chapters two through four I argue that Paul qualifies both judgment according to works and justification by faith in several ways throughout Rom 1–11. First, in Rom 1:18–3:20 and in the rest of Rom 1–11 divine mercy is the norm before the final judgment. Second, what I refer to as the primary argument (Rom 3:21–5:21 along with Rom 1:16–17; 10:5–13) and the secondary argument (Rom 6–8) cannot be reduced to "faith alone" but are held together through what I call the faith event, which has three components: faith, baptism, and reception of the Spirit. Believers are assured of salvation on the basis of faith, but because they have been baptized and have received the Spirit, they are commanded to live in a way that reflects their death with Christ and their resultant life with him. Furthermore, their eventual co-glorification with Christ is conditioned on "putting to death the deeds of the body" as well as co-suffering with Christ. Finally, in Rom 9–11 Paul warns Gentile believers of the possibility of falling away into unbelief.

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Raymond Foyer, MA

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A NOTE ABOUT TRANSLATIONS

Because this study makes frequent reference to the original languages of Scripture, I found it necessary to use my own translations for all biblical quotations (including those from the LXX) and to keep them as literal as possible. The term ἔργα νόμου is rendered literally, “works of law” (always in quotes), not because this is the “best” translation of this term but purely for the sake of convenience and consistency. The shortened form ἔργα in Rom 3–4 and Rom 9–11 is likewise translated “works” (again, kept in quotes) in order to maintain its implicit relationship to ἔργα νόμου.

INTRODUCTION: TWO PERCEIVED INCOMPATIBILITIES IN ROMANS

1. THE PROBLEM

One of the most significant events in modern ecumenism occurred on October 31, 1999, when representatives of the Catholic and Lutheran churches signed a *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. This document begins with a remarkable synthesis of the biblical notion of justification that relies heavily on the letters of Paul. In deference to the Lutheran tradition, it defines justification first of all as the forgiveness of sins. In line with the Catholic emphasis on transformation, it also describes justification as “liberation from the dominating power of sin and death” as well as “acceptance into communion with God.”¹ In this way the *Joint Declaration* finds a way to affirm major aspects of two positions that were historically formulated in opposition to one another.

What is notably missing in this synthesis, however, is something closely bound to the biblical—and especially Pauline—notion of justification: eschatological judgment according to works. One likely reason for this omission is that the relationship of judgment and justification has been a persistent problem in Pauline scholarship. In the last century, some have gone so far as to question whether judgment and justification in Paul can even be reconciled. According to Rudolf Bultmann, Paul’s doctrine of judgment exists “in at least seeming contradiction” to justification by faith.² Similarly, Heikki

¹ The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), §11.

² Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1951–55), 1:75.

Räisänen in his study of Romans concludes that the portions of Rom 2 regarding judgment “stand in flat contradiction” to the letter’s broader argument.³

As Räisänen’s study suggests, the problem is particularly conspicuous in the letter to the Romans. In Rom 2 and Rom 3–4, Paul says seemingly opposing things about judgment and justification. On the one hand, Paul warns that final judgment will be “to each according to one’s works” (Rom 2:6) and insists that “the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom 2:13). He also seems to suggest that there exist certain Gentiles who demonstrate the kind of obedience that is required to be justified (Rom 2:14–15, 26–27). On the other hand, it is not long before the apostle declares that “from works of law no flesh will be justified” (Rom 3:20) and that justification comes “by faith, apart from works of law” (Rom 3:28). Moreover, he soon places faith in opposition to “works” and excludes the latter as the basis of justification (Rom 4:1–8).

In order to avoid conclusions like those of Bultmann and Räisänen, there has arisen a whole mountain of scholarship on judgment and justification in Paul. That this has happened is not surprising. According to C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, the philosophers who pioneered the so-called new rhetoric, whenever two statements seem to conflict, the natural human tendency is to attempt to reconcile them: “Normally, when someone asserts a proposition and its negation simultaneously, we do not think he is trying to say something absurd, and we wonder how what he says should be interpreted in order to avoid inconsistency.”⁴ When that someone is a writer of Scripture, many will

³ Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (WUNT 29; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983), 103.

⁴ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 195.

labor assiduously to make the work appear consistent. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca put it, an adherent of Scripture “assumes the text to be not only coherent, but truthful.”⁵

Nevertheless, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca also acknowledge that most human speech is not constructed from some kind of formal philosophical system but is in fact what they call “ordinary speech.” Thus one rarely comes across true *contradiction* but instead encounters *incompatibility*. Unlike formal systems, where statements are “univocal,” that is, terms are given precise meanings and used consistently, ordinary language often uses the same or similar terms in different ways.⁶ In the case of Romans, there does indeed seem to be a kind of verbal contradiction between judgment and justification, but the real question is whether these teachings are ultimately *compatible*. In short, can they exist together in Paul’s argument, or must one be chosen over the other?

Before this question can be answered, it must be acknowledged that no less than *two perceived incompatibilities* regarding judgment and justification are to be observed in Romans. The first is between judgment according to works and Paul’s *negative* teaching that justification does not come through “works of law” or “works.” The second concerns judgment according to works and Paul’s *positive* argument that justification comes graciously by faith. A related problem is the identity of the obedient Gentiles in Rom 2:14–15, 26–27, but it is these two perceived incompatibilities—especially the second—that are at the center of the problem of judgment and justification. As will soon be seen, there have been a great number of attempts to address this problem, and while much progress has been made, a satisfactory solution has remained elusive.

⁵ Ibid., 124–25.

⁶ Ibid., 194.

2. PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP ON THE PROBLEM

Although previous scholarship has not identified two distinct questions of compatibility as I have done, it is generally accepted that there are three basic interpretive possibilities regarding the coherence of Paul's teaching on judgment and justification: (1) it is in some way contradictory or incoherent; (2) it is not at all incoherent; and (3) it too unclear to be sure on the matter.⁷ The vast majority of scholars are committed to the second position, but a small minority, of which Räisänen and Bultmann are the most prominent examples, have embraced the first. The third is usually avoided.⁸ It should also be noted that (unlike the present study) many studies on the problem are not limited to Romans, although the particularly stark instantiation of the problem in Romans is usually at the forefront of the discussion.

The first position, that *Paul's teaching is contradictory or incoherent*, has been held by a handful of interpreters, and they do not all agree on where to locate the difficulty or on its significance. An early example is Gillis P. Wetter, who claims that Paul's fundamental message is coherent, but that it is irreconcilable with his eschatology.

⁷ Hendrikus Boers, who finds the tension to be a kind of paradox, perhaps belongs in a category of his own. Boers argues that the apparent contradiction of justification by faith and judgment according to works is but a concrete or "surface" expression of a deeper tension between what he calls the "existential and social micro-universes" (*The Justification of the Gentiles: Paul's Letter to the Galatians and Romans* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994], 32–33). The paradox is that it is only by recognizing this irresolvable tension between micro-universes that Paul can be understood as a coherent thinker.

⁸ The closest to this position is Ernst Synofzik, *Die Gerichts- und Vergeltungsaussagen bei Paulus: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (GTA 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977). He claims that Paul uses judgment themes merely as an argumentative tool (*Argumentationsmittel*) and gives little information on his precise view of judgment.

According to Paul, grace has replaced the Jewish notion that we are saved by works. Nevertheless, his eschatology retains the idea of final retribution. This results in an incoherent eschatology: “Any systematic construction of Pauline eschatology is impossible from the outset; the parts which are standing side by side cannot be united.”⁹ Herbert Braun, by contrast, sees judgment according to works as fully integrated with justification by faith. Both have to do with the eventual outcome, salvation or damnation, but for Christians there is no possibility of retribution for bad works. Faith guarantees a positive outcome. Where Paul is inconsistent is in his occasional uncertainty regarding the final outcome for Christians, whom he also sometimes threatens with judgment for bad behavior. Braun attributes this inconsistency to a Jewish mode of thinking which had no use for systematization and to Paul’s occasional emotional relapses “into the tenor of Jewish paranesis.”¹⁰

Nigel M. Watson has proposed that judgment according to works and justification by faith are an “antinomy,” by which he seems to mean that they are contradictory but that each nevertheless is valid depending on the situation of the Christian.¹¹ Relying on the work of Wilfred Joest, Watson regards the contradiction as a consequence of the occasional nature of Paul’s letters and his dialectical and pastoral mode of preaching.

When addressing those who have become complacent in their faith and who presume on

⁹ Wetter, *Der Vergeltungsgedanke bei Paulus: Eine Studie zur Religion des Apostels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1912), 154 (translation mine). Kent L. Yinger translates a bit more loosely: “Every attempt to express Paul’s eschatology as a coherent system is utterly impossible; the elements he places side by side cannot be united” (*Paul, Judaism, and Judgment according to Deeds* [SNTSMS 105; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 7).

¹⁰ Herbert Braun, *Gerichtsgedanke und Rechtfertigungslehre bei Paulus* (UNT; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1930), 97.

¹¹ Watson, “Justified by Faith; Judged by Works—An Antinomy?” *NTS* 29 (1983): 209–21.

God's grace, Paul warns that judgment is a real possibility in order to jolt the complacent back to faith and thus experience grace all over again. When addressing those who are scrupulous or who are despairing of salvation, Paul brings a fresh reminder of the message of grace and of the assurance of salvation on the basis of faith. In other words, judgment according to works and justification by faith each apply to Christians, but at different stages in their journey of faith. Watson considers this dialectical approach valid, even if it leaves theologians at a loss to explain it systematically. The whole point of justification by faith is that it is a miracle and defies all logic.

Räisänen's major work on Paul is not devoted specifically to the problem of judgment and justification, but he is an ardent proponent of the view that Paul's letters, and particularly his views on the law, are plagued by incoherence and contradiction. Räisänen does not address the second incompatibility, but with respect to the first (the incompatibility of judgment according to works and Paul's exclusion of "works of law") he makes it abundantly clear that in Romans "Paul's mind is divided" with regard to whether or not keeping the law is possible.¹² Räisänen is heavily influenced by the position of E. P. Sanders (see below for a discussion of Sanders), that Paul argues from solution to plight, that is, that he begins with the premise that Christ is the only way and works backward to the conclusion that the law must be insufficient. The contradictions in Paul cannot be explained, Räisänen says, by claiming he was an unsystematic Jewish thinker, otherwise the Jews themselves would not have had such a hard time comprehending Paul. Rather, his contradictory argumentation is a sign that he is trying to rationalize his break from the law and yet maintain the fiction that it is really the Jews,

¹² Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 107.

not the apostle, who have turned their backs on the law.¹³ For the sake of refuting the Jews, Paul concocts a theory that the law cannot be kept, and then, to our astonishment, in Rom 2:14–15 and 2:26–27 he uses non-Christians Gentiles as an example of those who “do the law” in order to prove that no one actually keeps the law. The antithesis Paul creates between faith in Christ and “works of law” is arbitrary, and is unprecedented in the NT. It not only ignores the importance of doing the law in his own theology but misrepresents the importance of grace and repentance in Jewish thought. In short, the contradictions in Paul’s thought derive from his attempts to distort Judaism for his own polemical and missionary purposes.¹⁴

Those who hold the second position, i.e., that judgment and justification in Paul do not conflict, disagree over the degree to which Paul departs from his Jewish past in his teaching on judgment. These scholars fit into three categories. First, there are *those who associate strict judgment according to works exclusively with Judaism and thus deny it any real role in Christian soteriology*. D. Ernst Kühl is the most prominent representative of this position.¹⁵ For Kühl, grace in no way depends on works or on any human action. Because judgment according to works deals with reward, it cannot affect salvation. Although it is always expected that Christians will have works, salvation remains certain on the basis of grace, regardless of works. This position has rightly been criticized for being unclear.¹⁶ Why have a judgment according to works if it has nothing to do with

¹³ Ibid., 201.

¹⁴ Ibid., 268–69.

¹⁵ Kühl, *Rechtfertigung auf Grund Glaubens und Gericht nach den Werken bei Paulus* (Königsberg i. Pr.: Wilh. Koch, 1904).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Yinger, *Judgment*, 10.

justification? Kühl represents a typical dogmatic mindset which seems most interested in assigning *an absolute and unqualified certainty* to Paul's statements that justification by faith will lead to salvation.

Kühl's emphasis on the complete gratuity of justification has been influential, but later scholars have seemed to notice that judgment according to works must serve some purpose in Paul's theology. Richard Campbell Devor, for example, while still emphasizing grace, suggests that Paul's teaching on judgment according to works has to do with varying rewards for the just.¹⁷ On this point, Paul is similar to the Jews at Qumran and has always differed from his fellow Pharisees. He departs more significantly from the Pharisees, however, when he begins to argue that righteousness cannot be earned. Although justification does not provide an absolute guarantee, it does not conflict with judgment, which is strictly about determining the level of reward for those whose salvation has already been obtained by grace.

Lieselotte Mattern harmonizes judgment and justification by postulating two judgment events.¹⁸ She claims that Paul's teaching on judgment intersects to some degree with Jewish apocalyptic thought inasmuch as it emphasizes the impossibility that the just will be judged. Paul differs in that the first judgment is decided solely on whether one has faith. In this respect he departs from any Jewish view of judgment. Furthermore, Paul envisions a second judgment, which evaluates the quality of a Christian's "work" (cf. Rom 2:7) and is not related to salvation. Judgment according to works (or "work," as she insists) thus has nothing to do with justification by faith.

¹⁷ Devor, *The Concept of Judgment in the Epistles of Paul* (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1959).

¹⁸ Mattern, *Das Verständnis des Gerichtes bei Paulus* (ATANT 47; Zurich: Zwingli, 1966).

The main criticism of the above group is that it does not take seriously that Paul warns Christians of judgment. These scholars seem so committed to making justification assured on the basis of faith alone that they empty the apostle's teaching on judgment of any soteriological significance. In a second category, by contrast, are those who hold that *judgment according to works retains a reduced yet significant role in justification*. Floyd V. Filson, writing in response to Wetter, concludes that Paul's experience of the grace of Christ led only to a change of emphasis. As a Pharisee, the principle of divine recompense was central to Paul's thought. After his conversion, grace became primary, but divine recompense was "retained and even vindicated" in three ways: (1) it remains operative among the unbelieving; (2) it is what makes substitutionary atonement necessary; (3) Christians are still accountable to God.¹⁹ In his letters Paul displays no reservation about speaking of eternal life as a reward, but he also considers eternal life a gift. Just like every other NT writer, Paul accepted the validity of both grace and recompense and "held the two lines of thought together at the same time and without any feeling of inconsistency."²⁰ In other words, the perceived conflict of judgment and justification is not a problem because Paul did not notice it.

Christoph Haufe concludes that reward and punishment for works is maintained in Christianity, but that, unlike Judaism, it does not require perfect obedience.²¹ Rather, through the help of the Spirit believers are now able to attain salvation by obeying God in their limited capacity. Justification by faith establishes this new hope of moral success,

¹⁹ Filson, *St. Paul's Conception of Recompense* (UNT 21; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1931), 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

²¹ Haufe, *Die sittliche Rechtfertigungslehre des Paulus* (Halle: VEB Max Niemeyer, 1957).

but it does not guarantee salvation. Haufe's view in effect reduces the requirement of justice. There will still be a judgment according to works, but grace means that this judgment will be far less strict than it would be otherwise. In the end, the believer obtains eternal life as both a gift and a reward because grace is needed to open up the possibility of reward.

The most influential scholar in this category has been Ernst Käsemann, who describes the relationship of judgment and justification in terms of the "already-not-yet."²² Reacting to Bultmann, Käsemann emphasizes that "the righteousness of God" in Romans consists of more than a gift to the individual, and that it has both present and future dimensions. It is received in the present by faith, but the believer must respond to the gift with obedience or face final punishment. In short, justification includes both a gift and a responsibility (*Gabe und Aufgabe*). In his commentary on Romans, Käsemann says that justification by faith can be understood as a proleptic act of judgment which occurs in the present but which must be lived out through obedience.²³ Paul's concept of obedience differs from that of Judaism in that it is not a human achievement but is empowered by grace. Obedience is necessary, but the key is whether someone has turned to *grace* to enable obedience.

Karl P. Donfried likewise emphasizes the already-not-yet. Following Käsemann, Donfried reacts against the "already" emphasis of Bultmann. He relates judgment and

²² Käsemann, "The Righteousness of God' in Paul," in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 168–82. Cf. also Karl Kertelge, *Rechtfertigung bei Paulus: Studien zur Struktur und zum Bedeutungsgehalt des paulinischen Rechtfertigungsbegriffs* (NTAbh 3; Münster: Aschendorff, 1967).

²³ Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 112.

justification by uniting them in a three-stage process of salvation: (1) justification, which begins the process and is realized in (2) sanctification, which occurs throughout the Christian life and results in (3) final salvation. The third step occurs at the judgment, when Christians will be judged according to whether they were obedient or disobedient to their calling. Any reference to a present certainty of salvation must therefore be understood as conditioned on obedience (“if you hold fast”; 1 Cor 15:2). Final salvation “is purely an act of God’s grace,” but it is only received by the believer “if he remains obedient to the gift of God and his Spirit.”²⁴ Donfried’s system seems simple and easy to grasp, but it reflects a certain ambiguity also present in Käsemann. What is not made explicit is that something *other than faith*, i.e., a response of obedience, is necessary for salvation.

Finally, there are *those who find little to no reduction of the role of judgment according to works in the process of justification*. These scholars contend that Paul’s view of judgment remained more or less unchanged from his previous view as a Pharisee, and that his central disagreement with Judaism must be located elsewhere. An early example of this approach is Calvin Roetzel, who shows that Paul’s eschatology is continuous with what can be found in early Jewish literature.²⁵ The chief difference between Paul and Judaism is Christology and ecclesiology. The apparent tension between judgment and justification is a symptom of the already-not-yet, but it is experienced *corporately* by the church as a result of the cross of Christ.

²⁴ Donfried, “Justification and the Last Judgment in Paul,” *Int* 30 (1976): 145.

²⁵ Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community: A Study of the Relationship between Eschatology and Ecclesiology in Paul* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).

The most influential scholar in this category is E. P. Sanders, although Sanders is unusual in that he finds Paul coherent with respect to the second perceived incompatibility but not the first. With respect to the first, Sanders focuses on the ways that Paul does *not* agree with Judaism. The apostle's main disagreement is over the need to keep the law, but in this regard Sanders finds the arguments in Romans to be weak and incoherent. He suggests that nearly all of Rom 2 was lifted from a synagogue sermon to attack the Jewish view of the law, and that Paul does not notice that the sermon actually supports the Jewish position.²⁶

What has been far more influential is the way Sanders deals with the second perceived incompatibility, that of judgment according to works and justification by faith, in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*. In this groundbreaking study, Sanders defines the "pattern of religion" in Judaism as "covenantal nomism." In this pattern, God graciously promises election to Israel through the law, but God also requires obedience. Failure is expected, however, and the law provides means of atonement. One's status in the covenant is maintained by a combination of obedience and atonement. Paul's pattern of religion, by contrast, can be called "participationist eschatology." Basic to this pattern is the idea that the believer has been transferred from sin to the dominion of Christ and has begun to be transformed. This transformation will not be completed until Christ's return, but in the meantime the believer must live in a way that reflects the new situation in Christ.

Sanders concludes that despite differences in these patterns, there is fundamental agreement on the relationship of grace and judgment in Paul and Judaism:

²⁶ Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983), 129–32.

Paul's view is typically Jewish. As we saw above, the distinction between being *judged on the basis of deeds* and punished or rewarded at the judgment (or in this life), on the one hand, and being *saved by God's gracious election*, on the other, was the general view in Rabbinic literature...In Paul, as in Jewish literature, good deeds are the *condition* of remaining "in," but they do not *earn* salvation.²⁷

Sanders adds that judgment therefore has no soteriological significance in either Paul or Judaism, although it is true that salvation can be lost through serious sin. He admits that the connection between justification and "doing the law" in Rom 2:12–16 is potentially problematic, but he concludes that this text does not have to do with salvation. Instead it concerns eschatological reward and punishment.²⁸ Like the conclusions of so many others, this final attempt to resolve the problem of judgment and justification does not fully banish a certain nagging ambiguity. Sanders is adamant that salvation in both Paul and Judaism is by grace and does not depend on "works," and yet he insists that works are necessary to remain saved and obtain reward. One "gets in" by grace and "stays in" by obedience. If works are necessary to remain saved, however, it would seem Sanders must concede that salvation in some way depends also on "works."

Despite the ambiguity of Sanders, his theory that Judaism was a religion of "covenantal nomism" has raised new questions with respect to what I have called the first incompatibility in Paul, particularly the meaning of "works of law." If Judaism was not a religion of merit, what is Paul's criticism of "works of law"? James D. G. Dunn's "New Perspective on Paul" solves this problem by redefining "works of law." Dunn claims that this expression does not refer to "good works" but to badges of membership in the

²⁷ Idem, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 517 (emphasis original).

²⁸ Ibid., 489. Interestingly, Sanders later "repents" of this interpretation of Rom 2:12–16 (which he concludes is not limited to Christians) but does not state the implications of his change of mind for the second perceived incompatibility (idem, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 126).

covenant people of Israel. These badges constitute the “minimal commitment” required to be considered part of God’s people, and they include distinctive Jewish practices such as circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath.²⁹ The distinction between faith in Christ and “works of law” is about establishing new identity markers for the people of God. Judaism had itself considered “justification by faith” one of several ways of talking about inclusion in the people of God, and the early Christians only added “in Christ” to the formula. Paul then drew the conclusion that justification by faith in Christ means the exclusion of all the other traditional Jewish identity markers.

For Dunn, then, “works of law” has nothing to do with earning salvation by works and thus does not conflict at all with judgment according to works. A major weakness of Dunn’s thesis is that it sweeps under the rug certain texts which connect “works of law” with a “works” approach to justification. With respect to Rom 4:4–5, for example, Dunn in his commentary claims that Paul—despite what the text actually says—is not really opposing the idea of trying to “earn” righteousness by works but is using commonsense logic to argue that the Jewish interpretation of Gen 15:6 does not seem to depend on grace.³⁰ Dunn’s New Perspective has been influential as an early attempt to take seriously the thesis of Sanders that Judaism was a religion of “covenantal nomism,” but Dunn perhaps takes it *too* seriously. As Francis Watson puts it, he reads Romans as if Paul had “read and been persuaded by *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.”³¹

²⁹ Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *The New Perspective on Paul* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 111.

³⁰ Idem, *Romans* (WBC 38; Dallas: Word, 1988), 1:228.

³¹ Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (rev. and exp. 2007; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 20.

Kent L. Yinger, in a major study of the theme of judgment according to works in Paul and Judaism, accepts the conclusions of both Sanders and Dunn. For Yinger, there is no conflict at all with respect to either alleged incompatibility. As far as he is concerned, the New Perspective has resolved the apparent conflict between judgment and Paul's rejection of "works of law." Concerning the relationship of judgment and justification by faith, he posits that both Paul and Judaism understood works as necessary confirmation of one's righteousness:

The apostle has inherited a way of speaking and thinking about divine judgment according to deeds which itself felt no tension... There is no tension in saying that the status of righteousness is conferred solely by means of faith in Christ, and that all (including the righteous) will be judged according to deeds. This is not a second justification, nor does it somehow place one's present justification (by faith) in doubt. It is the standard Jewish expectation that one's outward behavior (one's *works* or one's *way*) will correspond to, and be a visible manifestation of, inward reality. The eschatological recompense according to deeds *confirms*, on the basis of deeds, one's justification.³²

In other words, there was an assumed agreement between Paul and his Jewish contemporaries with respect to the relationship of grace and judgment, and they did not see it as a problem. Even if this is true, Yinger's solution is unclear. Again, it implies that something *other than faith* (in this case, confirming righteousness through works) is necessary to be justified. Although Yinger finds no theological conflict between

³² Yinger, *Judgment*, 290 (emphasis original). Cf. also Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (2d ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2008); Kevin W. McFadden, *Judgment According to Works: The Meaning and Function of Divine Judgment in Paul's Most Important Letter* (Emerging Scholars; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), both of whom largely follow Yinger's conclusions regarding the relationship of judgment and justification by faith. In an unrelated study, Roman Heiligenthal, relying mostly on German scholarship, draws similar conclusions regarding the function of works, though his study compares the biblical concept of works with that found in non-Jewish Greek literature (*Werke als Zeichen: Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung der menschlichen Taten im Frühjudentum, Neuen Testament und Früchristentum* [WUNT 2d. Series 9; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983]). Three other competing views on the role of works can be found in Robert N. Wilkin et al., *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment* (Counterparts: Bible & Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

judgment and justification by faith, he does acknowledge an *existential* tension in a way that is reminiscent of Watson's theory of an antinomy:

Those who would depart from the gospel and from Christ, who would walk according to the flesh rather than the Spirit, will be judged to be unrighteous according to their deeds... This impossible possibility does create an existential dynamic which permits the assurance of present and future justification by faith while denying any sort of unconditional guarantee or immunity.³³

Again, there is an ambiguity here. If justification by faith is not an unconditional guarantee and requires an additional response of obedience, it seems that justification is not based on faith alone but also on the believer's success in living by the Spirit.

Not all have been satisfied with the conclusions of Sanders concerning the relationship of grace and judgment in Judaism and in Paul. Klyne R. Snodgrass, in a study of the role of Rom 2 in Paul's thought, observes that these themes were used in a variety of ways in Judaism, and that they were often separated in such a way that it led to exaggerated conclusions (either positive or negative) regarding God's attitude toward the Jews. Paul's view of judgment is more consistent in that it assumes complete impartiality with respect to all people, both Jews and Gentiles. Although the apostle does not require perfection, in his teaching on judgment "salvation and damnation are a result of one's action, taking into consideration the amount of revelation given."³⁴ Grace is necessary to forgive sin and empower obedience, but judgment will ultimately be based on whether one has responded with good works through the Spirit. Snodgrass sees no incompatibility between judgment according to works and Paul's exclusion of "works of law," for the

³³ Yinger, *Judgment*, 291.

³⁴ Snodgrass, "Justification by Grace—To the Doers: An Analysis of the Place of Romans 2 in the Theology of Paul," *NTS* 32 (1986): 79.

latter is associated with trying to obey through the flesh, whereas the former is connected with the Spirit (Rom 2:29).

There may be something to this last suggestion, but Snodgrass is on less firm ground in his attempt to relate judgment to justification by faith. His assertion that judgment takes into account the amount of light received has no basis in Paul. Snodgrass also explains away Rom 6:23 by emphasizing the previous verse, which according to him implies that eternal life is the “result” (τέλος) of sanctification.³⁵ His interpretation of this verse, however, is unlikely. The grammar of Rom 6:22 seems to indicate that *both* sanctification *and* eternal life are the result of being freed from slavery to sin, sanctification being the καρπός (the “fruit”) and eternal life the τέλος (the “end result”) of this change of masters. In any event, the next verse cannot just be ignored. In Rom 6:23, death is indeed received as a wage by the one enslaved to sin, but eternal life is described as a *gift* to the one who has changed masters from sin to obedience. Snodgrass should be applauded for trying to take Paul’s teaching on judgment at face value, but if his exegesis of Rom 6:22 is correct, it only adds to the apparent tension in Romans between the gratuity of salvation and the condition of obedience.

Chris VanLandingham’s recent work on judgment and justification takes the position of Snodgrass even further. VanLandingham posits that in both Paul and Judaism, there is indeed present the idea that “salvation is earned, at least in the sense that there is a *quid pro quo* or cause and effect relationship between obedience to God in this age and

³⁵ Ibid., 85.

eternal life in the next.”³⁶ He also maintains that “justification” in Paul is not a forensic term and does not refer to judgment at all when it is used in connection with faith. The δικαιοῦν word group instead should be translated in the LXX sense of “made righteous,” and in Paul it has to do with the effects of the Christ event. These effects include both expiation/forgiveness and the ability to act righteously. After the believer is made righteous, at the last judgment the believer’s eternal destiny is decided on the basis of works.³⁷

VanLandingham’s thesis is bold, but it is not without its problems.³⁸ He does not even address Rom 6:23 and similar texts which speak explicitly of eternal life in terms of a gift. Moreover, it seems odd that Paul would hold that *salvation* can be earned but not *righteousness*. That would almost create a dichotomy between δικαιοῦν and σώζειν (“to save”). VanLandingham does acknowledge the danger in positing too sharp a distinction between these two terms, which he admits are closely associated in Rom 5:9–11 and Rom 10:9–10, but his claim that they refer to completely different events is unconvincing. Paul’s logic that righteousness leads to salvation on judgment day (the ultimate forensic setting) is rather straightforward and implies that δικαιοῦν does have some forensic connotation. Even if we grant that this verb should not be translated in terms of acquittal but in terms of expiation and cleansing from sin, in Paul’s worldview (unlike today) there

³⁶ VanLandingham, *Judgment and Justification in Early Judaism and the Apostle Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 333.

³⁷ Ibid., 329.

³⁸ See the more extensive review: Michael Bird, “Judgment and Justification in Paul: A Review Article,” *BBR* 18 (2008): 299–313. Bird considers VanLandingham an apologist for Judaism who with “daring bravado” seeks to overturn the consensus of scholarship regarding δικαιοῦν and creates a Paul who “oscillates somewhere between semipelagianism and pure pelagianism” (313).

is plenty of room in a forensic setting for being cleansed from sin. In the OT, it was commonly thought that God's throne could not be approached without some form of sacrificial cleansing (see, e.g., Isa 6:5–7). For all of these reasons, VanLandingham's thesis does not successfully resolve the apparent incompatibility of judgment according to works and justification by faith.

3. METHOD AND ARGUMENT

The above survey is by no means exhaustive, but it shows that there is a wide variety of approaches regarding judgment and justification in Paul. With regard to the first perceived incompatibility, most agree that Dunn's New Perspective is a step in the right direction, and Yinger even accepts the New Perspective whole cloth. It has become increasingly clear in recent years, however, that Yinger is the exception to the rule. Sanders and Dunn have successfully demonstrated that Paul and Judaism did not exist on opposite sides of the spectrum, but there is still considerable debate about the nature of first-century Judaism. According to the New Perspective, first-century Judaism was dominated by "covenantal nomism" and had a robust understanding of the importance of divine grace. Others maintain that Judaism was at least partly a religion of "works-righteousness," and that Paul was distinctive in his complete reliance on grace.³⁹ Still

³⁹ See, e.g., Douglas J. Moo, "Law, 'Works of the Law,' and Legalism in Paul," *WTJ* 45 (1983): 73–100; Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (NovTSup 68; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992); Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of the Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Timo Laato, *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach* (trans. T. McElwain; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 115; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); Simon J. Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1–5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). Most of these adhere to the common Protestant view that

others have sought to avoid the old characterization of Judaism as a religion of “works” while retaining an authentically “Lutheran” understanding of Paul.⁴⁰ Most importantly, Dunn’s argument that the term “works of law” in Paul is restricted to covenant badges has not been widely accepted.

With regard to the second perceived incompatibility, the level of disagreement is even greater. On one extreme are Kühl, Devor, and Mattern, who emphasize justification by faith to the point that judgment according to works retains no salvific import. Haufe, Snodgrass, and VanLandingham are on the opposite extreme in that the grace obtained by faith only restores one’s ability to earn salvation by good works. Räisänen, Watson, and Yinger attempt to allow both judgment and justification their full force, but they reach much different conclusions. Räisänen finds them contradictory, for Watson they are situational “antinomies,” and for Yinger they exist in a kind of existential tension which Jews (for some reason) did not see as a problem.

Despite the wide range of views on the problem of judgment and justification, strangely enough there is to be observed a surprising amount of methodological agreement. Most studies are fundamentally similar in that they are largely *comparative* and *diachronic*. That is, they are usually framed as a broad comparison between “Judaism” and “Paul” and either aim to demonstrate Paul’s continuity or his essential discontinuity with his fellow Jews. While this approach may be suitable to the smaller

Paul held to a monergic soteriology and denied Jewish synergism (the cooperation of divine grace and human good works).

⁴⁰ So Stephen Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 132–34; Brendan Byrne, “The Problem of Νόμος and the Relationship with Judaism in Romans,” *CBQ* 62 (2000): 308–9; Byrne recasts Luther’s contrast between law and gospel as a contrast between sin and grace, with the caveat that law serves a positive purpose as it exposes sin.

problem of the first perceived incompatibility, which hinges greatly on the meaning of the apparently Hebraic expression “works of law,” it has not produced satisfying results in the case of the second, which is far more complicated and does not (despite the claims of Yinger and VanLandingham) derive solely from some later misunderstanding of Paul within his Jewish context. In order to address adequately the second perceived incompatibility, what is needed is *a new reading of Romans*, one that is primarily *synchronic*. Rather than proffering yet another theory concerning the nature of first-century Judaism, I will remain focused on the more basic task of understanding the argument of Romans, particularly Rom 1–11, which might be called the central nexus of the problem of judgment and justification in Paul.⁴¹

A major challenge in this kind of study is that, as can be seen from even a cursory look at the many commentaries on Romans, virtually every jot and tittle of the letter has been the subject of dispute at one time or another. While some of these disputes will no doubt have to be addressed, unfortunately many will have to be passed by with little or no comment. The consequence of this is that numerous (mostly minor) exegetical decisions will be left undefended. Furthermore, while the present study relies initially on rhetorical theory to define the problem of judgment and justification, and will occasionally discuss certain rhetorical features in Rom 1–11, it is not first of all an exercise in rhetorical criticism. Instead I will adopt a more modest approach, one that revolves around a core

⁴¹ My exclusion of Rom 12–16 does not imply that these chapters are less significant, but I do not agree with the judgment of some that Rom 12–16, which consists of some general exhortations, a conclusion, and a long list of greetings, significantly affects the interpretation of what precedes. Robert Jewett, for example, interprets “each verse and paragraph” in Romans in terms of Paul’s desire in the final chapters to gain support for his mission to Spain and to rid the Roman congregations of certain “prejudicial elements” (*Romans: A Commentary* [ass. Roy Kotansky; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 1). The problem with Jewett’s view is that the first-time reader would not be able to understand most of the letter before reaching the end.

insight which, I contend, corrects a recurring paradigm which was observed in my criticism of earlier scholarship. This paradigm, which appears first in Kühl, systematically places justification by faith (or “by faith alone”) at the center of Rom 1–11 and often refuses to allow for the possibility that Paul qualifies this teaching at any point in Romans.

By contrast, my view is that it is not *faith alone* that lies behind the argument of Rom 1–11 but rather what I call *the faith event*. This event, which is equivalent to Christian initiation, is not restricted to faith but has three components: faith, baptism, and reception of the Spirit. While the letter’s *primary argument*, which is mostly concentrated in Rom 3:21–5:21, places heavy emphasis on faith, much of the rest of Romans does *not* center on faith. The primary argument must be read within its context in Rom 1–11, which contains a *secondary argument* in Rom 6–8 regarding the other two components of the faith event, i.e., baptism and reception of the Spirit. Thus the primary and secondary arguments are inseparable, and together they account for the entirety of the faith event. Additionally, they must be related to the remainder of Rom 1–11, which includes what may be considered a preliminary argument in Rom 1:18–3:20, as well as a special argument concerning Israel in Rom 9–11.

My proposal, then, is two-pronged. The first perceived incompatibility largely concerns the meaning of the expression “works of law” (Rom 3:20, 28) as well as three similar terms: “the doers of the law” (Rom 2:13), “the work of the law” (Rom 2:15), and “works” as a shortened form of “works of law” (Rom 3:27; 4:2–6; 9:11–12, 32; 11:6). In the first chapter I will make the case that these terms do *not* all have the same meaning within their respective contexts in Romans and therefore (as Dunn rightly claims) do not

pose a problem of compatibility. The second alleged incompatibility will require an extensive examination of the structure and argument of Rom 1–11. Rather than choosing between judgment and justification, or trying to bring both together somehow without there being any perceived tension, in chapters two through four of this study I will argue that *Paul qualifies both judgment according to works and justification by faith* in several ways throughout Rom 1–11, and that neither doctrine can be understood independently or at face value. First, I will interpret judgment according to works within the letter's preliminary argument in Rom 1:18–3:20, which has a complex relationship to the letter as a whole. Second, I will examine the primary and secondary arguments and attempt to view them together through the lens of the faith event. Finally, I will discuss Rom 9–11, where Paul further qualifies both the primary and secondary arguments as he warns Gentile believers of the possibility of falling away into unbelief.

CHAPTER 1: FOUR TERMS REGARDING THE LAW AND “WORKS”

The first perceived incompatibility regarding judgment and justification concerns the apparent conflict between Paul’s affirmation that “the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom 2:13) and his later series of denials that justification comes from “works of law” or “works.” In this chapter I will attempt to resolve this problem. I will proceed in two steps. First, I will discuss three similar-sounding terms in Romans: “the doers of the law,” “the work of the law,” and “works of law.” I will show that these terms do not all mean the same thing, and that Paul uses them much differently than other Jewish writers. Second, I will argue that “works” in Rom 3–4 and Rom 9–11 is a shortened form of “works of law,” but that nevertheless the two expressions are not always interchangeable.

1.1. THREE DIFFERENT TERMS FOR “DOING THE LAW”

According to C. E. B. Cranfield, the expressions “the doers of the law” (οἱ ποιηταὶ νόμου; Rom 2:13), “the work of the law” (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου; Rom 2:15), and “works of law” (ἔργα νόμου; Rom 3:20, 28) all mean more or less the same thing.¹ This view seems

¹ “‘The Works of the Law’ in the Epistle to the Romans,” *JSNT* 43 (1991): 94–95; so also Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 147. Cranfield says that every expression which regards doing, keeping, or fulfilling the law in Romans is synonymous. The most common method of resolving the resultant tension between Rom 2:13 and Rom 3:20 has long been to distinguish different meanings of δικαιοῦν in each verse. Thomas Aquinas, for example, asserts that each verse has in mind two kinds of justice (the act in Rom 2:13, possession of the habit in Rom 3:20; *Sum. Theol.* 1-2.100.12). More recently, E. P. Sanders, in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 489, has argued that, unlike the other occurrences of δικαιοῦν in Paul, in Rom 2:13 the verb has to do with eschatological reward (“staying in”) and not salvation (“getting in”). James D. G. Dunn has rightly criticized this view for making too strong a distinction between the present and future aspects of justification (*Romans* [WBC 38; 2 vols.; Dallas:

to make the language of Romans more consistent, but unfortunately it only strengthens the tension between judgment and justification. We are left with a Paul who affirms the need to do the law in Rom 2 and then says precisely the opposite in the following chapter, without any real indication that he does not mean either. Cranfield's position also does not take into account the subtle differences in the expressions themselves. Moreover, it does not consider that their respective contexts, as well as their placement within the argument of Rom 1–11, often differ considerably.

In contrast to Cranfield, I contend that, despite the verbal similarity of the above terms, they do not all mean the same thing. This position is in part inspired by the observation of Klyne R. Snodgrass that Rom 2 speaks of obedience to the law thoroughly *positively*, whereas “works of law” is always *negative* in Paul.² The key to understanding the above expressions is to recognize that each of them is part of a different pair of contrary terms, one of which is positive and one negative: “the doers of the law” is contrasted with “the hearers of the law,” “the work of the law” (by implication) with the word or letter of the law, and “works of law” with “faith in Christ.” The building blocks of these expressions come mostly from the LXX and arise from Paul's Hellenistic-Jewish mindset. As I will show, some of them appear also in the Qumran literature, but Paul's usage is new and reflects a much different view of the law from that found at Qumran.

Word, 1988], 1:97). It is also worth noting that the tense of the verb is the same (future) in Rom 2:13 and 3:20, and that both verses speak in terms of what is just *before God* (παρὰ τῷ θεῷ; ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ). It seems, then, that distinguishing different meanings of δικαιοῦν is a dead end.

² Snodgrass, “Justification by Grace—To the Doers: An Analysis of the Place of Romans 2 in the Theology of Paul,” *NTS* 32 (1986): 84.

1.1.1. The Doers of the Law

1.1.1.1 In the Qumran Literature

The expression “the doers of the law” (Gr. οἱ ποιηταὶ νόμου) does not appear in the OT or in other Jewish literature except for the Qumran writings, where it occurs in the Hebrew form עושי התורה. This plural form is used twice, both in *Pesher Habakkuk* (1QpHab) in the context of Hab 2:4b, the same text that in Rom 1:17 becomes foundational to Paul’s understanding of justification by faith. The first occurrence is in 1QpHab 7:11 as the writer is commenting on Hab 2:3b:

“If it tarries, be patient, it will surely come true and not be delayed.” This refers to those loyal ones, *the doers of the Torah* (עושי התורה), whose hands will not cease from loyal service even when the Last Days seem long to them, for all the times fixed by God will come about in due course as he ordained that they should by his inscrutable insight. (1QpHab 7:9–12)³

The phrase appears again in 1QpHab 8:1, which is commenting on Hab 2:4b:

[“As for the righteous man, by loyalty to him one may find life.”] This refers to all *the doers of the Torah* (עושי התורה) among the Jews whom God will rescue from among those doomed to judgment, because of their suffering and their loyalty to the Teacher of Righteousness. (1QpHab 8:1–3)

In addition to these two instances of the plural, there is one occurrence of the singular in 1QpHab 12:4–5 (“the simple-hearted of Judah who does the Torah [עושה התורה]”).⁴ In

³ Translations of *Pesher Habakkuk* are adapted from the translation of Edward Cook in Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 114–22. The only change I have made to Cook’s translation regards עושי התורה, which I have rendered more literally as “doers of the Torah” rather than Cook’s “obedient to the law.”

⁴ Here the text is commenting on Hab 2:17: “For the crimes perpetrated against Lebanon he will bury you, for the robbery of the beasts.” The singular expression also occurs in 4Q171 2:22, which is commenting on Ps 37:16, but the text is fragmentary: “‘Better is the little the righteous man has than the

each of these texts, the doers of the Torah are those who accept and follow the practices of the Teacher of Righteousness, an unnamed Jewish leader. They are contrasted with disobedient Jews, who are identified as “traitors with the Man of the Lie” (1QpHab 2:1–2), “the family of Absalom and the members of their party” (1QpHab 5:9–10), and the Wicked Priest (mentioned throughout 1QpHab 8:8–12:10). These Jews are condemned for disobeying, betraying, or even persecuting the Teacher of Righteousness and his followers.

Interestingly, both Paul and *Pesher Habakkuk* incorporate the words “faith” (πίστις; אמונה) and “righteous” (δίκαιος; צדיק) from Hab 2:4b into their argument, but their respective interpretations of this verse are quite different. Paul in fact uses the verse in two different ways: in Rom 1:17 it is positive proof that righteousness comes by faith, and in Gal 3:11 it is also negative proof concerning the possibility of justification through the law. In *Pesher Habakkuk*, Hab 2:4b is not about “righteousness by faith” but loyalty (אמונה) to the Teacher of Righteousness and his interpretation of the Torah on the part of the doers of the Torah. The expression עושי התורה in *Pesher Habakkuk* thus reflects a kind of sectarian exclusivism. Yet it is everywhere assumed that doing the Torah is both possible and necessary for all Jews. On this point it is likely that most Jews would have agreed.

1.1.1.2. In Romans

great abundance of the wicked.’ [...This refers to] the doer of the Torah (עושה התורה) who does not [...]” (adapted from Cook’s translation in Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 222).

The term “the doers of the law” in Rom 2:13 has a much different meaning from its Hebrew counterpart in the Qumran literature. In Rom 2:13, “the doers of the law” are not distinguished from rival sects of Judaism but from “the hearers of the law.”

According to Dunn, this contrast between hearing and doing is not particularly Hebraic and might “ring somewhat oddly in the ears of a devout Jew.” The reason is that it does not occur in the OT, probably because the Hebrew word שָׁמַע (“to hear”), which is often translated ὑπακούειν (“to heed,” “to obey”) rather than ἀκούειν (“to hear”) in the LXX, often implies obedience.⁵ In Greek, however, the distinction between hearing and doing seems rather straightforward, and it appears elsewhere in the NT in connection with the words of Jesus or the word of salvation (Matt 7:24–27; Luke 6:46–49; Jas 1:22–25).

What is unique about Paul is that he contrasts hearing and doing *the law*. My contention is that Paul’s peculiar application of this common NT contrast constitutes an allusion to two verses from the LXX: Lev 18:5 and Deut 6:4 (the Greek Shema). In short, Paul is effectively pitting one verse from the LXX against another.

First, “the hearers of the law” (οἱ ἀκροαταὶ νόμου) is an allusion to the Greek Shema and its command to “hear” (ἄκουε Ἰσραὴλ; LXX Deut 6:4) that “the Lord is one” and also to put the words of the law in one’s heart (LXX Deut 6:6–9). Paul’s denial that these hearers are automatically “just” before God, along with his implication that they are not necessarily “doers,” indicates that he has in mind a kind of literalistic understanding of the Greek Shema. The hearers of the law are those who merely “hear” and understand the dictum of the Greek Shema that “the Lord is one” and then attempt to put the words

⁵ Dunn, *Romans*, 1:97.

of the law deep in their heart. As good as this all may be, it is not enough for justification. Thus Paul here (though with less wittiness) sounds a lot like James in his retort to the one who has faith without works: “You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe, and tremble” (Jas 2:19). Paul, though, goes a step further: hearing the law is not even *necessary*. As he will argue next in Rom 2:14–15, Gentiles can be doers of the law without being hearers of it.

Second, Paul’s statement that “the doers of the law will be justified” in Rom 2:13 can be understood as an allusion to LXX Lev 18:5. There are at least two reasons to make this connection. The first is Paul’s rare use of the noun ποιητής (“doer”), which in his letters occurs only in Rom 2:13. There is a similar word in LXX Lev 18:5, which, in place of the Hebrew imperfect פָּעַל , has a participle: “the person who does (or *has done*; \acute{o} ποιήσας) these things will live in them.” By rendering the verb as a participle, the translator of LXX Lev 18:5 almost makes the verb into a substantive: “the-one-who-does-these-things-person” (\acute{o} ποιήσας αὐτὰ ἄνθρωπος). In Paul’s mind, then, \acute{o} ποιήσας could easily be transposed with a substantive like the noun ποιητής. Another reason we should connect οἱ ποιηταὶ νόμου and LXX Lev 18:5 is that Paul regularly cites the latter to refer to a general approach to justification (Gal 3:12; Rom 10:5). Interpreters of Paul have missed the allusion to this verse in Rom 2:13 probably because it has a negative connotation elsewhere in Paul. It only has a negative connotation, though, when it is understood in a literalistic way that excludes faith or the Gentiles. Thus in Gal 3:12 and Rom 10:5, Paul contrasts the literal Lev 18:5—which in both of these verses is quoted word-for-word—with texts that emphasize faith and inclusion, e.g., Hab 2:4 (Gal 3:11), Isa 28:16 (“everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame”; Rom 10:11), and

Joel 2:32 (“everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved”; Rom 10:13).

On the other hand, when Lev 18:5 is interpreted more loosely and is contrasted with the Greek Shema in Rom 2:13, it gains a positive significance. It becomes inclusive rather than exclusive; it makes room for the Gentiles, who in Rom 2:14 are then cited as an even better example of obedience than Jewish “hearers of the law.”

The inclusive interpretation of Lev 18:5 in Rom 2:13, just like the exclusive interpretation in Gal 3:12 and Rom 10:5, is distinctive to Paul. Contemporary Jews—including fellow Hellenistic Jews—would not have considered hearing and doing the law to be conflicting approaches to justification. After all, the Greek Shema appears within the law itself. To follow its command to hear and study the law *is* to do the law, or at least an important part of doing the law. There are also many other OT texts which imply a close connection between acquaintance with the law and obedience to the law. A good example is Ps 119:97: “How I love your law, Lord; I study it all day long.” In Rom 2:13, Paul tries to sever the connection between obedience and the literal study of the law in order to make room for obedient Gentiles who do not have the law. These Gentiles are not the “doers of the Torah” imagined by those at Qumran, but according to Paul they do what the law requires (τὰ τοῦ νόμου; Rom 2:14; cf. similar expressions in Rom 2:26; 8:4) and apparently are justified.

1.1.1.3. The Example of Obedient Gentiles in Romans 2:14–15

Even if my exegesis of Rom 2:13 is correct, it does not fully resolve the problem of the identity of the obedient Gentiles in Rom 2:14–15. Paul could easily use the

example of believing Gentiles here to make his point, but it seems he has in mind Gentiles who are *not* necessarily believers and who do what the law requires “by nature.” This example of non-Christians creates potential conflicts with two later passages in Romans. First, it seems that these Gentiles cannot be justified in light of Paul’s argument that all are under sin (Rom 3:9). Second, these Gentiles should not be able to do the law because the apostle claims in Rom 8:1–11 that the Spirit is necessary to empower obedience to the law.

There are two main ways that scholars attempt to overcome these potential incompatibilities. The most popular way is to argue that the Gentiles in Rom 2:14–15 must not be justified at all.⁶ This approach harmonizes the passage with Rom 3, but unfortunately it disjoins Rom 2:14–15 from the previous verse. Why would Paul say in Rom 2:13 that the doers of the law will be justified and then give an example of doers who are *not* justified? Others have claimed that the Gentiles in these verses are justified, but that they must be believers who obey through the Spirit.⁷ Again, the immediate

⁶ Just a few examples include Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 311; Otto Kuss, “Die Heiden und die Werke des Gesetzes (nach Röm 2, 14–16),” *MTZ* 5 (1954): 77–98; Günther Bornkamm, “Gesetz und Natur, Röm 2,14–16,” in *Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum: Gesammelte Aufsätze II* (BEvT 28; Munich: Kaiser, 1959), 93–118; Friedrich Kuhr, “Römer 2,14f. und die Verheissung bei Jeremia 31,31ff.,” *ZNW* 55 (1964): 243–61.

⁷ This view was popularized by Augustine, though it predates him. He articulates it in *Spir. et litt.* 26, 43–27, 47, where he reverses his earlier position, perhaps after having read Ambrosiaster, who strangely says that either Christians or non-Christians are in view in different parts of Rom 2:14–15 (*Ad Rom.* 2, 14 [CSEL 81.1, 75]). Augustine’s later view, though it is the minority position, has had many supporters: Wilhelm Mundle, “Zur Auslegung von Röm 2, 13ff.,” *TBl* 13 (1934): 249–56; Karl Barth, *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* (London: SCM, 1959), 36–37; Felix Flückiger, “Die Werke des Gesetzes bei den Heiden (nach Röm. 2,14ff.),” *TZ* 8 (1952): 17–42; Josef Bohumil Souček, “Zur Exegese von Röm. 2, 14ff.,” in *Antwort. Karl Barth zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1956* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956), 99–113; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975–1979), 1:155–63; N. T. Wright, “Law in Romans 2,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; WUNT 89; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996), 131–50; Roland Bergmeier, “Das Gesetz im Römerbrief,” in *Das Gesetz im Römerbrief und andere Studien zum Neuen Testament* (WUNT 121; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2000), 31–102; Simon J. Gathercole, “A Law unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2.14–15 Revisited,”

context makes this view unlikely. The description in Rom 2:14 of Gentiles who do the law “by nature” does not bring believers to mind.⁸ We are therefore left with the reading that is the most difficult, but also the most natural: they are non-Christians who are justified.

How then can the apparent incompatibilities which result from this reading be resolved? A full treatment of this problem goes beyond the scope of this study, but a couple of suggestions are in order. First, there is no reason that Paul cannot qualify his general statement that all are sinners. After all, Israel’s patriarchs, like the obedient Gentiles in Rom 2:14–15, do not always fit neatly into Paul’s argument on justification. They lived long before both Christ and the law, and they could not have been justified in precisely the same way as believers. That is why Paul is careful about the way he incorporates the patriarchs into his argument. He does not come out and say that the patriarchs believed in Christ, but instead he uses them as more general examples. Abraham is one who “believed God” apart from “works,” circumcision, and the law, and his faith was specifically in the God who raises the dead (Rom 4). Isaac was a child of God not through the flesh but through the promise (Rom 9:7–10). Jacob was chosen in advance apart from “works” (Rom 9:11–12). Thus Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all become positive examples, even though none of them are said to have believed in Christ.

JSNT 85 (2002): 27–49. Watson, like Augustine, changes his mind in *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles*, 192–216.

⁸ Gathercole makes the case that the dative φύσει (“by nature”) goes with what precedes (“they *do not have* the law by nature”) and not, as traditionally supposed, with what follows (“by nature they *do* the law”) (“A Law unto Themselves,” 36–37). As Dunn notes, however, the balance of the verse strongly suggests that the φύσει belongs with what follows (*Romans*, 1:98; also Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 310). I would add that ἐαυτοῖς (“to/for themselves”), which is also a dative, appears in the second half of the verse in the same construction, and it unquestionably goes with what follows (“not having the law, *for themselves they are* the law” rather than “*not having the law for themselves*, they are the law”).

On the other hand, although Paul freely cites the patriarchs in Rom 4 and Rom 9, it is true that he chooses not to incorporate the patriarchs—or any other OT exemplar—into his teaching on obedience in Rom 6–8. This decision it seems is what later leads James to add that Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac was a necessary act of obedience in addition to his faith (Jas 2:21–23). Even more significantly, James then cites a Gentile example, Rahab (Jas 2:25), and later recommends “the perseverance of Job” (Jas 5:11). Paul, on the other hand, never refers to *any* OT figure as an example of obedience, nor does he happen to mention any Gentile examples anywhere else in his letters. The example of obedient Gentiles in Rom 2:14–15 is therefore obscure within the Pauline corpus, but it has some precedent in the OT and is not entirely out of place in the NT as a whole.

Second, there was not necessarily a strict dichotomy in Paul’s mind between doing the law “by nature” and obeying God’s law through the Spirit (Rom 8:4). This dichotomy only became prominent later through Augustine, who objected to Pelagius’s extraordinary confidence in nature and countered that believers must adopt a thoroughly negative anthropology or else concede that Christ died for nothing.⁹ Augustine, however, had a much more robust theory of human nature than Paul, and what he meant by nature was something different from what the apostle means in Rom 2:14. Augustine distinguished nature from grace, and for him nature refers to the sinful condition in which everyone is born. After sharpening this distinction between nature and grace in the midst

⁹ See, e.g., *Nat. grat.* 50, 58, where Augustine marvels at the statement of Pelagius that the ability not to sin has been “inseparably implanted in nature” (trans. Roland J. Teske, S.J., in *Answer to the Pelagians* [vol. I/23 of *The Works of Saint Augustine*, ed. John E. Rotelle; New York: New City, 1997], 254).

of the Pelagian controversy, he then revisited Rom 2:14 and seemed to impose the distinction on the text. His exegesis posits that “by nature” (Lat. *naturaliter*; Gr. φύσει) in this verse refers either to nature which has been restored by grace (*De spir. et litt.* 26, 43–27, 47) or to the remnants of the law that had been written on the heart of Adam (*De spir. et litt.* 27, 48–29, 51).

Whereas nature in Augustine is opposed to grace, in Rom 2:14 nature (φύσις) is opposed to *law* (νόμος). This same sort of contrast appears also in 1 Cor 11:14, where Paul states that women are taught to use head coverings not only by tradition and custom but by “nature itself.” The words in this passage for tradition and custom (παράδοσις and συνήθεια respectively; 1 Cor 11:2, 16) are more or less synonymous with νόμος as it is contrasted with φύσις. Nature in this sense is a positive term. Paul may rely heavily on a negative anthropology in Romans, but, unlike Augustine, he also maintains a relatively positive view of nature. His respect for nature—along with the existence of righteous Gentiles in the OT—is likely what allows him to concede in Rom 2:14–15 that there are exceptional cases of obedient Gentiles who will be justified.

1.1.2. The Work of the Law

One of the most frequently misquoted lines from Paul is in Rom 2:15, which is often said to refer to “the law written on everyone’s heart.” The prevalence of this misquotation may be due in part to the ambiguity of the KJV, which says that the Gentiles in this verse “shew the work of the law written in their hearts.” Does “written” modify *work* or *law* here? Fortunately, the Greek is clear as to what it modifies: it is the *work* of

the law that is written on their hearts, not the law itself (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν). On the other hand, what Paul means by τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου (“the work of the law”) is not so clear. The phrase does not occur in any Jewish literature prior to or contemporary with Paul. It does appear once in Aristotle, but in a much different context.¹⁰ There are countless interpretations of τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου, including “what the law prescribes,” “the effect of the law,” “the business of the law,” “the core of the law,” “the epitome of the law,” “the work which the law requires,” and “the accomplishment of Torah,” just to name a few.¹¹ Some read it as an objective genitive, others as a subjective genitive. Some say it has the same negative connotation of the plural ἔργα νόμου (“works of law”; Rom 3:20, 28), others that it has the positive meaning of the similar expression in Jer 31:33[LXX 38:33]: “I will place my laws (νόμους μου) in their mind and write them on their hearts (ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν γράψω αὐτούς).” In short, there is nowhere near a consensus on the meaning of τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου in Rom 2:15.

My view is that this phrase is an objective genitive (just like “the doers of the law” two verses earlier), and that it has a positive connotation, but that it runs *contrary* to the literal meaning of Jer 31:33. The phrase is part of what may be called a “counter-allusion,” which can be defined as an allusion that only makes sense if it is placed *in opposition* to the text to which it alludes. On its own, “the work of the law written on their hearts” does not quite fit with Jer 31:33, nor does it make a lot of sense on its own. What does it mean for work (of any kind) to be written on the heart? Anyone familiar

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.15.7 §1375b. Aristotle says that the written law “does not do the work of the law.” See Hilary B. P. Mijoga, *The Pauline Notion of Deeds of the Law* (San Francisco: International Scholars, 1999), 59–61.

¹¹ For a discussion of the various translations of τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου, see Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 311.

with Jeremiah would have expected Paul to speak of the law itself being written on the heart, not the work of the law.

It seems therefore that the apostle has made a significant alteration to a well-known expression. His concern within the context of Rom 2:15 is not with the actual words of the law being written on the heart, as in Jer 31:33, but with the inward *doing* of the law by Gentiles who are not even familiar with the law. In other words, the “hearers of the law” who follow the literal meaning of the Greek Shema and of Jer 31:33 are concerned with the λόγος of the law, but these Gentile “doers of the law” are busy performing the ἔργον of the law.¹² This implied contrast between λόγος and ἔργον can be seen in the following paraphrase of Rom 2:13–15a:

It is the *doers* of the law, not the *hearers* of the law, who are justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature what the law requires, they are the law for themselves. They demonstrate that the *work* of the law—not the *word* or *letter* of the law—is written on their hearts.

This paraphrase shows that the work of the law is a positive expression that parallels the doers of the law. The letter of the law, on the other hand, parallels the hearers of the law. It is the letter that is in view in Jer 31:33, which contains the same assumption as the Greek Shema, namely, that placing the words of the law deep within one’s heart (or *mind*, the heart being the center of understanding in Hebraic thought), i.e., learning the law, will lead to obedience, and is itself a critical part of obeying the law. What Paul is doing is undermining this assumption, just as he does in Rom 2:13 with the distinction between hearing and doing the law. He expects the audience to be familiar with the notion of the νόμος (or νόμοι, so LXX Jer 38:33) being written on the heart and to notice that he has

¹² The words λόγος (“word”) and ἔργον (“deed”) are also contrasted in Rom 15:18.

added that it is the work of the law, not the law itself, that is written on the hearts of these Gentiles. To make note of this important difference between Paul and Jeremiah is not to “split hairs,” as Gathercole claims.¹³ In light of Paul’s penchant for pitting OT texts against each other, it should not be surprising that Rom 2:15 actually runs contrary to the literal meaning of Jer 31:33. For him, placing the law on the heart is not necessary, nor will it lead to obedience and justification. All that matters is that kind of law-doing which even Gentiles can demonstrate.

1.1.3. “Works of Law”

Before the breakthrough study of Sanders, most exegetes understood “works of law” (ἔργα νόμου) primarily in the light of Rom 3:27 and Rom 4:2–6. The argument was that Paul rejected “works of law” because in these verses it is associated with “boasting before God,” “works,” and the potential of “earning” justification.¹⁴ Since Sanders, there has been a reevaluation of the meaning of ἔργα νόμου in Paul’s letters. The most prominent study is the “New Perspective” of Dunn, who interprets ἔργα νόμου as badges

¹³ Gathercole, “A Law unto Themselves,” 41. Gathercole sees in Rom 2:15 an allusion to the “new covenant obedience” envisioned in Jer 31:31–34, but what Jeremiah has in mind is a deeper *knowledge* of the Torah; obedience is only implied. It is precisely Jeremiah’s assumption about obedience—that knowing the Torah is closely associated with doing the Torah—that Paul is calling into question. Paul does mention the new covenant in 2 Cor 3, but here again he makes a distinction that goes against the literal meaning of Jeremiah. The covenant Paul has in mind is “not of the letter but of the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:6), whereas the original text of Jer 31:31–34 *is* describing a covenant of the letter. The prophet imagines that it is through deeper acquaintance with the Torah that Israel will become God’s people and be forgiven of their sins.

¹⁴ For a survey of the multitude of scholars who have followed this interpretation of ἔργα νόμου, see Mijoga, *Pauline Notion*, 5–21. Mijoga credits the popularity of the theology of Martin Luther for the prominence of this view, but he also acknowledges that Luther’s own exegesis of Paul was more nuanced. For more recent examples, see Douglas J. Moo, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” *WTJ* 45: (1983) 73–100; Cranfield, “The Works of the Law,” 89–101.

of membership in the covenant people of Israel. These badges constitute the “minimal commitment” required to be considered part of God’s people, and they refer primarily to distinctive Jewish practices, e.g., circumcision and food laws.¹⁵ In this view, Paul is not opposing “works-righteousness” but rather these nationalistic badges of membership.

My position is that neither of these interpretations is entirely wrong, but that they share a common methodological flaw: they seem to assume that what Paul means by ἔργα νόμου corresponds with the usual Jewish understanding of this term. By contrast, my view is that Paul, especially in Romans, often understands ἔργα νόμου much differently from other Jews. As a result there is some validity to both the New Perspective and the older view. The New Perspective focuses only on those aspects of Paul’s argument that are in line with the way other Jews thought of “works of law.” Dunn is correct that Paul connects ἔργα νόμου specifically with badges of membership like circumcision (Rom 3:29–30) and food laws (Gal 2:11–14), but ἔργα νόμου cannot therefore be limited to these badges. The older view is also correct in that Paul does indeed speak of ἔργα νόμου in terms of works, boasting, and perhaps even earning righteousness, but the apostle appears to be distinctive in this regard when compared to contemporary Jews.

To defend this position on Paul and “works of law,” I will first discuss the meaning of similar expressions in the Qumran literature before turning to Paul’s letters.

¹⁵ Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *The New Perspective on Paul* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 108–111. Dunn also includes the Sabbath, but of course one might say that strictly speaking the Sabbath is the *cessation* of works. There are other interpretations of ἔργα νόμου as well. Lloyd Gaston classifies it as a subjective genitive (“Works of Law as a Subjective Genitive,” *SR* 13 [1984]: 39–46), but several have criticized this view (see Mijoga, *The Pauline Notion*, 49–51, 91–92). Michael Bachmann argues that ἔργα νόμου should be translated “the regulations of the law” (*die Regelungen des Gesetzes*) rather than “deeds of the law” (“Rechtfertigung und Gesetzeswerke bei Paulus,” *TZ* 49 [1993]: 1–33).

1.1.3.1. In the Qumran Literature

Like οἱ ποιηταὶ νόμου, the term ἔργα νόμου does not occur in any Jewish literature prior to or contemporary with Paul except in the Qumran literature in various Hebrew forms.¹⁶ The presence of parallel expressions in Qumran, though, may be enough to conclude that “works of law” had become a common phrase by Paul’s time.¹⁷ In any event, there are significant differences in the way the phrase is used in Qumran and in Paul. In the Qumran literature, parallel expressions appear in three documents. First, 4QMMT C 27 (4Q398 14–17 II, 3) mentions מקצת מעשי התורה (“some of the works of the Torah”), an almost precise Hebrew equivalent of ἔργα νόμου:

Now, we have written to you *some of the works of the Torah* (מקצת מעשי התורה), those which we determined would be beneficial for you and your people, because we have seen [that] you possess insight and knowledge of the Torah. Understand all these things and beseech Him to set your counsel straight and so keep you away from evil thoughts and the counsel of Belial. Then you shall rejoice at the end time when you find the essence of our words to be true. And it will be reckoned to you as righteousness, in that you have done what is right and good before Him, to your own benefit and to that of Israel. (4QMMT C 26–32 [4Q398 14–17 II, 2–8])¹⁸

¹⁶ So concludes Mijoga, who notes that the formula “works of” (מעשי; Gr. ἔργα + gen.) appears regularly in the OT, and that it can refer to good or bad works (*Pauline Notion*, 62, 74–77). He concludes that anyone familiar with the OT (whether in Hebrew or in Greek) would have recognized this common Semitic construction in ἔργα νόμου. He also lists several texts from the MT/LXX which use עשה (“to do”; Gr. ποιᾶν) in the context of תורה (“Torah”; Gr. νόμος; Num 6:13–21; Deut 17:11; 27:26; 28:58; 29:28; 31:12; Josh 1:8; 23:6; 2 Chr 14:3; 33:8), but he concedes that only one of these texts uses the two words right next to each other (2 Chr 14:3; ולעשות התורה; LXX ποιῆσαι τὸν νόμον), and that none of them has the noun מעשה (“work”; Gr. ἔργον).

¹⁷ Ibid., 166.

¹⁸ Adapted from the translation of Abegg in Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 364. The only change I have made to Abegg’s translation of 4QMMT is that I have rendered תורה as “Torah” rather than “Law.”

There are several things to note about this passage. First, the text refers to the items listed earlier in the document as *some* of the works of the Torah, and the ones that are mentioned have to do with a variety of topics, including ritual purity, sacrifices, and marriage.¹⁹ Thus there is more in view than badges of covenant membership, even though the document concerns only some of the works of the Torah. On the other hand, there is no assumption at all that justification through works of the Torah is impossible. Israel is obligated to do the works of the Torah, and there is no hint of any other means of justification. It is also implied that doing the works of the Torah will lead to being “counted righteous” and “doing what is right and good.”²⁰ Although the kind of obedience envisioned and the particular interpretations of the Torah are, as in *Pesher Habakkuk*, sectarian (here the readers are urged to avoid the “counsel of Belial,” another pejorative reference to a rival group), the connection between being counted righteous (an allusion to Gen 15:6, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”) and obedience is a common Jewish theme.²¹ Finally, there is no

¹⁹ James D. G. Dunn claims that both מעשי התורה and ἔργα νόμου have to do with creating “a boundary which marks out those of faith/faithfulness from others” (“4QMMT and Galatians,” *NTS* 43 [1997]: 151), but this definition is too narrow and has been criticized, e.g., by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, who says that the “broad outlook” of the matters discussed in 4QMMT excludes Dunn’s definition (*According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle* [New York: Paulist Press, 1993], 23). See also the criticism in Jacqueline C. R. de Roo, “*Works of the Law*” at Qumran and in Paul (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 94–95.

²⁰ Mijoga, *Pauline Notion*, 101.

²¹ Martin Abegg suggests that the author of 4QMMT has in mind Ps 106:30–31, which itself alludes to Gen 15:6 as it recounts the intervention of Phineas and concludes that “it was counted to him as righteousness” (“Paul, ‘Works of the Law,’ and MMT,” *BAR* 20 [1994]: 52–55). De Roo argues that there is a double allusion to both texts (“*Works of the Law*,” 75–79). It is better, though, to think of 4QMMT as conforming to a tradition, one which Ps 106:30–31 helped establish, of reading Gen 15:6 in terms of obedience.

dichotomy between works of the Torah and grace or atonement. It is assumed that doing the works of the Torah is the means by which any needed grace is obtained.

The second relevant text, 4QFlorilegium (4Q174), apparently contains the words מַעֲשֵׂי תוֹרָה (“works of the Torah”; 4QFlor 1–2 I, 7), which would be a precise equivalent of ἔργα νόμου, but the expression seems out of place: “And he has commanded that they build him a temple of Adam so that in it they might offer up before him *works of Torah*.”²² Moreover, the manuscript is hard to read. The top half of the first word in מַעֲשֵׂי תוֹרָה is cut off, but the letters are still discernible, except that in the second word it is possible to read תוֹדָה (“thanksgiving”) in place of תוֹרָה (“Torah”). Because the context here is about building a temple, the latter makes just as much sense, if not more (“that they might offer up before him *works of thanksgiving*”). If “works of Torah” is the correct reading, there are two ways the expression can be understood: in terms of the offering of sacrifices or more generally as the performance of the whole Torah as a metaphorical offering.²³ Either way, it is significant that 4QFlor 1–2 I, 7 is possibly another example of a text that speaks of works of Torah in the context of sacrifices.

²² Translation mine. Wise translates, “He has commanded that they build Him a Temple of Adam (or Temple of Humankind), and that in it they sacrifice (מִקְטִירִם) to Him proper sacrifices” (Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 227). The *hiphil* participle מִקְטִירִם literally means “making something (e.g., sacrifices or incense) smoke” (“that in it they might make *works of Torah* smoke before him”).

²³ Mijoga makes a good case that “Torah” is to be preferred to “thanksgiving” because the text says later in 4QFlor 1–3 II, 2 that “they shall do the whole of the Torah” (וַעֲשׂוּ אֶת כּוֹל תּוֹרָה) (*Pauline Notion*, 104–7). Mijoga also says that works of Torah in 4QFlorilegium should be understood symbolically as works which are “offered as incense” to God, and he cites the symbolic use of incense as prayers in Rev 8:3–5 to support this claim. De Roo, independently of Mijoga (she is apparently unaware of his monograph), accepts the reading “Torah” on similar grounds and agrees that the text is metaphorically referring to more than literal sacrifices (*“Works of the Law,”* 11–17).

Finally, *Rule of the Community* (1QS) twice mentions מעשיו בתורה (“his works in the Torah”), a less precise equivalent to ἔργα νόμου, in the context of examining initiates:

When anyone enters the Covenant—to live according to all these ordinances, to make common cause with the Congregation of Holiness—they shall investigate his spiritual qualities as a community, each member taking part. They shall investigate his understanding *and his works in the Torah*. (1QS V, 21)

When he has passed a full year in the *Yahad*, the general membership shall inquire into the details of his understanding *and his works in the Torah*. (1QS VI, 18)²⁴

Here one’s “works in the Torah” are a criterion, along with one’s “understanding,” which is the basis for a candidate’s full initiation into the community. There is again a sectarian flavor here, but this time obedience to the Torah is seen as something which is measureable and which can be readily seen in a candidate. As in 4QMMT (and perhaps 4QFlorilegium), the assumption is that the works of the Torah can and must be performed.

1.1.3.2. In Galatians

The first time Paul uses ἔργα νόμου is in Galatians, and the most obvious difference from Qumran is the apostle’s stance that “works of law” is not a viable means of justification. The term appears first in Gal 2:16, in which it occurs three times. The context here concerns the incident at Antioch where Peter had compelled the Gentiles “to live as a Jew” (Ἰουδαϊκῶς ζῆν) and “to Judaize” (Ἰουδαΐζειν; Gal 2:14) by his sudden

²⁴ Adapted from the translation of Wise in idem, Abegg, and Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 133–35. Wise renders מעשיו בתורה inconsistently as “works vis-à-vis the Law” (1QS V, 21) and “works of the Law” (1QS VI, 18). De Roo rightly prefers the former, but she perhaps goes too far when she therefore excludes this text as a parallel to ἔργα νόμου (“*Works of the Law*,” 73–74).

decision to withdraw from them and observe exclusive eating customs. Paul's reason for using Peter as a negative example, though, seems to have more to do with circumcision than eating customs. He has already mentioned in Gal 2:4 that there had been a conflict in Jerusalem regarding the necessity of Gentile circumcision, and two later texts (Gal 5:2–6 and Gal 6:12–15) confirm that compulsion to be circumcised is in fact the main problem he is confronting in the letter. In order to convince the Galatians not to submit to circumcision, in Gal 2:16 Paul creates a new contrast between ἔργα νόμου and πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“faith in Jesus Christ”), the latter of which also occurs here for the first time in Paul's letters.²⁵ In this verse he makes an argument which is unprecedented in Jewish literature: none will be justified by “works of law,” and another means of justification is necessary, namely, faith in Christ.

The next set of occurrences is in Gal 3:2, 5, in which ἔργα νόμου is contrasted with ἀκοή πίστεως (“the hearing of faith” or “the message of faith”). Paul associates the latter with the Spirit and the former with the flesh, again indicating that physical circumcision is the specific “work” of the law he has in mind. His decision to use ἀκοή πίστεως in this passage rather than πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is probably so that he can introduce the example of Abraham, who of course did not “believe in Christ Jesus” (Gal 2:16) in the same way as the Galatians. Paul begins his discussion of the example of

²⁵ For a good defense of πίστις Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive (“faith in Christ”) rather than the recently popular subjective genitive (“faith/faithfulness of Christ”), see R. Barry Matlock, “Detheologizing the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective,” *NovT* 42 (2000): 1–23. Matlock argues convincingly that the close connection between πίστις and πιστεύειν in the context of πίστις Χριστοῦ rules out the subjective genitive. It may also be relevant that the objective genitive “is very common with substantives denoting a frame of mind or an emotion” (Herbert W. Smyth, *A Greek Grammar for Colleges* [rev. Gordon M. Messing; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956], 319 [§1331]). Thus it would be quite natural to assume that πίστις Χριστοῦ (cf. φόβος Χριστοῦ, “fear of Christ”; Eph 5:21) is an objective genitive unless the context suggests otherwise.

Abraham by quoting Gen 15:6, but for him this verse proves that Abraham was “counted righteous” by faith and not by “works of law” (Gal 3:6). In 4QMMT, by contrast, it is precisely the works of the Torah that allow one to be counted righteous.

Paul further develops his new distinction between ἔργα νόμου and Abrahamic faith in Gal 3:7–14. It is “those of faith” (οἱ ἐκ πίστεως; Gal 3:7, 9), not those “who are of works of law” (ὅσοι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν; Gal 3:10), who are the children of Abraham. Those who follow “works of law,” far from being counted righteous, are in fact under the curse of Deut 27:26, which demands that “all the things that are written in the book of the law” be done (Gal 3:10). The possibility that the law itself provides a means of redemption from the curse is not even considered. The law is simply “not of faith” (Gal 3:12) and therefore cannot bring justification.

The exact phrase ἔργα νόμου does not appear again in Galatians, but it is significant that Gal 5:3 warns that succumbing to circumcision means that the *whole law* must then be kept. Dunn’s restriction of “works of law” to badges of covenant membership therefore seems unwarranted. On the other hand, Paul does not cite any specific observances other than circumcision and exclusive eating customs, both of which could indeed be called “badges.” He does not seem to anticipate the objection that some observances are intended to provide grace, and he even says that those who return to seeking justification through the law “have fallen from grace” (Gal 5:4). As will be seen, this apparent dichotomy between law and grace becomes much more prominent in Romans.

1.1.3.3. In Romans

Galatians uses ἔργα νόμου a total of six times, but in Romans it occurs only twice: in Rom 3:20, in which it is again the alternative of πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, and in Rom 3:28, where the latter is shortened to πίστις. Yet Paul does not simply repeat all of the same arguments from Galatians. He omits the reference to the curse, there is not the same emphasis on the need to do the whole law, and he adds new arguments which dissociate ἔργα νόμου not only from righteousness but from grace, atonement, and the Hellenistic-Jewish axiom that “God is one” (although cf. the use of this axiom in Gal 3:20, which is hard to follow). As I will argue later in the present chapter, he also shortens ἔργα νόμου to ἔργα in Rom 4 and 9–11, but the shortened expression is not always interchangeable with ἔργα νόμου and should be discussed separately.

In Rom 3:20, there is seen again the earlier proof from Gal 2:16 that “from works of law ‘no flesh will be justified before him’” (Ps 143:2), but the context is much different. The argument in Rom 3:9–20 is that neither Jews nor Gentiles possess an advantage, and that all are sinners. The impossibility of justification by “works of law” here becomes a reason that the Jews, at least with respect to sin, possess no advantage through the law. Then, in the following passage (Rom 3:21–26), Paul considerably widens the dichotomy established in Galatians between the law and grace. Whereas “works of law” leads to condemnation and the knowledge of sin, faith in Christ brings grace, redemption, and expiation for sin “apart from the law.” Even though redemption and sacrificial atonement are mentioned frequently in the law itself, Paul does not consider the possibility that they are available through the law.²⁶

²⁶ The claim of Dunn that Rom 3:20 is taking aim at a devout Jew who “was usually conscious of his need of repentance and for the atonement provided within the law” is unlikely in this context (*Romans*,

In Rom 3:28, ἔργα νόμου is spoken of in terms of boasting, the law of works, Jewish exclusivity, and circumcision. In Rom 3:27, Paul inverts the expression to “[the law] of works” (τῶν ἔργων) and insists that boasting—presumably boasting on the basis of ἔργα νόμου—is excluded by the “law of faith” (a play on the word νόμος, which can also mean “principle”). This flipping of the expression “works of law” allows it to be shortened to “works” later in Romans. In Rom 3:28, Paul reveals what the law of faith is: “a person is justified by faith, apart from works of law” (Rom 3:28).²⁷ Then, in Rom 3:29–30, he associates “works of law” with Jewish exclusivity and the requirement of circumcision, both of which, he says, conflict with the unity of God: “Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles as well, if indeed God is one, who will justify the circumcised from faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” Here circumcision, as in Galatians, is a specific example of a “work” of the law, but it would seem to go without saying that most Jews would not have agreed that the unity of God renders circumcision unnecessary, or that it conflicts with the idea that the Lord is their God. In fact, in the Greek Shema the statement concerning the unity of God is immediately juxtaposed with the assertion that the Lord belongs to Israel: “Hear O Israel: the Lord *our* God, the Lord is one” (LXX Deut 6:4). For Paul, however, the Greek Shema applies equally to the Gentiles. Because God is one, God belongs to all, not just to the circumcised members of Israel.

1:154–55). Paul does not even consider that grace is available through the law, and he has already given examples (e.g., Rom 2:4) of those who are hostile to divine mercy and ignorant of their need to repent.

²⁷ Dunn’s argument that νόμος in Rom 3:27 means “Torah” is unconvincing (*Romans*, 1:186–87). He tries too hard to connect the thought with Rom 3:31 (“through faith we establish the law”), and as a result he overlooks the close relationship of Rom 3:27 with the immediately following verse, which seems to define the law of works and the law of faith as two principles (“laws”) of justification.

It can safely be concluded, then, that many contemporary Jews would have found Paul's portrayal of ἔργα νόμου in Romans—and in Galatians as well—not only shocking but perhaps confusing. Grace and atonement are by no means absent in the Torah, and although a tension can be observed in the Torah between grace and the requirement of obedience, there is no reason to suppose that this tension was considered unacceptable.²⁸ On the one hand, there is the demand of complete obedience to the entire Torah. There was no “minimal commitment” in this regard. In a sense it was all or nothing, as the older works-righteousness view has long maintained. On the other hand, as Dunn's New Perspective rightly emphasizes, there was an expectation of continual failure, and a major part of doing the law was repentance and atonement for sins.

In no sense does Paul view “works of law” through the lens of this tension between the need for obedience and the expectation of failure. Instead he speaks of “works of law” as if it were wholly incompatible with divine grace. The apostle has a great deal to say about grace in Rom 3:21–26, and he also uses atonement language in Rom 3:24–26 (and later in Rom 8:3) to describe Christ's sacrifice, but strangely he never says anything about the means of grace and atonement that other Jews assumed were available through the law. He calls Christ a ἱλαστήριον, the same term used in the LXX for a “mercy seat,” but he does not tell us precisely why a new kind of ἱλαστήριον is necessary. This omission would seem to be a hole in the argument, one which the writer of Hebrews later tries to fill (see, e.g., Heb 10:4: “It is impossible for the blood of bulls

²⁸ This same tension can be observed in Sanders's description of first-century Judaism as “covenantal nomism,” although Sanders himself does not make note of the tension. He says that in the pattern of covenantal nomism “all those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God's mercy belong to the group which will be saved” (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 422). There is an unresolved tension in this sentence between atonement and mercy on the one hand and the requirement of obedience on the other. De Roo notes a similar tension in the Qumran literature (*Works of the Law*, 26–41).

and goats to take away sins”).²⁹ Another apparent hole is that Paul does not acknowledge that the law’s “just requirements” (Rom 2:14, 26; 8:4), which he admits must be done in order to be justified, were an important part of the works of the law. These holes would have been particularly noticeable to a Jewish reader, and it is hard to imagine that many Jews who had been raised to study and revere the Torah—even those who accepted the gospel—would have adopted Paul’s rather grim view of “works of law.” Indeed, Paul himself would likely have found it offensive before his own conversion.³⁰ Nevertheless, his letters reveal that he now has his own “new perspective” on Judaism, one in which the expression “works of law” has lost its implicit relationship to grace, to Abrahamic faith, and ultimately, to justification.

1.1.4. Conclusion

The three expressions discussed above may look and sound similar, but each of them has a different meaning. First, “the doers of the law” in Rom 2:13 is a *positive* term and is opposed to the hearers of the law. The doers of the law are not Jews who seek justification by “works of law,” but those who, like the Gentiles in Rom 2:14, follow Lev

²⁹ A. Andrew Das has argued that, despite Paul’s silence on the efficacy of atonement through the law, the description of Jesus as a ἱλαστήριον constitutes a *de facto* rejection of efficacy (*Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001], 143–44). Nevertheless, the precise reason for this rejection remains unclear.

³⁰ Krister Stendahl has widely been credited (rightly) with dispelling the notion that Paul as a Pharisee already thought of the law as impossible to keep (“Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969], 80–81). In order to get a glimpse into Paul’s Pharisaic past, Stendahl points not to the grim view of the law in Rom 7 but to Phil 3:6, where the apostle indicates that he thought himself “blameless” under the law before he came to know Christ. I would also point to the speech in Acts 23:1, where Paul begins by testifying that he has lived “in all good conscience (πάσῃ συνειδήσει ἀγαθῇ) before God” his entire life.

18:5 without necessarily observing the literal prescription in the Greek Shema to hear and study the law. Second, “the work of the law” in Rom 2:15 is also a *positive* term and is by implication opposed to the word or letter of the law. It is based on the common Greek distinction between λόγος/ἔργον and follows closely from the contrast between hearing and doing two verses earlier. There are those who listen attentively to the letter in accordance with the Greek Shema and Jer 31:33, but only those who do the law—even if they have not heard it—will be justified.

Third, “works of law” is the *negative* alternative of faith in Christ. Whereas Rom 2:13 affirms a new and inclusive interpretation of Lev 18:5 by contrasting it with the Greek Shema, Rom 3:20 rejects an *exclusive* understanding of “works of law” on the basis of Ps 143:2. The apparent contradiction between Rom 2:13 and Rom 3:20 is thus the result of two different, yet fully compatible understandings of Lev 18:5:

The one who does these things will live in them. (Lev 18:5)

It is not the hearers of the law [an exclusive group] who are just before God, but the doers of the law (in an inclusive sense) will be justified. (Rom 2:13)

By works of law [in an exclusive sense] “all flesh will not be justified before him.” (Rom 3:20)

In both Rom 2:13 and Rom 3:20, an exclusive reading of the OT is eschewed. The real problem is Paul’s wholesale rejection of justification by “works of law” in Rom 3:20, which not only represents a significant departure from contemporary Jewish thought but comes at the cost of two potential holes in the argument. Paul does not mention that the law already provides a means of grace and atonement, and he seems to ignore that the law itself requires obedience to what he calls the law’s just requirements. In order to close these holes, he would have to (1) include an argument, like the one in Heb 10:1–4,

that tells why the means of atonement under the law are ineffective, and (2) concede that obedience to the law's just requirements could be considered a more positive form of "works of law." As I will show in the next section, however, Paul gambles that it would be more rhetorically effective for his predominantly Gentile audience to divorce "works of law" entirely from grace and from the possibility of righteousness. This decision allows him to be more forceful about a fundamental choice that he is presenting to them: faith in Christ or "works of law."

1.2. "WORKS" IN ROMANS 3–4 AND ROMANS 9–11

After ἔργα νόμου first appears in Rom 3:20, the word ἔργα ("works") suddenly begins to be used consistently on the negative end of various contrasts (Rom 3:27; 4:2, 6; 9:11–12, 32; 11:6; similarly the verbs ἐργάζεσθαι in Rom 4:4–5 and πράσσειν in Rom 9:11), and after Rom 3:28 ἔργα νόμου never occurs again. The critical question here is how these two terms, ἔργα and ἔργα νόμου, relate to one another. According to Dunn, the negative uses of ἔργα are simply "shorthand" for ἔργα νόμου and thus refer mainly to nationalistic boundary markers and not to good works as such.³¹ Every time the word ἔργα appears in Rom 3–4 and 9–11, we can substitute ἔργα νόμου and sidestep any potential conflict with the positive doctrine of judgment according to works.

³¹ Dunn, *Romans*, 1:154. Fitzmyer calls ἔργα an "abbreviated form" (*Romans*, 338). An alternative to the view of Dunn and Fitzmyer is that of Moo, who says that "works of law" is a "subset" of the broader term "works" (in the sense of moral actions; "'Works of the Law,'" 91–99), presumably because the latter is technically mentioned first in the teaching on judgment according to works in Rom 2:6. The teaching on judgment, though, is a positive teaching, whereas "works of law," and then all subsequent references to works, has a negative connotation.

Dunn's solution is on the right track, but two important caveats must be added. First, as I have argued, ἔργα νόμου cannot be reduced to boundary markers. The second caveat—and this is one of the more difficult things to grasp about the rhetoric of Romans—is that, although ἔργα in Rom 3–4 and Rom 9–11 is properly a shortened form of ἔργα νόμου, *the two expressions are not always interchangeable*. Once ἔργα is separated from its original molecule, it quickly takes on different meanings. This phenomenon may seem odd, but in Rom 4 it occurs also with respect to πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, which is likewise used only twice (Rom 3:22, 26), and which is then shortened to πίστις throughout the rest of the letter.³² The shorter form is used throughout Rom 4, but it does not necessarily mean faith specifically in Christ; Abraham is a more general example of “believing God,” and never is it implied clearly that he believed in Christ.

To help show more precisely the relationship of ἔργα and ἔργα νόμου in Romans, I will once more begin with a discussion of the Qumran literature, which contains at least two documents which shorten the expression in a similar way. I will then turn to Romans and make the case that here too there is a shortening of the expression, but that the shorter term has various shades of meaning within each respective context. I will also argue that the various senses of ἔργα in Rom 3–4 and Rom 9–11 possess a fundamental unity. In most cases, Paul is reacting against the usual emphasis on “works” in Jewish exegesis of the patriarchs with regard to justification and election. Finally, I will show that later NT writers did not understand Paul's rejection of works as a complete rejection of the

³² Paul varies the expression as πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Rom 3:22) and πίστις Ἰησοῦ (Rom 3:26) before shortening it to πίστις in Rom 3:28. It is varied similarly in Gal 2:16 (πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, πίστις Χριστοῦ). See Dunn, *Romans*, 1:167.

principle of divine retribution, and that they sought to qualify the rhetoric of Romans in order to preserve clearly the positive role of works in justification.

1.2.1. The Shortened Form in the Qumran Literature

In the Qumran literature, the longer and shorter forms are more fully interchangeable than in Romans.³³ It is significant, though, that the shorter form could be employed comfortably without fear of misunderstanding. The shorter form appears in two documents. First, in *Rule of the Community*, מעשיו בתורה (“his works in the Torah”) is three times shortened to מעשיו (“his works”) and once to מעשיהם (“their works”) throughout 1QS V, 21–VI, 18 as part of the formula “his understanding (or spiritual qualities) and his works” in the context of examining candidates:

They are to be enrolled by rank, one man higher than his fellow—as the case may be—by virtue of his understanding *and his works*. Thus each will obey his fellow, the inferior his superior. They shall examine their spiritual qualities *and their works* annually, promoting a man because of his understanding and perfection of walk, or demoting him because of failure. (1QS V, 23–24)

If anyone of Israel volunteers for enrollment in the society of the *Yahad*, the man appointed as leader of the general membership shall examine him regarding his understanding *and his works*. (1QS VI, 13–14)

If he does proceed in joining the society of the *Yahad*, he must not touch the pure food of the general membership before they have examined him as to his spiritual fitness *and his works*, and not before a full year has passed. (1QS VI, 16–17)³⁴

³³ That the two forms are interchangeable has been established by Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4.V: Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah* (DJD X; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 139 n. 43.

³⁴ Adapted from the translation of Wise in idem, Abegg, and Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 133–34. The contention of Moo that “works” was the “popular Jewish way of describing the observance of commandments” is unlikely (““Works of the Law,”” 92–93). He cites some OT texts to support this statement (2 Chr 17:4; Isa 66:18; Sir 16:12), but, as Fitzmyer observes, these do not imply that obedience to the law is specifically in view (*Romans*, 388). Bachmann notes the importance of Exod 18:20, which in the

It is interesting that the shortened form, just as in Romans, appears more frequently than the longer form. In *Rule of the Community*, though, the meaning of the shortened form is not at all ambiguous. It has the same meaning as the longer form, and it is abbreviated for the sake of convenience and brevity.

The second text is 4QMMT B 2 (4Q394 3–7 I, 2), which has מַעֲשִׂים (“works”) at the beginning of the second part of what was once (probably) a three-part document, the first part of which is no longer extant. I have already discussed the meaning of the expression “some of the works of the Torah” (מִקְצַת מַעֲשֵׂי הַתּוֹרָה; 4QMMT C 27 [4Q398 14–17 II, 3]), which occurs in the third and final part of the document, but at the beginning of the extant text the word מַעֲשִׂים is used absolutely:

These are some of our pronouncements [concerning the law of Go]d. Specifically, s[ome of the pronouncements] concerning works (מַעֲשִׂים) that w[e have determined...and al]l of them concern [defiling mixtures] and the purity of [the sanctuary...] (4QMMT B 1–3 [4Q394 3–7 I, 1–3])³⁵

There is little question that מַעֲשִׂים here means the same thing as the longer expression. It is not at all ambiguous (although the text is fragmentary), and the addition of הַתּוֹרָה to מַעֲשִׂים at the end of the document does not significantly alter the latter’s meaning. In light of the subject matter of the body of 4QMMT, by then the reader already knows that the works in question have to do with the Torah.

LXX mentions τὰ ἔργα (the MT has the singular מַעֲשֶׂה) in the context of doing the law (“Rechtfertigung,” 30), but there is nothing in Romans which suggests that Paul has this verse in mind.

³⁵ Adapted from Abegg’s translation in Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 359. Abegg’s translation has “works of the law,” but the Hebrew only has מַעֲשִׂים.

1.2.2. The Shortened Form in Romans 3–4 and Romans 9–11

There are five passages in Rom 3–4 and Rom 9–11 in which the shortened form appears. The main difference between Paul and the Qumran literature is that in Paul the implicit connection between the shorter and longer forms is not always immediately obvious. A first-time reader could not pick up Romans and start in Rom 4 or Rom 9–11 and understand entirely what is meant by ἔργα without looking back at what is written about ἔργα νόμου in Rom 3. As will be seen, Paul also has different reasons for using ἔργα absolutely from the writers at Qumran.

The first time ἔργα appears in a negative sense is in Rom 3:27, but here the word νόμος is implied as Paul reverses the order of ἔργα νόμου by means of the elliptical expression τῶν ἔργων: “Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? [That] of works (τῶν ἔργων)? No, but by the law of faith. For we count a person justified by faith, apart from works of law” (Rom 3:27–28). The result of this use of an elliptical expression is that Paul can then safely shorten ἔργα νόμου to ἔργα for the rest of the letter, and the reader has already been alerted of the implicit relationship of the two. Similarly, πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is shortened to πίστις in Rom 3:28 and then never used again in the letter in the longer form. The use of the term “law of works” also hints that much of the argument will be directed against what Paul considers to be a misappropriation of the principle of divine recompense.

Now that he has signaled his intention to shorten πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ and ἔργα νόμου to πίστις and ἔργα respectively, Paul immediately employs the shorter forms in Rom 4:2–6 as he discusses the example of Abraham. Here the reader can begin to

understand *why* the apostle shortened the terms in the first place. One reason is that it would be much harder to argue directly that Abraham did the works of the law before the law was given, or that he believed in Christ before Christ actually came.³⁶ Paul therefore makes the more general claim in Rom 4:2–3 that Abraham was justified by faith and not “works.” He then uses the example of Abraham in Rom 4:3–6 to draw a general conclusion about how a person (ἄνθρωπος) is justified. There is an implication, though, that Abraham himself was justified in much the same way as believers are. The same is true in Rom 4:17–21, where Paul declares that Abraham “believed the God who gives life to the dead” and interprets the story of Abraham and Sarah as one of heroic faith in the resurrection of the dead. For Paul, the faith of Abraham is not mere belief in the Jewish God; it is the precursor of the faith he now preaches.

Another likely reason that Paul uses ἔργα rather than ἔργα νόμου in Rom 4:2–6 has something to do with Gentile sensibilities. As Dunn has noted, in other Jewish literature the tendency was to treat Abraham as “a type of or model for the devout Jew.”³⁷ Sometimes it was even imagined that he did the law before it was actually given (Gen 26:5; *Jub.* 16:28; 24:11; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 57:1–2). What may have been particularly offensive to many non-Jews, though, was the common assumption that Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac was evidence of his obedience (see Sir 44:19–21; 1 Macc 2:52; Jas 2:21–22).³⁸ Paul avoids mentioning this incident and contends that in fact

³⁶ So Moo, ““Works of the Law,”” 94–95.

³⁷ Dunn, *Romans*, 1:200. De Roo speaks similarly of “the elevation of Abraham as a perfect human being” (“*Works of the Law*,” 103).

³⁸ Dunn also cites Jud 8:26; *Jub.* 17:15–18; 18:16; 19:8; *m. ’Abot* 5:3; Philo, *Abr.* 192; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.233–25; Ps-Philo, *Lib. Ant.* 40:2, 5; 4 *Macc* 14:20, though his inclusion of Heb 11:17–18 is questionable (*Romans*, 1:200–201). In Heb 11:17–18, the writer is synthesizing Pauline exegesis (the

Abraham was not justified by works at all. The apostle thus places himself at odds with the standard Jewish exegesis of Israel's greatest patriarch.³⁹ He is more concerned about his Gentile audience, which did not grow up listening to the praises of father Abraham, and which may not have been inclined to view the sacrifice of Isaac in as favorable a light.

The last three passages which mention ἔργα are in Rom 9–11, and again there are important reasons that Paul employs the shortened form in each case. The first is Rom 9:10–13, in which Paul argues that the patriarch Jacob and his brother Esau were not chosen or rejected on the basis of their “works”:

Not only that, but also Rebekah after conceiving from one man, Isaac our father—for though they had not yet been born nor done anything good or bad, so that the plan of God which is according to election might remain, not from works (ἔργα) but from the one who calls, it was said to her, “The greater shall serve the lesser,” just as it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”

In this passage, ἔργα is not interchangeable with ἔργα νόμου. Nor is it quite interchangeable with the earlier usages of ἔργα in Rom 4, where it is contrasted with faith and refers first to works done to try to earn righteousness like a wage (Rom 4:4–5) and then apparently to the *sinful* works of the happy man who by faith has been justified and forgiven (Rom 4:6–8). In Rom 9:11–12, both the positive and negative senses of “works” are combined into one, but this time the point is about God's plan of election regarding Jacob and Esau, a plan which was announced before they had “done (πράσσειν) anything

emphasis on the promise and Abraham's faith in the resurrection of the dead) and traditional Jewish exegesis (the example of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac).

³⁹ De Roo argues that Paul is even more radical because (according to her) he portrays Abraham as *disobedient* and among the “ungodly” in Rom 4:5 (“*Works of the Law*,” 102). A careful reading, however, will reveal that Paul avoids characterizing Abraham himself as disobedient. Instead he uses the text about Abraham in Gen 15:6 to create a general principle—one which applies specifically *in Paul's own day*—about how a person (ἄνθρωπος) is justified.

good or bad.” Like the justification of the sinner, God’s plan of election is non-retributive. Jacob and Esau were chosen or rejected not on the basis of their “works” but “by the one who calls,” before they were born.

Once more Paul shows sensitivity to the way many Gentiles would have likely viewed the patriarchs. In the story of Jacob and Esau, it is hard to imagine that the former’s works would have been considered praiseworthy from the perspective of many non-Jews. Not everyone would have praised, for instance, Jacob’s deception of Isaac to obtain his blessing. Paul therefore stresses that God’s plan of election was independent of “works”—that is, works in the sense of good *or* bad. Jacob was not chosen because he was more deserving than Esau or because God was pleased or displeased with the actions of either brother. Jacob was chosen in accordance with divine election and because of God’s call.⁴⁰

Paul’s interpretation of the story of Jacob and Esau may appeal more to a Gentile audience, but the dichotomy between divine election and “works” puts asunder what was usually considered inseparable by other Jews. Just as Jewish exegesis tended to emphasize Abraham’s obedience in addition to his faith, in the same way there was a frequent concern to show that Abraham and the other patriarchs were not unworthy of their election. Conversely, it was often claimed that those who were rejected *were* unworthy, even though Genesis itself is often silent on their relative worthiness. *Jubilees*, for example, introduces Jacob as an “upright man” (*Jub.* 19:13) and portrays his

⁴⁰ There is not necessarily a denial of free choice here, as divine election is described in terms of God *calling* (καλεῖν), which would seem to imply the need for a response. Rather Paul simply assumes that some things are not, as Epictetus says, “up to us” (ἐφ’ ἡμῖν). According to Epictetus, *Enchir.* 1.1, only “our own works” (ἡμέτερα ἔργα) are up to us, i.e., in our power. Interestingly, he lists the body (τὸ σῶμα), which could be understood as including one’s physical descent, as one of those things which is *not* up to us.

deception of Isaac as an act of obedience to his mother Rebekah (*Jub.* 26:10). By contrast, once Abraham “saw the deeds of Esau” (*Jub.* 19:16), it was then that Esau was rejected. The writer of Hebrews adds further that Esau was “immoral,” “profane,” and unrepentant despite his tears (Heb 12:17).⁴¹ Paul, by contrast, does not make Esau a villain or turn Jacob into a hero in order to make election congruent with the principle of divine recompense. He does not deny traditions concerning the moral character of Jacob or Esau, but he insists that their actions, whether good or bad, were not the basis of God’s choice.

The second occurrence of ἔργα in this part of the letter is in Rom 9:32. Here Paul returns to the original faith/works distinction, but in the context of Israel’s quest for the “law of righteousness” (Rom 9:31). At this point in the argument, he seems to notice that he needs to remind his reader that ἔργα is a shortened form of ἔργα νόμου, and so here, as in the original expression τῶν ἔργων in Rom 3:27, it is noticeably interchangeable with the longer form. The word νόμος is mentioned in the preceding verse (Rom 9:31), and within Rom 9:30–10:13 as a whole there is a dual emphasis on both Israel’s commitment to the law and its devotion to “works.” In Rom 10:5, Paul even brings “doing” and the law together: “For Moses writes of the righteousness that is of *the law*: ‘The one *who does* (ποιεῖν) these things will live in them.’” Thus in Rom 9:32, the apostle could have used ἔργα νόμου instead of ἔργα. The latter, however, is more symmetrical with πίστις (“faith”; though cf. Rom 3:28, where πίστις is contrasted asymmetrically with ἔργα

⁴¹ Also relevant here is 1 John 3:12, which says that Cain murdered Abel because the latter’s “works” (τὰ ἔργα) were just and his own were evil.

νόμου).⁴² Furthermore, the shorter form maintains continuity with the previous usage in Rom 9:12, in which ἔργα is noticeably *not* interchangeable with ἔργα νόμου. In Rom 9:32, because he has strayed far from its earlier meaning in Rom 3–4, Paul restores to ἔργα its original sense, reminding the reader that it ultimately stands for ἔργα νόμου, the alternative of πίστις.

The last occurrence of ἔργα is in Rom 11:6. The question in Rom 11:1–10 is whether God has “rejected his people,” but this time Paul does not turn to the patriarchs in Genesis. To help bring together earlier strands of the argument regarding election, grace, and the Jewish remnant, he finds an example from outside the Pentateuch: Elijah and the remnant of seven thousand. He likens the situation of Elijah in 1 Kgs 19 to the present situation of Israel—and of himself as a believing Jew—and concludes that God’s preservation of a remnant from Israel is not based on “works” but grace: “Thus also in the present time, a remnant exists in accordance with gracious election (lit., ‘the election of grace’). Now if it is by grace, it is no longer from works (ἔργα); otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (Rom 11:5–6). The usage of ἔργα here is similar to that of Rom 9:11–12, but this time the contrast is with divine *grace*, specifically God’s gracious plan to preserve a remnant from Israel. As in Elijah’s time, there is now a remnant, but it is not (and never has been) preserved on the basis of “works.”

⁴² One possible explanation for the lack of symmetry in Rom 3:28 is that the longer form confirms that the “law of works” in the previous verse is indeed an inverted form of ἔργα νόμου. Interestingly, the Textus Receptus has the longer form also in Rom 9:32, but it is likely that νόμου was added later in order to make it conform to Rom 3:28 (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [2d ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994], 462–63).

1.2.3. The Shortened Form in Later New Testament Writings

What makes Paul's rhetoric against "works" potentially difficult is that he does not balance it—at least not in Rom 3–4 and Rom 9–11—with any sort of reaffirmation of the role of "works" or of the ongoing significance of divine recompense. Much as he does with "works of law," Paul rejects "works" wholesale, and he expects the reader to remember the implicit connection of the two terms, and that he has already said in Rom 2:6–10 that final judgment will be according to works. Although he stresses obligation and obedience in both Rom 6–8 and Rom 12–15, he never mentions the word ἔργα in any of these chapters, and it is not until Rom 14:10–12 that he again refers to divine judgment. Later NT literature, on the other hand, is much quicker to reaffirm the positive role of "works." In fact, *every time* that Paul's negative rhetoric regarding "works" resurfaces in other NT writings, there is a consistent concern to qualify it immediately so that it is not interpreted as an absolute rejection of the positive role of "works" in justification.

The first writing to consider is the book of James, which, presumably out of respect to Jewish sensibilities, nowhere speaks negatively of the role of the law or of works in justification. The word νόμος recurs throughout Jas 2:1–13, which speaks variously of the "royal law" to love one's neighbor (Jas 2:8) and the "law of liberty," the latter having something to do with the necessity of showing mercy in order to avoid judgment (Jas 2:12–13). The word ἔργα then comes to the fore in Jas 2:14–26, which immediately seems to hint at a certain discomfort with the Pauline rejection of justification by "works." The writer reiterates the more traditional exegesis of Abraham

and emphasizes that the patriarch was indeed justified “by works” (ἐξ ἔργων; Jas 2:21, 24), verbally contradicting Rom 4:2.⁴³ The idea of faith “by itself” (καθ’ ἑαυτήν; Jas 2:17) or justification “by faith alone” (ἐκ πίστεως μόνον; Jas 2:24) is rejected outright, although Paul of course never actually uses these expressions. Faith is indeed necessary, but through Abraham’s offering of Isaac his faith “worked together (συνεργεῖν) with his works” (Jas 2:22). The writer of James thus leaves no doubt that “works” have a positive role in justification. It should be remembered, though, that ἔργα here is not a shortened form of ἔργα νόμου as in Rom 4. The only law that James has in mind is the law of love, which is interpreted chiefly as an obligation to perform works of mercy, e.g., showing impartiality to the poor, clothing the naked, and feeding the hungry (Jas 2:1–17).

The verbal contradiction between Paul and James has long drawn the attention of exegetes, but what has been overlooked is that the deuteropauline letters, while affirming Paul’s rhetoric in Romans against “works,” also consistently complement it (whether or not these letters were written by Paul himself is of no concern here; it suffices to say that they were written later than the undisputed letters). Even more so than in James, ἔργα remains detached from its original connection to ἔργα νόμου, and rather than attempting to reestablish this connection, in each case the writer simply reuses an earlier pair (or

⁴³ Most commentators downplay the tension between Paul and James. Luke Timothy Johnson, for example, denies that Jas 2:14–26 is written in response to Paul and argues that the contrasts are much different: faith versus “works of law” in Paul and “ineffectual faith” versus “works” in James (*The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995], 242). Douglas J. Moo views Paul and James as complementary. Paul shows that Abraham was already justified before he had done works or been circumcised, but James adds that Abraham’s faith was not “completed” (Jas 2:23) without “works” (*The Letter of James* [Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 137–38). It should be noted, however, that Paul’s notion of faith in Rom 4 is therefore incomplete from James’ point of view since it does not take into account the positive role of “works.” That James does not acknowledge the legitimacy of a justification “apart from works” suggests some discomfort with the idea, or at least that the writer thought it apt to be misunderstood.

pairs) of contrary terms from Romans and then balances them with positive language concerning “works.” There are three deuteropauline letters in which this procedure can be found. The first is Ephesians, which recalls the contrast between grace and “works” as well as the one between faith and “works”:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. Yet this is not from you; it is the gift of God. Not from works (ἔργα), lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship (ποίημα), created in Christ Jesus for good works (ἔργα ἀγαθὰ) which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:8–10)

These verses faithfully reproduce the distinction made in Romans between grace/faith and “works,” but they immediately juxtapose a new and original statement concerning the necessity of “works.” Believers may not have been saved by “works,” but as God’s “workmanship” they are nevertheless created for and obligated to “good works.”⁴⁴ The writer also reiterates that salvation apart from “works” excludes boasting (cf. Rom 3:27; 4:2), but there is no indication that “works” here means anything other than good works. There is some negative language regarding the law later in Eph 2:15, but it has no obvious connection with Eph 2:9 or with “works.” The law is only spoken of in terms of a divider of Jews and Gentiles which has now been removed through the cross of Christ.

There are two more examples, both from the Pastorals.⁴⁵ First, the letter to Titus recapitulates the contrast in Romans between grace and “works,” interpreting grace in terms of a rebirth through the Holy Spirit:

⁴⁴ According to Andrew T. Lincoln, the writer of Ephesians here is simply adapting the Pauline notion of salvation apart from “works”: “The writer has again taken up what he believes to be a characteristically Pauline theme in such a way that, removed from its original specifically polemical context, it now has a more general reference” (*Ephesians* [WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990], 112). This is not untrue, but the writer of Ephesians is not merely generalizing a distinctive Pauline theme but is also *qualifying* it, not unlike James.

⁴⁵ Commentators regularly explain away the emphasis on “works” in the Pastorals and do not acknowledge that these letters deliberately qualify the negative rhetoric of Romans. William D. Mounce,

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, not by works (ἔργα) which we had done in righteousness but in his mercy he saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out richly upon us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to an eternal hope. (Titus 3:4–7)

The writer then immediately adds, “I want you to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God might take care to apply themselves to good works (καλὰ ἔργα)” (Titus 3:8). The law is not mentioned at all in Titus. Second, there is one last example in 2 Timothy:

Share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works (ἔργα) but according to his own purpose (πρόθεσις) and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages. (2 Tim 1:8–9)

Here works is placed in opposition to both “purpose” (πρόθεσις) and grace, but the writer is only weaving together contrasts which occur originally in Rom 9:11–12 and Rom 11:6 respectively. Then, throughout each of the next two chapters, it is categorically asserted that believers should be prepared for “every good work” (πάν ἔργον ἀγαθόν; 2 Tim 2:21; 3:17; cf. 2 Cor 9:8). As in Titus, the law is never mentioned in the letter. The concern is not about “works of law” but about interpreting the Pauline tradition in such a way that the positive role of “works” is preserved.

1.3. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have attempted to resolve the first perceived incompatibility regarding judgment and justification. First, I showed that the three expressions for “doing

for instance, attributes this emphasis to the supposed preoccupation with the “practical outworking of Christianity” in the Pastorals (*Pastoral Epistles* [WBC 46; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000], 483).

the law” in Romans mean different things within their respective contexts. The term “the doers of the law” in Rom 2:13 is part of a positive allusion to Lev 18:5, which Paul places in opposition to a literalistic understanding of the Greek *Shema* and its command to “hear” the law. The meaning of “the work of the law” in Rom 2:15 is similar to that of “the doers of the law,” but it is part of what I identified as a “counter-allusion” to Jer 31:33 and is opposed to the letter or word (*λόγος*) of the law. “Works of law,” however, is the alternative to faith in Christ and is not viewed in a positive light. For rhetorical reasons, Paul categorically rejects the possibility of righteousness by “works of law,” thereby creating two apparent holes in the argument (at least from a Jewish perspective): he does not acknowledge that obedience to the law’s just requirements could be considered a positive form of “works of law,” nor does he mention the means of grace and atonement already available through the law.

Second, I argued that the word “works” in Rom 3–4 and Rom 9–11 should be understood as a shortened form of “works of law,” but that the two terms are not always interchangeable. In different contexts, the term “works” is associated variously with boasting in “works of law,” earning justification, God’s preannounced plan of election, and the preservation of a remnant from Israel. What unites most of these is Paul’s divergence from the way the principle of divine recompense was usually applied in Jewish exegesis of the patriarchs. Out of sensitivity to his Gentile audience, which might not have been so impressed with the works of the patriarchs, and in order to fit the patriarchs into his argument against “works of law,” the apostle argues that the patriarchs were justified or chosen by faith, grace, and God’s purpose, and not because of their “works.” Not surprisingly, this new rhetoric against “works” was perceived as potentially

problematic by his contemporaries, and later NT writings, including the deuteropauline letters, were quick to qualify it so that the positive role of “works” in justification would be clearly maintained.

CHAPTER 2: THE PRELIMINARY ARGUMENT

The second perceived incompatibility concerns the apparent conflict between judgment according to works and justification by faith. In order to resolve this problem, it will be necessary to examine the argument of Rom 1–11. This task will require three chapters. The present chapter is concerned with Rom 1:18–3:20, which I call a preliminary argument, and has two parts. First, I will discuss two major problems regarding the interpretation of Rom 1:18–3:20, namely, the internal consistency of this section of the letter and its relationship to the broader argument of Rom 1–11. Second, with these two problems in mind I will turn to Rom 1:18–3:20 and argue that this section is primarily a negative argument in which Paul denies that the unrighteous possess an excuse or an advantage before God. Moreover, I will show that the positive doctrine of judgment according to works has a significant role within the letter, but that it is also qualified, both within the preliminary argument and within Rom 1–11 as a whole.

2.1. PROBLEMS IN THE INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 1:18–3:20

What kind of argument is Rom 1:18–3:20? By far the most common view is that it is a negative argument that no one is righteous and that God's judgment therefore is upon all, both Jews and Gentiles.¹ This view is not without some merit, but it effectively

¹ Quite typical among commentators is Joseph A. Fitzmyer's title for Rom 1:18–3:20, "Theme Negatively Explained: Without the Gospel God's Wrath Is Manifested Against All Human Beings" (*Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 1993], 269; similarly James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* [2 vols.; WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988], 1:51: "The Wrath of God on Man's Unrighteousness"). The view that Rom 1:18–3:20 is a negative argument that all are sinners is especially prominent among some defenders of "Lutheran" theology; see, e.g., Richard H. Bell, *No One*

reduces all of Rom 1:18–3:20 to the conclusion in Rom 3:9 that all are sinners. It also has difficulty relating judgment according to works (Rom 2:6–10), the affirmation that “the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom 2:13), and the example of obedient Gentiles (Rom 2:14–15) to the argument. There are, to be sure, some who have challenged the conventional interpretation of Rom 1:18–3:20, but the results have been no more satisfactory. Heikki Räisänen, for example, states that Paul leaves the argument “in flat contradiction.”² E. P. Sanders similarly finds the apostle inconsistent, and he speculates that much of Rom 2 must have been adapted from some preexisting synagogue sermon, and that Paul did not take enough care to remove the parts of the sermon that do not fit with his argument.³

The internal consistency of Rom 1:18–3:20 thus is a major problem. In the previous chapter, I have already addressed the apparent conflicts regarding “doing the law.” I also proposed a way to help resolve the tension between the obedient Gentiles in Rom 2:14–15 and the universality of sin. In the present chapter, I will go a step further and inquire into the overall unity of Rom 1:18–3:20 as well as the role of judgment according to works in the argument. My view is that Rom 1:18–3:20 is not primarily an argument *that* no one is righteous—though Paul does eventually make this point in Rom 3:4 and in Rom 3:9–20—but that those who *are* unrighteous have no excuse or advantage on judgment day. The argument can be outlined as follows:

I. Denunciation of the impiety of idolaters (Rom 1:18–32)

Seeks for God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 1.18–3.20 (WUNT 106; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1998).

² Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (WUNT 29; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983), 103.

³ Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983), 129–32.

II. Warning of future judgment to those who judge; divine impartiality toward Jews and Gentiles (Rom 2:1–16)

III. Interrogation of the Jewish teacher; the conditional advantage of circumcision (Rom 2:17–29)

IV. Various questions and answers regarding Jewish advantage, the truth and righteousness of God, and the mendacity and unrighteousness of humanity (Rom 3:1–8)

V. Final question and answer regarding Jewish advantage and the universality of sin (Rom 3:9–20)

In the first two parts, Paul denies that either idolaters or human judges have an excuse.⁴

After the warning of a final judgment according to works, the rest of the argument is then dominated by the question of whether the Jews have an advantage at this judgment. The universality of sin is not mentioned until Rom 3:4, and in Rom 3:9–20 this becomes the ultimate proof that the Jews possess no advantage.

My position, then, is that Rom 1:18–3:20 is indeed consistent, but in light of my understanding of this section a second problem emerges: the relationship of Rom 1:18–3:20 to the rest of the letter. It is my thesis that Rom 1:18–3:20 is the first of a four-part argument in Rom 1–11 with the following structure:

1. Preliminary argument (Rom 1:18–3:20)
2. Primary argument (Rom 3:21–5:21; also 1:16–17; 10:5–13)
3. Secondary argument (Rom 6–8)
4. Special argument concerning Israel (Rom 9–11)

⁴ Most commentators understand Rom 1:18–3:8 as leading logically to the final condemnation of Jews and Gentiles in Rom 3:9–20. Thus Dunn says that Rom 1:18–32 is directed against Gentiles, and that Rom 2:1–3:8 is Paul's condemnation of the Jews (*Romans*, 1:51; so also Fitzmyer, *Romans*, viii; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 91–94). Again, this division of Rom 1:18–3:20 oversimplifies the argument. Paul does not even introduce ethnic distinctions until Rom 2:9–10, which speaks of *both* negative *and* positive judgment as if one is no more likely than the other.

In light of this structure, I contend that Rom 1–11 as a whole can only be understood properly in relation to *both* the negative *and* the positive argumentation in Rom 1:18–3:20. The role of the former is not difficult to ascertain, for some of the negative argumentation becomes quite prominent in the rest of Rom 1–11. The universality of sin (Rom 3:9) and the rejection of “works of law” (Rom 3:20; later shortened to “works”), for example, are mentioned explicitly at numerous points throughout Rom 3:21–11:36. Yet the positive teaching regarding divine retribution is also maintained, even as Paul adds important qualifications which allow for atonement, a present assurance of salvation, freedom from sin’s domination through baptism, a new obligation to live by the Spirit, and reception of eternal life as a gift.

In order to defend my solutions to the above problems, it will be necessary to discuss each of the five parts of the preliminary argument which I delineated above. For each passage, I will follow a three-step procedure. First, while it will be helpful at certain points to make note of parallels between Paul and Wisdom of Solomon, the latter of which contains similar speeches involving idolaters and “those who judge,” I will examine the argument of the passage largely on its own. Here every effort will be made to follow the principle recommended by George A. Kennedy: that of linear reading. According to Kennedy, rhetorical arguments by nature are “linear and cumulative,” meaning that they are composed with the presumption that the audience cannot “turn the pages back and forth to compare earlier passages with later ones.”⁵ I therefore will try to avoid “looking ahead” and then inserting later conclusions—especially those regarding

⁵George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 5.

sin and “works of law”—back into the argument. Second, in order to reveal the unity and logic of the preliminary argument, I will inquire into the role of the passage within Rom 1:18–3:20. Finally, I will attempt to show the relationship of the passage to the broader argument of Rom 1–11. Particular attention will be given to Rom 2:1–16, wherein is found Paul’s teaching on judgment according to works.

2.2. THE PRELIMINARY ARGUMENT OF ROMANS

2.2.1. Romans 1:18–32

2.2.1.1. The Argument

The denunciation of idolaters in Rom 1:18–32 has two parts. The first part is Rom 1:18–23, which begins with an announcement of the wrath presently being revealed (*ἀποκαλύπτεται*; present tense) upon idolaters. Implicit in Paul’s description of idolaters in Rom 1:18 is the reason that God is angry: they are those who actively and unjustly “suppress the truth,” i.e., the truth about God. It is because they are suppressors of the truth that God punishes *all* of their impiety (*ἀσέβεια*), or their failure to worship the true God, as well as all of their injustice. In Rom 1:19–23, Paul gives the explicit reason that God does not tolerate their impiety, and he also provides a description of their error. They are “without excuse” (*ἀναπολόγητος*) because they have been given a natural revelation of God’s “invisible attributes,” which include “both his eternal power and divinity” (Rom 1:19–20). They have knowingly worshiped the image of various “corruptible” (*φθαρτός*)

creatures instead of praising this eternal and “incorruptible” (ἄφθαρτος) God (Rom 1:23). That they consider themselves wise as they make this choice only makes them all the more foolish (Rom 1:21–22).

The second part of the argument is Rom 1:24–32, where Paul states precisely how God’s wrath is being revealed against idolaters. Strangely, he says that God has repaid them by “handing them over” (παράδιδόναι; Rom 1:24, 26, 28) to the corruption of both body and mind. Most of Rom 1:24–32 is a description of this corruption, though there is a brief interruption in Rom 1:25 where Paul recounts the error of idolaters before bursting into praise of the eternal creator. This interjection of praise is well calculated rhetorically because it suggests that it must have required a great effort on the part of idolaters to restrain the natural human impulse—which Paul himself is either unwilling or unable to restrain—to praise and to serve the true God. The apostle then claims that God has “handed them over” to sexual practices that are also “against nature” (παρὰ φύσιν; Rom 1:26) and to a mind that engages in acts that are “not fitting” (τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα; Rom 1:28). As a result they both practice and approve of evil, and they do so with full knowledge that they deserve death and that it is God who has decreed this consequence (Rom 1:32).⁶

⁶ What specific “decree of God” (τὸ δικάσιμα τοῦ θεοῦ) Paul has in mind in Rom 1:32, or why idolaters are aware of it, is unclear. Dunn suggests the expression refers at least to “a strong strand of moral sensibility then current,” and possibly to the Adamic or Noahic commandments (*Romans*, 1:69). Fitzmyer finds no connection with the Adamic commandment whatsoever (“the alleged echoes of the Adam stories in Genesis are simply nonexistent”; *Romans*, 274), though Paul’s earlier reference to a knowledge of God which is evident “from the creation of the world” (Rom 1:20) is perhaps an allusion to humanity’s creation in God’s image in Gen 1:26–27. It is therefore possible that idolaters’ creation in God’s image is also what makes them aware of “the decree of God” regarding their actions.

It is well known that the denunciation of idolaters in Rom 1:18–32 has several striking similarities to Wis 13–15, and it may even be dependent on the latter.⁷ In many respects, however, Paul goes much further as he makes the case that idolaters have no excuse. First, in Romans there are not varying levels of guilt. Any failure to worship the creator by those who have been given a revelation of God results in divine wrath from heaven (Rom 1:18). The writer of Wisdom of Solomon, on the other hand, makes a distinction between those who worship the elements, the stars, and other natural marvels, and those who “call the works of human hands gods” (Wis 13:10). The latter are wretched, but the former, though still not to be pardoned, are considered less guilty (Wis 13:8).

Second, Paul argues that creatures have a more direct perception of God. Idolaters know God through divine revelation, that is, by (paradoxically) “seeing clearly” (καθορᾶν; from ὁρᾶν) God’s unseen attributes (τὰ ἀόρατα; from the same root as ὁρᾶν) as they perceive (voεῖν) them with the mind (Rom 1:20).⁸ In Wisdom of Solomon, by contrast, the creator is “beheld” (θεωρεῖν) not directly but “by analogy” (ἀναλόγως) through “the greatness and beauty of created things” (Wis 13:5). Third, in Wisdom of Solomon immorality is similarly attributed to idolatry (“the source, cause, and end of all

⁷ Beverly Roberts Gaventa reviews the debate regarding the literary relationship of Romans and Wisdom of Solomon in “The Rhetoric of Death in the Wisdom of Solomon and the Letters of Paul,” in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.* (eds. Kenneth G. Hoglund, et al.; JSOTSup 58; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987), 127–28. The main argument against literary dependence is that Rom 1:18–32 does not quote Wisdom of Solomon directly. It cannot be ruled out, however, that Paul was at least aware of the book and perhaps even adapted some of its arguments against idolaters to fit his own rhetorical purposes in Romans.

⁸ Dunn is unclear as to whether Paul in Rom 1:20 is committing himself or merely “trading upon” the Stoic notion of an “invisible realm of reality” which can be known through reason (Dunn, *Romans*, 1:58). The latter is at least the case, but the degree to which Paul emphasizes—over and above Wisdom of Solomon—the directness of humanity’s perception of God’s attributes strongly suggests that the former is true is well.

evil”; Wis 14:27), but Paul goes so far as to give God an active role in the moral debasement of idolaters. Though they are the ones who have chosen idolatry and “the lusts of their hearts” are their own (Rom 1:24), it is God who has “handed them over” to an impure body and to an unfit mind which happily commits and encourages all sorts of evil. Finally, the vice list in Rom 1:29–31 is reminiscent of the one in Wis 14:25–26, but in the latter idolaters do not expect to face justice for their moral debasement. For Paul, idolaters possess full knowledge of what they deserve for their actions (Rom 1:32), and so they would seem to have no reason to be optimistic about escaping future judgment.

2.2.1.2. *Within Romans 1:18–3:20*

There are many ways that Rom 1:18–32 lays the foundation for the rest of the preliminary argument. First, the third-person denunciation of idolaters in Rom 1:18–32 turns out to be a rhetorical ploy which allows Paul to shift to the second person. By beginning with the third person, Paul lures the audience into condemning idolaters so that they will already begin to assume the role of a judge. He then switches to the second person in Rom 2:1 and addresses them as if they are indeed an audience full of judges (the second-person singular here has a plural sense; “you [σύ], *everyone who judges*”) who are likewise “without excuse.”⁹ The thoroughly negative example of idolaters thus

⁹ It has sometimes been argued that this shift to the second person in Rom 2:1 resembles the one in 2 Sam 12:7, where Nathan declares to David that “you are the man!” after telling him a parable about a wrongdoer in the preceding verses (so, e.g., Dunn, *Romans*, 1:79). A key difference, however, is that Nathan’s parable is about nothing other than the sin of David, whereas the particular errors of the idolaters in Rom 1:18–32 are hardly congruent with those of the judge. The judge may be equally “without excuse” and guilty of “doing the same things” (Rom 2:1), but the judge’s hypocrisy and rejection of divine mercy (Rom 2:3–4) have no apparent relationship to the errors of the idolaters.

becomes a sort of hyperbole which is meant to draw attention not just to the errors of the idolaters themselves but also to the pretense of others who suppose that they have an excuse for their own immoral behavior.¹⁰ While those who judge may not already be subject to divine wrath like the idolaters, they too will face retribution when all people are judged according to works (Rom 2:5–10). Just as God’s wrath is already upon those who “suppress the truth out of injustice,” on judgment day wrath and anger will be upon those who “disobey the truth” and who “obey injustice” (Rom 2:8). To obtain eternal reward they must successfully seek ἀφθαρσία (“incorruption”; Rom 2:7), that same quality that idolaters rejected in turning aside from the “incorruptible” (ἄφρατος) God (Rom 1:23).

Second, Paul’s contention that idolaters are well aware of God and of the deserved consequence of their actions supports his argument concerning divine impartiality in Rom 2:9–16. The Gentiles do not need the law to tell them of God’s eternal power or that wicked actions are deserving of death, and so if those “without the law” sin, they rightly perish (Rom 2:12). Otherwise they will be justified as “doers of the law,” even if they do not possess the law (Rom 2:13–14). Third, by summarily denouncing idolaters, Paul is in effect denouncing at least the majority of the Gentiles, whom he later concludes are under sin (Rom 3:9). He does not use the word Ἑλλήν (“Greek”) or ἔθνος (“Gentile”) in Rom 1:18–32, but it is reasonable to assume that the

¹⁰ The exaggerated criticisms of idolaters and others in Rom 1:18–3:20 has led Dunn to the conclusion that Paul’s attacks are *ad hominem* (Dunn, *Romans*, 1:58), but according to Stanley Kent Stowers, it was not uncommon to begin an ancient diatribe with aggressive preliminary argumentation against the pretentious and/or arrogant (*The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans* [SBLDS 57; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981], 116–17). Stowers also notes that this practice was pedagogical and should not be mistaken for a real polemic.

suppressors of the truth are Gentiles.¹¹ The emphasis here, though, is not that all Gentiles are sinners, but that God does not excuse the error of any person (ἄνθρωπος; Rom 1:18) who suppresses the truth about God. It is not until Rom 3:4 that it will become apparent that *every* person (πᾶς ἄνθρωπος) is in some way opposed to the truth.

2.2.1.2. *Within the Broader Argument of Romans*

Even though the Gentiles are not mentioned explicitly in Rom 1:18–32, within Rom 1–11 this passage establishes that the Gentiles have historically refused to worship God. This fact becomes significant much later in Rom 9–11, where it is argued that, in light of the proclamation of the gospel “to the ends of the earth” (Rom 10:18), these same ones who did not seek God have now found God (Rom 10:20). That is, they have found righteousness through faith in Christ (Rom 9:30), and they have become a beloved people (Rom 9:25–26) and the beneficiaries of God’s kindness (Rom 11:22). This change in the situation of the Gentiles is dramatic and unexpected, but Rom 1:18–32 does leave open the possibility that this kind of change might occur. After all, idolaters have not yet felt the full effect of the divine punishment that they deserve. It is true that God’s anger is already upon them in the form of their moral debasement, which is the consequence of their deliberate suppression of the truth. Their sexual misdeeds have even yielded a further “recompense which was necessary for their straying” (Rom 1:27), and they now live with the knowledge that their behavior is “worthy of death” (Rom 1:32).

¹¹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 270. Moo says that Rom 1:18 is directed at all people, while Rom 1:19–32 is speaking primarily *about* the Gentiles but still *to* everyone (Moo, *Romans*, 97). What Moo overlooks is that Rom 1:18 is not addressing all people but specifically those “who suppress the truth,” i.e., idolaters.

Nevertheless, Paul nowhere suggests that this death is imminent. Even in the midst of the present revelation of wrath upon them, God has also shown patience to those who suppress the truth.

2.2.2. Romans 2:1–16

2.2.2.1. *The Argument*

Exegetes have long debated the difficult transition in Rom 2:1 and specifically the meaning of *διό* (“therefore” or “wherefore”). The major views are (1) that the *διό* indicates that an inference is being drawn from the previous verse (Rom 1:32);¹² (2) that the inference is instead being drawn from Rom 1:18–32 as a whole;¹³ and (3) that the *διό* is merely a “colorless transition particle” (*farblose Übergangspartikel*).¹⁴ Despite the numerous attempts to defend the first two, there really is nothing in Rom 2:1 that can be considered an explicit inference from what precedes. The third option, however, is even less acceptable. If Paul wanted a “colorless” word, he would have likely chosen *δέ*, not *διό*. There must therefore be a fourth option: that there is an *unstated* inference in Rom

¹² Theodor Zahn, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1910), 104.

¹³ William W. Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1896), 55; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975–1979), 1:141; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 299; Moo says that the *διό* refers back to Rom 1:18–19 (*Romans*, 129).

¹⁴ Hans Lietzmann, *An die Römer* (5th ed.; HNT 8; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1971), 37–39; Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (14th ed.; KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 112–13; similarly Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 54.

2:1. Paul has just spoken of those who openly approve of those who do evil, and so *διό* indicates that he is “therefore” going to address those who do *not* openly approve of them, i.e., “those who judge.” The transition in Rom 1:32–2:1 can thus be paraphrased:

They know God’s just decree that they are worthy of death for doing these things, and yet they not only do them but approve of those who do them; therefore (*διό*) I now turn to all who do *not* approve of them but who instead judge them. To you I say: you are without excuse, for (*γάρ*) in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself, for you do the same things that they do.

As this paraphrase shows, it is not the *διό* that tells why the judge is without excuse, but rather it is the *γάρ*. There is thus no need to mine Rom 1:18–32 in search of the reason that the judge is without excuse. The reason is not elusive at all; as the *γάρ* indicates, the judge condemns others and yet “does the same things.” The purpose of the *διό* is simply to show that it is logical for Paul to move on from his denunciation of idolaters to his rebuke of those who judge. In other words, the *διό* is elliptical.¹⁵ Paul does not take the time to create a smooth transition but turns suddenly to his next targets, as if they already should (but apparently do not) know that they are next: “Therefore: you are without excuse, everyone who judges...and here is why.”

While *διό* in Rom 2:1 is only understood with some difficulty, it is perhaps strange that there has been so much debate over the identity of those addressed in Rom 2:1–5. Some have supposed that they are Gentiles (like the idolaters), but most conclude that they are Jews.¹⁶ My view is that “everyone who judges” means just that: all human

¹⁵ A similar example of this way of using *διό* is in Rom 5:12, which begins with the similar expression *διὰ τοῦτο* (“because of this”). In this context, *διὰ τοῦτο* points out that it is logical to move from a proof that believers have received reconciliation through Christ to a defense of the pattern, i.e., the “type” of Adam, through which believers (or “the many”) are able to be reconciled through Christ (or “the one”).

¹⁶ According to Fitzmyer, general agreement has been reached that “everyone who judges” in Rom 2:1 refers to “a Jew who judges himself superior to the pagan because of his people’s privileges” (*Romans*, 297). The problem with this view is that it depends on a non-linear reading. Fitzmyer is correct that ὁ ἄνθρωπος (“O man”) in Rom 2:1 “cannot be taken merely as a reference to humanity in general” (*ibid.*, 297;

judges. The apostrophe to those who judge in Rom 2:1–5 is not unlike the one at the beginning of Wisdom of Solomon: “Love righteousness, you who judge the earth” (Wis 1:1; similarly LXX Ps 2:10). Both Paul and the writer of Wisdom of Solomon are imagining temporarily that they are speaking to all the judges in the world, as if all judges are present in the audience. The only difference is that “everyone who judges” (πᾶς ὁ κρίνων; Rom 2:1) is perhaps more general than “those who judge the earth” (οἱ κρίνοντες τὴν γῆν; Wis 1:1) and could potentially include those who do not possess any real judicial authority. For Paul, *any* person (ἄνθρωπος; Rom 2:1) who judges is without excuse.¹⁷ Those who judge may not openly approve of evil like idolaters, but as they judge others they condemn themselves. Not only do they “do the same things,” but they either foolishly seek to escape judgment by judging others (Rom 2:3), or worse, they spurn God’s mercy—even mercy for themselves—out of ignorance of God’s intention to guide them to μετάνοια (“repentance,” i.e., a change of mind/heart; Rom 2:4).¹⁸ When God’s

contra Zahn, *Römer*, 106–7), and that ἄνθρωπος is similarly qualified in both Rom 1:18 and Rom 2:1 (“people *who suppress the truth*”; “O man, *everyone who judges*”), but there is nothing in the argument so far which would suggest that “everyone who judges” ought to be restricted further to *Jewish* judges. Paul does not mention the Jews, or any ethnic group, in Rom 1:18–3:20 until Rom 2:9.

¹⁷ Interestingly, according to John Chrysostom real judges are indeed in view in Rom 2:1. Chrysostom identifies the judges as Roman “rulers” (οἱ ἄρχοντες) because “that city (i.e., Rome) was at that time entrusted with the rule of the world” (ἡ πόλις τότε ἐκείνη τὴν ἀρχὴν ἣν ἐγκεχειρισμένη τῆς οἰκουμένης; *Hom. Rom.* 5, PG 60.423). Chrysostom may be right that Rome’s political status had something to do with Paul’s decision to address judges in Rom 2:1–5, but his interpretation of πᾶς ὁ κρίνων (“everyone who judges”) as “rulers” would seem to require the reading ὁ κρίνων πάντας (“you who judges everyone,” i.e., Rome).

¹⁸ Some interpreters mischaracterize Rom 2:4 as a criticism of the Jewish presumption of divine mercy (so Dunn, *Romans*, 1:78; Kyoung-Shik Kim, *God Will Judge Each One according to Works: Judgment according to Works and Psalm 62 in Early Judaism and the New Testament* [BZNW 178; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011], 177–80). Regardless of whether the person in Rom 2:4 is a Jew, Paul’s point in this verse is that the judge (potentially) *despises* (καταφρονεῖν) divine mercy, not that the judge *presumes upon* divine mercy.

patience runs out, on judgment day they will face wrath precisely because their heart was ἀμετανόητος (Rom 2:5), i.e., without μετάνοια.

After the apostrophe to those who judge, in Rom 2:6–10 Paul describes what will happen on this day of judgment, but at some point in this description he begins to digress from the subject of his initial speech. First, he says that God “will render to each according to one’s works” (Rom 2:6). In other words, those who judge are not exempt from their own judgment, and their excuses will do them no good. Like everyone else, reward and punishment will be repaid to them according to their works (Rom 2:7–8). Next Paul begins to digress on the impartiality of divine judgment to Jews and Gentiles in Rom 2:9–10, noting twice that reward or punishment will be distributed to “Jew first and also Greek.” As proof he cites the OT principle of divine impartiality (“for there is no partiality with God”; Rom 2:11; cf. Deut 10:17; 2 Chr 19:7; Sir 35:12–13; Wis 6:7).¹⁹ Now that ethnic terms have finally entered the preliminary argument, in Rom 2:12–16 Paul introduces the subject of the law as well. The word νόμος (“law”) occurs here for the first time in Romans (the word ἀνόμως, “without the law,” is actually used first), as does δικαιοῦν (“to justify”). With the help of this forensic language, Paul identifies Jews and Gentiles in terms of whether they possess the law. The Jews are those “in the law” (ἐν νόμῳ) and are “the hearers of the law,” and the Gentiles are “without the law” (ἀνόμως) and “do not have the law.”²⁰

¹⁹ Jouette M. Bassler has successfully shown that Paul was the first writer to cite the principle of divine impartiality to argue for the equality of Jews and Gentiles, but her claim that all of Rom 1:18–3:20 “pivots on the assertion of divine impartiality” in Rom 2:11 has not been widely accepted (*Divine Impartiality: Paul and a Theological Axiom* [SBLDS 59; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1982], 121. If there is a “pivot” in this vicinity, it more likely begins with the declaration in Rom 2:9 (repeated in Rom 2:10) that judgment according to works applies to both Jews and Greeks.

²⁰ As Stanley K. Stowers has noted, the word ἀνόμως, which in Rom 2:12 is normally translated “without the law,” often means “lawlessly” or “impiously” (*A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and*

The particulars of the argument of Rom 2:12–16 are notoriously difficult, but it is important to recognize that Paul is *not* saying here that all are sinners.²¹ On the contrary, throughout Rom 2:7–16 he speaks of positive judgment as if it is a real option for all. His argument in Rom 2:12–16 is not that positive judgment is impossible but that possession of the law is a matter of indifference—in other words, it provides no *advantage*—and that obedience is the real criterion on judgment day. This argument can be divided into three parts. First, in Rom 2:12 Paul declares that possession of the law does not affect the *negative* judgment of sinners. Gentiles who sin are not exempt from condemnation because they lack the law. Much less are Jewish sinners who are “in the law” given an excuse, for their possession of the law only means that they will be judged—in their case, negatively—by it.²²

Second, Paul distinguishes “the hearers of the law” and “the doers of the law” in Rom 2:13 in order to show that possession of the law is also a matter of indifference in the case of those who will receive a *positive* judgment. As I argued in the previous chapter of the present study, this distinction between hearers and doers is effectively a

Gentiles [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994], 140). It is therefore unclear in Rom 2:12 whether Paul is saying that the Gentiles are simply ignorant of the law or that they blatantly disregard the law. Stowers argues for the latter, but his position is less likely in light of Rom 2:14, which says twice that Gentiles simply “do not have the law” (μὴ νόμον ἔχοντες, νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες).

²¹ Simon J. Gathercole discusses the whole range of interpretive problems in “A Law unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2.14–15 Revisited,” *JSNT* 85 (2002): 27–49. His central claim is that the Gentiles in Rom 2:14–15 are Christians, but he depends too heavily on an unlikely interpretation of τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου (“the work of the law”; Rom 2:15), which is not (as Gathercole claims) a direct allusion to the new covenant of Jer 31:33 but runs *contrary* to Jeremiah’s notion of the literal law being written on the heart.

²² The contention of Stowers that διὰ νόμου κριθήσονται (“they will be judged through the law”; Rom 2:12) is a neutral expression (he translates, “they shall have their case judged by the law”) is not entirely convincing (Stowers, *Rereading*, 140). Here κρίνειν (“to judge”) is in parallel with, and is a synonym of, ἀπολλύειν (here in the passive, “to perish”). The point is not just that Jews who sin will be judged through the law but that they will be judged *negatively* through the law.

denial that justification comes through slavishly following the command of the Greek Shema to hear (ἀκούειν) the law. Rather, as it is written in Lev 18:5, one must *do* the law. By contrasting the Greek Shema and Lev 18:5, Paul is declaring that Gentiles too can be “doers of the law” even though they have not heard the law. He admits that the law must be done in some sense, but he denies that it needs to be learned. Knowing the law is not a critical part of the kind of obedience that is required for justification.

Third, in Rom 2:14–16 Paul holds up the example of Gentile “doers of the law” as evidence that positive judgment does not require possession of the law. These Gentiles do τὰ τοῦ νόμου (lit. “the [things] of the law”), i.e., the essential requirements of the law (cf. similar expressions in Rom 2:26; 8:4), and they do it “by nature” (φύσει), without possessing the law.²³ It makes no difference that they do not *have* the law, because in doing what the law requires they *are* the law (“they are the law for themselves”; ἑαυτοῖς εἶσιν νόμος), and they demonstrate that “the work of the law” (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου) is written on their hearts. Again, I have already discussed what Paul means by τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου in the previous chapter of this study. “The work of the law” is by implication opposed to the word or letter of the law. Paul is alluding to Jer 31:33, but his statement is *contrary* to the literal meaning of Jeremiah, who foresaw that God would write the law itself on the hearts of Israel and Judah. On the hearts of the obedient Gentiles in Rom

²³ Dunn gives a good defense of the traditional interpretation of the φύσει (“by nature”) in Rom 2:14 as modifying the verb which follows (“they *do* by nature *what the law requires*”) rather than the participle which precedes (“*not having the law* by nature,” a more recently popular interpretation) (Dunn, *Romans*, 1:98; similarly Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 310). Dunn notes that both the balance and syntax of the verse make the traditional interpretation more likely, and that if Paul had intended the φύσει to go with what precedes, he would have needed to put it earlier to avoid confusion. I would add that the φύσει (a dative) parallels the dative ἑαυτοῖς in Rom 2:14, the latter of which is subject to precisely the same potential ambiguity, but which is nevertheless always understood to belong with what *follows* and not with what precedes.

2:15 is not the literal law, which they lack, but the *work* of the law, i.e., the essential work which is required to fulfill τὰ τοῦ νόμου. The Gentiles therefore are not at a disadvantage because they lack the law and do not have the actual words of the law “written on the heart.”

The remainder of Rom 2:14–16 is exceedingly difficult because of the unexpected genitive absolute in Rom 2:15: “their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts accusing or defending each other” (συμμαρτυρούσης αὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως καὶ μεταξύ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων). One possible purpose of the genitive absolute is to allow Paul to shift from his *present* demonstration of Gentile obedience back to his description of the *future* day of judgment. It is true that the verb κρίνει in Rom 2:16 is in the present tense (“on the day when God judges [κρίνει]”), but the meaning here is likely future.²⁴ It is on the future day of judgment when the “secrets” of obedient Gentiles will speak up and be heard, that is, the secrets hidden away in their conscience and in their thoughts. Though grammatically speaking these thoughts in Rom 2:15 must be those of the obedient Gentiles, in Rom 2:16 the implication is that the inner testimony and argument of all people will be heard on judgment day.²⁵ It is the secrets of all people (ἄνθρωποι; Rom 2:16), whether obedient or not, that will be revealed and

²⁴ So Dunn, *Romans*, 1:102. The verb of course can also be accented as a future (κρίνει), but the vast majority of manuscripts accent it as a present (κρίνει).

²⁵ The implied relevance of the inner argument in Rom 2:15 to all people may be the reason that Paul unexpectedly mentions *accusing* along with defending thoughts. It may also be that Paul considers accusing thoughts a natural occurrence even for the righteous, as in 1 John 3:20, where the all-knowing God is said to be “greater” than believers’ hearts when their hearts condemn them. Still another, less likely possibility presents itself if the ἢ καὶ in Rom 2:15 is translated as “or *rather*” (“accusing, or rather defending each other”) instead of just “or.” On this reading, it would seem that Paul has the general expectation that everyone’s thoughts will accuse them but then makes an exception for obedient Gentiles (“or in their case, their thoughts actually defend them”). For a fuller discussion of the particle ἢ, as well as the addition of καὶ, which is often immaterial, see Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. Gordon M. Messing; Harvard University Press, 1956), 649, §2860, 2862.

judged. As a result no Gentile needs the law in order to be judged according to works, either positively or negatively.

The argument of Rom 2:12–16 is indeed hard to follow, but in light of the above exegesis it will be helpful to paraphrase this passage, along with Rom 2:5–11, so that the whole portrait that Paul paints of divine judgment can be viewed at once:

According to your hardness and your impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and of the revelation of the just judgment of God, who on that day will repay everyone—including you, O judge—according to one’s works. To those who seek honor, glory, and incorruption by persevering in good work, God will render receive eternal life; but to those who are contentiously disobedient to the truth and who obey injustice, there will be wrath and anger.

Moreover, not only will retribution come to all, *it will be impartial to Jew or Greek*: tribulation and distress will be upon every human soul which does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For as Scripture says, there is no partiality with God; and because God is impartial to Jew or Greek, *possession of the law will not make a difference on judgment day*. It does not matter for the sinner, because all who have sinned without the law will perish without the law, and all who are in the law and have sinned will only be judged—in their case, negatively—through the law. Nor does the law make a difference for the just, for it is not the hearers of the law who are just before God, but rather the doers of the law will be justified—even if they are not hearers. The example of obedient Gentiles proves this: for Gentiles who do by nature what the law requires may not *have* the law, but they *are* the law for themselves; they show that the work of the law (not the letter of the law) is written on their hearts; and on judgment day their conscience will bear witness and their thoughts will accuse or defend each other when God, through Christ Jesus, judges what is hidden in all human hearts.

The division in this paraphrase is artificial, but it shows that Paul begins to change the subject to impartiality in Rom 2:9. A seemingly unimportant grammatical shift in Rom 2:8 anticipates this digression. What changes is the grammatical case of the terms for reward and punishment. In Rom 2:7, “eternal life” is in the accusative case (ζωὴν αἰώνιον) and is the object of the verb ἀποδώσει (“God will render”) in Rom 2:6. In Rom 2:8, “wrath and anger” are both nominatives (ὀργὴ καὶ θυμός; probably predicate

nominatives: “*there will be* wrath and anger”) and thus grammatically independent of Rom 2:6–7. The digression begins next in Rom 2:9–10, where the terms for reward and punishment are not only in the nominative but have now apparently become the subjects of the sentence (“tribulation and distress *will be*”; “glory, honor, and peace *will be*”). Greater emphasis is then placed on the *recipients*, “Jew first and also Greek,” who are mentioned at the end of both Rom 2:9–10. Paul thus is no longer addressing those who judge after Rom 2:8. The rest of the passage is about God’s impartiality to Jews and Gentiles and about God’s indifference to what divides them, namely, possession of the law.

2.2.2.2. *Within Romans 1:18–3:20*

Why does Paul speak to an imaginary audience full of judges in Rom 2:1–5? The most common position is that these verses are merely a transition from Paul’s condemnation of the Gentiles in Rom 1:18–32 to his indictment of the Jews, even though the latter does not formally begin until Rom 2:17.²⁶ I have argued, however, that Rom 1:18–3:20 should not be read as a proof that Jews and Gentiles are all sinners. Paul’s charge that all human judges “do the same things” does seem to imply that sin is a basic part of the human condition (“you do the same things because everyone does them”), but the universality of sin is not the main point of Rom 2:1–5. On the other hand, these verses can be thought of as a kind of transition. They are a hinge between Paul’s declaration of

²⁶ So Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 298. Moo calls the whole argument of Rom 1:18–2:29 a “series of concentric circles” in which Paul is speaking to the Jews indirectly in Rom 1:18–32, implicitly in Rom 2:1–16, and at last explicitly in Rom 2:17–29 (*Romans*, 97).

present judgment upon *some* (idolaters) and his warning of the future judgment of *all*.

This warning of final judgment then turns into a defense of God's impartiality vis-à-vis Jews/Gentiles (Rom 2:9–11) and the law (Rom 2:12–16). Just as idolaters and those who judge have no excuse, nor do Jews or Gentiles have an advantage—or a disadvantage—because they possess or lack the law. “The doers of the law” can be anyone, even those who lack the law.

Although the warning of future judgment is a digression within Rom 2:1–16, it has a significant role within the preliminary argument. It establishes that, whatever potential advantage the Jews might have—and the question of their advantage will dominate the remainder of the preliminary argument—obedience is the criterion before God. Perseverance in “good work” (Rom 2:6) is what it means to “do the law,” and there is no other way to gain an advantage before the impartial God. Those “in the law” who sin will be condemned (Rom 2:12), and the mere “hearers of the law” will not be justified (Rom 2:13). Throughout the rest of the preliminary argument, disobedient Jews will continue to be denied an advantage before God. In Rom 2:17–29, the Jewish teacher earns no praise from God through the law or circumcision because he disobeys the chief commandments and does not “practice the law” (Rom 2:25). Paul does grant the Jews the advantage of the divine oracles in Rom 3:1–2, but these actually prove that *all* are sinners, and therefore that the Jews as a whole do not “surpass” the Gentiles (Rom 3:9).

I have already argued in the previous chapter that the example of obedient Gentiles in Rom 2:14–15 does not necessarily undermine Paul's later claim that all people are sinners, but another question is *why* the apostle risks this rather obvious exception to the rule. There are at least two reasons. The first is that it helps prove that

the Jews' possession of the law truly is no advantage. Learning the law is so unnecessary that, despite the prevalence of sin among all people, some Gentiles are able to "do the law" without having heard it. The second reason is that Paul does not want to overstate his case against Gentile culture. After all, the audience of the letter is predominantly Gentile, and Paul has already excoriated Gentile religion in Rom 1:18–32. He therefore balances his criticism with a positive example. Just as he admits for the sake of his fellow Jews that the requirements of the law must be done, for the sake of his audience he includes an example of good Gentiles who meet these requirements "by nature."

2.2.2.3. *Within the Broader Argument of Romans*

A potential difficulty arises when an attempt is made to relate judgment according to works to the broader argument because on the surface it might seem to preclude any qualification: God "will render *to each* (ἕκαστος) according to one's works" (Rom 2:6). A close reading of the preceding context, however, will reveal that for Paul the reality of a final, universal judgment according to works is qualified by the possibility of mercy in the present. The reason that those who judge can be sure that they are "storing up wrath" on judgment day is that they reject God's mercy toward them in the interim (Rom 2:4). The use of pleonasm ("kindness, forbearance, and patience") and the description of divine mercy as "wealth" indicate that there is *abundant* mercy available before judgment day. In other words, mercy is not only a possibility, it is the norm.

It should not be surprising that Paul places the principle of divine retribution in immediate tension with divine mercy. After all, they also occur in close proximity in Ps 62:13 (LXX Ps 61:13), the verse he quotes in Rom 2:6:

God has spoken once,
these two things I have heard:
Strength belongs to God,
and to you, Lord, mercy (τὸ ἔλεος);
for you will render to each according to one's works.²⁷

Similar is LXX Sir 16:11–12:

Even if there had been one stiff-necked person,
it would be a wonder if he had gone unpunished.
For mercy (ἔλεος) and wrath are with him;
he is the master of atonement, and he pours out wrath.
Great as his mercy (τὸ ἔλεος) is his reproof;
he judges a man according to his works.

In other words, God is equally merciful and just. God is forgiving (“the master of atonement”), but God also judges according to works. In all of the above texts, including Rom 2:6, the principle of divine retribution does not exist apart from divine mercy.

Throughout the remainder of Rom 1–11, Paul remains true to the balance of judgment and mercy as he qualifies, but never abrogates, the principle of divine retribution. First, the proclamation in Rom 3:21–26 that redemption and forgiveness are available by faith implies that believers will *not* be judged—at least not negatively—according to the works which have been forgiven. It is significant, though, that in this proclamation Paul emphasizes the revelation of God’s *righteousness* (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, ἡ

²⁷ Paul may also be quoting Prov 24:12, which is nearly identical to Ps 62:13. Kim argues purely on the basis of conceptual and thematic parallels that Paul is citing Ps 62:13, though it is the general prevalence of Ps 62:13 in early Jewish and Christian literature—a prevalence which is demonstrated throughout Kim’s overall study—which is perhaps the more decisive reason for concluding that Paul has this verse in mind (*God Will Judge*, 169–71).

δικαιοσύνη αὐτοῦ; Rom 3:21–22, 25–26). In providing a means of forgiveness and justification for all, God does not simply ignore human sin. Rather God offers Christ himself as the ultimate means of atonement, proving that God is just (δίκαιος; Rom 3:26).

Second, in Rom 5:9–10 Paul again states that the death of Christ allows for a present justification, but he adds that the resurrection of Christ further assures believers that they will be saved from future wrath. This assurance is possible because the pattern of Christ follows the pattern or “type” of Adam (Rom 5:14). This pattern maintains the principle that individual sin leads to death (Rom 5:12), but it also permits a single moral action by a prototypical figure to influence the destiny of the many. Thus through Adam’s single transgression, sin—and therefore death—entered the natural order (or the κόσμος; Rom 5:12–13). In a similar way, through Christ righteousness and life are available as a gift to all who receive it.

Third, in Rom 6–8 Paul mentions certain conditions which have been met—and must continue to be met—in order for believers to achieve the moral success that God requires. Through baptism believers have already been freed from the power of sin, and in the present they must count themselves as those who are “dead to sin but who live to God” (Rom 6:11). Similarly, those who possess the Spirit have been freed from “the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2), and now with the Spirit’s assistance they must “put to death the deeds of the body” in order to live (Rom 8:13). Finally, in Rom 6:22–23 Paul avoids describing the result of obedience in terms of something that is owed. While death is the “wages” of sin and eternal life is the τέλος (“end”) of obedience, eternal life is not therefore a wage as well. Rather it is “the gift of God” given to those who have become slaves of obedience.

2.2.3. Romans 2:17–29

2.2.3.1. *The Argument*

Paul addresses another imaginary person in Rom 2:17–24, this time a Jewish teacher, but the style of argumentation is less direct. He does not outright accuse the teacher, but instead he includes a long list of the teacher’s boasts in Rom 2:17–20 before abruptly initiating an aggressive interrogation. This interrogation consists of several leading questions in Rom 2:21–23 which strongly suggest that the teacher breaks the same commandments that he (and the teacher is male because in Rom 2:25–29 he tries to take refuge in circumcision) teaches others. The teacher’s great knowledge of the law therefore does not cause him to obey the law. Just as the hearers are not necessarily the doers, neither are the teachers the doers.

It is significant that the kind of obedience that Paul has in mind in Rom 2:17–24 is a literal one. It is not merely doing “by nature” what the law requires (Rom 2:14) but is rooted in a distinct knowledge of God’s will and of the very “form of knowledge and of truth” (Rom 2:20) that comes through the law. Paul even alludes to specific commandments, e.g., the injunctions against stealing, adultery, and idolatry. He gives the reader no reason to think that these “weightier commandments” are to be given some spiritual interpretation, or that the teacher’s emphasis on these commandments is misguided. Nevertheless, the teacher’s correct understanding of the law does not make him a true “doer of the law.” He is more interested in telling others about obedience than

in modelling it. As a result he leads the Gentiles, i.e., his students, not into obedience but into blasphemy (Rom 2:24).

After the interrogation of the teacher, in Rom 2:25–29 Paul responds to an unstated defense which relies on the advantage of circumcision. As can be seen in Fitzmyer’s paraphrase of a hypothetical defense by the teacher, this advantage is something that applies not just to the teacher but to all circumcised Jews:

Perhaps we Jews do not observe the law as we should, but at least we are circumcised. In this regard at least we have carried out God’s command. Did not God himself set up the covenant with Israel and make circumcision the seal of that covenant, the very shield against God’s wrath?²⁸

The heart of Paul’s criticism is that the teacher understands this “shield” as an unconditional advantage which renders obedience unnecessary. The next three sentences therefore begin with the conditional particle *ἐάν* (“if”; Rom 2:25–26). First, Paul says that the teacher will receive the benefit of circumcision if he “does the law” (*νόμον πράσσειν*; Rom 2:25). Of course, Paul has just suggested in the preceding interrogation that the teacher is a transgressor of the law, and so it is immediately apparent that the teacher has not met the condition and thus does not receive the benefit of circumcision.

Second, Paul tells the teacher that if he is a transgressor (which he is), his circumcision has been undone (Rom 2:25). Here circumcision is a metonymy for the *advantage* of circumcision (the teacher’s actual circumcision is not what is reversed), but Paul is also hinting at a deeper kind of circumcision which goes beyond the physical and which can be undone by disobedience. Third, Paul considers the contrary example of an obedient Gentile, and again he implies that true circumcision is not something literal. He

²⁸ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 320.

argues that this Gentile will be “counted” as circumcised simply by doing “the just requirements of the law” (τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου; Rom 2:26), i.e., those “weightier commandments” which are alluded to in Rom 2:21–22. In Rom 2:27, this Gentile obtains an additional benefit: he will be able to judge the disobedient teacher. By obeying the law’s just requirements he not only obtains what the teacher seeks—a shield from judgment—but he also becomes an *instrument* of judgment upon those who have failed to obtain the shield.

After this stinging example of the obedient Gentile, in Rom 2:28–29 Paul finally states definitively that true circumcision is not something physical at all. Neither Jewish identity nor circumcision is known by anything visible, but rather these are hidden realities which are known only to God.²⁹ Circumcision is not literal but is “of heart, in/by spirit not letter (ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι; Rom 2:29).” Much has been made of the reference to πνεῦμα here, and some have gone so far as to argue that Spirit-empowered obedience must be in view here.³⁰ What Paul is doing, however, is placing OT texts in opposition in order to prove that true circumcision is not something visible. He is not resorting to a non-literal reading of Scripture, but rather he is saying that some texts—at

²⁹ George P. Carras argues that Paul and his Jewish interlocutor actually agree that circumcision has a dual meaning (“Romans 2, 1–29: A Dialogue on Jewish Ideals,” *Biblica* 73 [1992]: 206–7). Yet what Paul says in Rom 2:28 is that circumcision is spiritual and *not* literal (though he does later call Abraham’s physical circumcision a “sign” of his faith in Rom 4:11). For him, circumcised of heart is the true meaning of circumcision and excludes the necessity of literal circumcision. This view represents a significant departure from the regular Jewish understanding of circumcision.

³⁰ So Thomas R. Schreiner, who holds up the reference to πνεῦμα in Rom 2:29 as evidence that Paul has Gentile *Christians* in mind in Rom 2:26–27 (“Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works? Another Look at Romans 2,” *BBR* 3 [1993]: 149–52). Schreiner reads too much into the reference, however. Paul is not telling the teacher that he needs to be a believer and receive the Holy Spirit to be considered circumcised, but that Scripture itself proves that true circumcision is not literal, and therefore that the disobedient Jew cannot take refuge in physical circumcision. It is not until Rom 7:6 (much later in the letter) that Paul connects πνεῦμα with believers’ renewed ability to obey God.

least when they are compared on a literal level—*supersede* others. In this case, the command of literal circumcision, e.g., in the covenant with Abraham in Gen 17:10–14, is superseded by the command to be circumcised in heart (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; cf. also Deut 30:6). The reason has to do with the OT axiom that what is visible to human beings is not always an indicator of what is hidden in the heart. This axiom is articulated in 1 Sam 16:1–13, where Jesse’s older sons win Samuel’s admiration before Samuel learns that God “looks at the heart” rather than human appearance (1 Sam 16:7). In the same way, those who are visibly circumcised may sometimes earn praise from human beings, but it is those who are circumcised in heart who receive praise from God (Rom 2:29).³¹

The πνεῦμα/γράμμα contrast in Rom 2:29 therefore does not concern Spirit-empowered obedience (as it does later in Rom 7:6), but rather it is to be understood within the context of the OT axiom regarding visible appearance and invisible reality. Physical circumcision does not avail because it is performed strictly in conformity to the letter, which as something *visible* is not always—e.g., in the command to be physically circumcised—concerned directly with hidden reality. Circumcision of heart, on the other hand, is true circumcision not simply because the letter commands it (and the letter does command it, thereby superseding the earlier command), but because it is associated with

³¹ There is a well-known wordplay between the Hebrew words for “Jew” (or “Judah”; יהודה) and “praise” (הלה), but, as Dunn rightly notes, Paul could not have expected his audience to be aware of it (*Romans*, 1:123). The wordplay derives from the etymology of the name Judah in Gen 29:35, but more relevant to Rom 2:28–29 is the use of this wordplay in Gen 49:8, more specifically the *translation* of it in the LXX version of this verse, where Jacob says to Judah (Ιουδα) that “your brothers shall praise (αἰνεῖν) you.” It is likely that the parallel between Ἰουδαῖος (“Jew”) and ἔπαινος (“praise”) in Rom 2:28–29 is an allusion to this verse in the LXX, and thus that Paul is not expecting his Gentile audience to be familiar with the original *Hebrew* wordplay. This allusion is easy to miss today because in English the words “Jew” and “Judah” are not easily interchangeable, whereas in Greek the word Ἰουδαῖος is clearly derived from Ιουδα. The Ἰουδαῖος, or “Judahite,” is someone who, like Judah, receives praise from his brothers, but for Paul the true Ἰουδαῖος is one praised by God.

πνεῦμα, i.e., *hidden reality*.³² The disobedient Jew therefore cannot take refuge in physical circumcision. It is not an effective shield from divine wrath and does not earn praise from God.

2.2.3.2. *Within Romans 1:18–3:20*

It is important to recognize that the speech in Rom 2:17–29 is not addressed to “the Jews” as a whole, at least not initially.³³ Nor is Paul speaking to “the Jew” as the epitome of “the religious man,” or “man in his highest potentialities,” a symbol of the ultimate pride and failure of all humanity before God.³⁴ Rather he is speaking to a Jewish *teacher*. Paul’s apparent presumption that the teacher fails to keep the commandments would again (as in Rom 2:1–5) seem to suggest a deeper problem of sin which is common to all, but the apostle does not draw attention to the universality of sin in Rom 2:17–29. On the contrary, he does not even accuse the teacher directly anywhere in this passage.³⁵ The main point of Rom 2:17–29 is not *that* all Jews are disobedient, but that

³² Paul perhaps associated “heart” and “spirit” because of the close relationship of these words in Ezek 36:26, which, although it does not mention the word circumcision, more or less equates the terms “new heart” and “new spirit.” The apostle may have also connected this verse with circumcision of heart, because “I will give you a new heart” seems to echo Deut 30:6, where Moses promises the Israelites that God “will circumcise your hearts.”

³³ Most commentators simply presume that Paul is addressing “the Jews” in Rom 2:17–24 (so Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 315; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:109, “the typical Jew”). It is not usually noticed that the person in these verses is specifically a Jew who considers himself “a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness,” etc., and one who “teaches others” the commandments. The only way that this Jew could stand for “the Jews” in general is if he represents the Jew *par excellence*, but there is little reason to suppose that Paul thought of the ideal Jew as a self-proclaimed teacher of the law.

³⁴ So Günther Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 95; similarly Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1951–55), 1:243. Dunn only shifts the emphasis from individual to *nationalistic* pride (*Romans*, 110–11).

³⁵ Paul does accuse the teacher *indirectly* by his quotation of LXX Isa 52:5 (“because of you the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles”), from which it can be inferred that all the preceding

expertise in the law or physical circumcision is no advantage to those who *are* disobedient.

While Rom 2:17–29 is not an argument that all Jews are sinners, it does help lead to the conclusion in Rom 3:9 that the Jews have no advantage. How it does so can be seen if we examine the order of the three types of people Paul has addressed so far in Rom 1:18–2:29: suppressors of the truth (idolaters), those who judge, and the Jewish teacher. There is a reason that the teacher is last, but it has nothing to do with the teacher’s supposed status as the ultimate “religious man.” The order reflects not the level of religiousness—after all, idolaters consider themselves quite religious, even if Paul rejects their religion as false—but rather the strength of the excuse or advantage which each type of person might claim to possess. First, the idolaters in Rom 1:18–32 are portrayed as if they obviously have no excuse or advantage. They deliberately worship corruptible images rather than the corruptible God, and they flaunt their moral debasement in blatant disregard of “the just decree of God” (Rom 1:32). Second, those who judge in Rom 2:1–5 suppose that they have an excuse because they do not openly approve of evil, but they are held accountable for doing the same things for which they judge others. Finally, the Jewish teacher has the strongest case for an advantage on account of his expertise in the law and his circumcision. Nevertheless, he is not a “doer of the law” any more than the blind and foolish “infants” (Rom 2:19–20) whom he seeks to

questions are to be answered in the affirmative. Interestingly, a number of commentators argue that Paul does indeed accuse the teacher directly. Rather than punctuating Rom 2:23 as a question (“do you, by your transgression of the law, dishonor God?”), they interpret it as an affirmation (“by your transgression of the law, you dishonor God”; so Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 66; Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Saint Paul: Épître aux Romains* [EBib; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, J. Gabalda, 1922], 318; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:113; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 315, 318, though he is inconsistent). Yet if the revised punctuation is correct, one wonders why the rest of the questions in the passage are not also read as affirmations.

guide into the truth. Furthermore, his disobedience undoes his circumcision, leaving him without any potential advantage. Consequently, once Paul proves in Rom 3:4, 9–20 that *all* people are disobedient, at length it becomes evident that no Jew has an advantage.

2.2.3.3. *Within the Broader Argument of Romans*

The speech to the Jewish teacher in Rom 2:17–29 is surprisingly difficult to relate to the broader argument. The teacher already begins to fade into the background in Rom 2:25–29, and after the ensuing question about Jewish advantage in Rom 3:1 (which is not necessarily the voice of the teacher) he never resurfaces anywhere in Rom 3–11.³⁶ The speech does introduce several key terms which recur throughout the next several chapters, e.g., “boasting” (Rom 3:27; 5:2–3, 11), circumcision (Rom 3:1, 30; 4:9–12), the law’s “just requirements” (Rom 8:4), and the *πνεῦμα/γράμμα* contrast (Rom 7:6), but it is important to recognize that these have much different roles outside Rom 2:17–29. First, the teacher’s “boasting in God” on the basis of the law (Rom 2:17, 23) is not completely unfounded. His main problem is that he does not *do* what the law has instructed him to do. In Rom 3:27, however, Paul excludes boasting altogether, though he seems to have in

³⁶ The claim of Runar M. Thorsteinsson that the one introduced in Rom 2:17—whom Thorsteinsson identifies as a *Gentile* who merely “calls himself” (*ἐπονομάζεσθαι*) a Jew—is the interlocutor throughout Rom 2–11 relies too heavily on external evidence from other Greco-Roman letters (*Paul’s Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography* [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003]). Regardless of whether Thorsteinsson’s peculiar understanding of *ἐπονομάζεσθαι* in Rom 2:17 is accepted, the problem is that Romans does not seem to have much of an “interlocutor” at all. There are occasional speeches to various imaginary audiences, and sometimes there are several questions and answers in close proximity, but there is little by way of actual *dialogue*. Many of the questions which Paul asks are simply false conclusions, several of which appear almost immediately in the next passage (Rom 3:1–8), and there is no reason to place them on the lips of any single interlocutor.

mind boasting specifically on the basis of “works of law” (Rom 3:28). He then restores the possibility of a boast two chapters later. The one who is justified by faith boasts “in hope” (Rom 5:2), “in afflictions” (Rom 5:3), and once more “in God” (Rom 5:11), though this last boast is “through our Lord Jesus Christ” rather than through the law.

Second, the notion of true circumcision (or the true Jew) in Rom 2:28–29 is never mentioned again. In Rom 3:30, circumcision is wholly a matter of indifference. The one God is equally the God of all and justifies both circumcised and uncircumcised by faith. In Rom 4:9–12, it is first of all *uncircumcised* believers who have Abraham as their father, and it is only because Abraham later received circumcision as a “seal” (Rom 4:11) after his justification by faith that he is also the father of circumcised believers. Third, in Rom 2:26–27 the ability of the obedient Gentile—who is not clearly identified as a believer—to keep the law’s “just requirements” (τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου) is never in question, whereas in Rom 8:4 the law’s “just requirement” (τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου) can only be fulfilled by believers who have been freed from sin by the Spirit.

Finally, like all of the key terms above, the πνεῦμα/γράμμα contrast is not used in the same way later in the argument. In Rom 2:29, it has to do with circumcision and the distinction between hidden reality and visible appearance. Physical circumcision is in accordance with a literal command and may obtain approval from human beings, but circumcision of heart concerns hidden reality and brings praise from God. In Rom 7:6, the πνεῦμα/γράμμα contrast has little to do with circumcision or appearance versus reality. Instead it concerns the two respective obligations that exist before and after believers’ “death” with respect to the law. Moreover, πνεῦμα more clearly refers to the Spirit that believers possess. Those who now “serve in the newness of the Spirit” are no

longer bound to live in sin because they have been released from their obligation to serve “in the oldness of the letter.”

2.2.4. Romans 3:1–8

2.2.4.1. The Argument

In Rom 3:1–8, Paul rapidly poses several questions concerning Jewish advantage (Rom 3:1–2), the faithfulness/truth of God (which is contrasted with the mendacity of humanity in Rom 3:3–4), the justness of divine judgment (Rom 3:5–7), and the basic human obligation regarding good and evil (Rom 3:8). The first question is open-ended, but the answer is brief. The advantage of the Jews is that they have been “entrusted with the oracles of God,” and this advantage is “great in every respect” (Rom 3:2). Paul does not elaborate further but hurries along to more general questions concerning the truth and justness of God on the one hand and the mendacity and injustice of humanity on the other. Each of these questions follows from a possible scenario. In the first scenario, Paul supposes for the sake of argument that some Jews “lack faith” (ἀπιστεῖν; Rom 3:3). This scenario follows loosely from his statement in the previous verse that the Jews have been “entrusted” (passive of πιστεύειν) with the divine oracles. He then poses a potential false conclusion: does their lack of faith cast any doubt on the “faithfulness” (πίστις) of God, i.e., the God who speaks through the oracles entrusted to the Jews? He answers with his customary negative optative, μὴ γένοιτο (“may it never be”; from γένεσθαι), but next he adds the imperative γινέσθω (“let it be”; also from γένεσθαι) in order to make two

positive demands: not only must God be called true, but *all people*—not just some Jews—must be called liars. He defends these demands with the help of Ps 51:6 (LXX 50:6), which he interprets as a general confession that applies to everyone. All people must, like the Psalmist, admit that God is “justified” and that they are in the wrong.³⁷

Paul gives two more scenarios in Rom 3:5–8, and both lead to potential challenges to this declaration of Ps 51:6 that God is justified in the judgment of sinners. In these scenarios, human injustice or mendacity have positive consequences, including an increased awareness that God is just or that God is true. In light of one or both of these scenarios, Paul asks three questions: (1) Is God therefore *unjust* (Rom 3:5)? (2) Why are liars judged (Rom 3:7)? (3) Do the positive consequences of sin mean that we are actually *obliged* to do evil in order to bring them about (Rom 3:8)? The first and third of these are false conclusions, and the second is a hypothetical complaint that implies a false conclusion, i.e., that God is unfair. All of them are a form of *reductio ad absurdum*, though the point is not that all are sinners—though Paul does make this point in Rom 3:4—but that those who know that they are sinners have no excuse. Even if their injustice or their lies have positive consequences, sinners cannot shift the blame back to God or take refuge in an “ends-justify-the-means” ethic. God remains true, and they remain liars.

2.2.4.2. *Within Romans 1:18–3:20*

³⁷ It is probably because Paul applies Ps 51:6 to all people that he switches to the first person (going back and forth between singular and plural) in Rom 3:5–8. Dunn argues that the first-person plural in Rom 3:5 refers back to the unfaithful Jews in Rom 3:3, and thus that the Jewish interlocutor’s voice here becomes “merged with Paul’s debate with himself” (*Romans*, 1:141). Again, there is no reason to suppose that there is a “Jewish interlocutor” here at all. The questions in Rom 3:5–8 are all meant to be the absurd conclusions of a foolish human being (“I speak in the way of a human being”; Rom 3:5) and do not represent a distinctively Jewish point of view.

The concession in Rom 3:1–2 that the Jews possess an advantage temporarily creates a tension in the preliminary argument that will soon be resolved in Rom 3:9–20. This tension exists because the advantage appears to be *unconditional*. Paul had noted in his speech to the teacher that physical circumcision benefits the Jew *if* he keeps the law (Rom 2:25), but it would seem that obedience is not necessarily required in order to be “entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). Does this unconditional advantage mean that Jews can be justified without obedience? Paul does not immediately tackle this question in Rom 3:3–8 but first lays the foundation for the answer by establishing that all are liars who are without excuse. He then revisits the problem of Jewish advantage in Rom 3:9–20, where he places all on equal footing precisely because all are sinners.

2.2.4.3. *Within the Broader Argument of Romans*

The questions in Rom 3:1–8 anticipate—either directly or by way of contrast—several later questions in Romans as well as the proclamation in Rom 3:21–26. First, the future consequence which is imminent in the scenario posed in Rom 3:5 contrasts with the present reality of those who believe in Rom 3:21–26. For the unjust, there is no excuse that will prevent God from justly bringing wrath upon them, even if their injustice “recommends” (συνιστάναι) God’s righteousness. For believers, justification is given to all despite their “previously committed sins,” which are overlooked because Christ has been offered as an actual *demonstration* (ἐνδειξις; Rom 3:25–26) of God’s righteousness. Second, after arguing that the grace of Christ is more abundant than the condemnation

that comes through Adam, in Rom 6:1 Paul recapitulates Rom 3:8 in terms of sin and grace. Just as no one should seek to “do evil that good may come” (Rom 3:8), believers should not attempt to “remain in sin that grace may abound” (Rom 6:1).

Finally, the pattern of the questions in Rom 3:3–7 recurs in Rom 9:6–29. In both instances, a problem regarding the Jews/Israelites (their potential disobedience or Paul’s grief over them) initiates the series, which has the following three elements: a denial that God’s word is untrue (Rom 3:3–4; 9:6), a hypothetical complaint which implies that God is unfair (Rom 3:7; 9:19), and the potential questioning of divine justice (Rom 3:5–6; 9:14). The argument of Rom 3:3–7 thus serves as an anticipation or “prolepsis” of Rom 9:6–29.³⁸ The scenario in which some Jews “lack faith” (Rom 3:3) also looks ahead to Rom 9–11 as a whole, particularly Paul’s eventual conclusion that some branches of the “olive tree” of Israel “were broken off because of unbelief” (Rom 11:20) and now “remain in unbelief” (Rom 11:23).

2.2.5. Romans 3:9–20

2.2.5.1. The Argument

Although much of Rom 3:9–20 consists of nothing more than quotations from the OT which prove that all are “under sin,” the passage is not without difficulties. First, the meaning of the question in Rom 3:9 (after the initial τί οὖν, “what then?”), which consists

³⁸ R. Dean Anderson, Jr., uses the term “prolepsis” to refer to all of Rom 3:1–8, though his characterization of this passage as a digression undervalues its role within Rom 1:18–3:20 (*Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* [CBET 18; rev. ed. Louvain: Peeters, 1998], 216).

only of the first-person plural verb *προεχόμεθα*, is disputed.³⁹ It is generally agreed that the first-person plural refers to the Jews (“we Jews”), but it is not entirely clear whether the voice should be understood as a passive (“are we Jews surpassed?”) or as a middle (“do we Jews surpass?”). The latter is the most common position, and it seems the most likely in this context.⁴⁰ Paul has established in Rom 3:1–2 that the Jews possess an advantage, but in light of his insistence in Rom 3:4 that all are liars it must now be determined whether the Jews truly do “surpass” the Gentiles.

It is not surprising that Paul answers in the negative, but the precise meaning of the immediate answer, *οὐ πάντως*, is also the subject of some debate. Either *οὐ* modifies *πάντως*, making Paul’s answer a qualified yes (“not entirely”), or *πάντως* modifies *οὐ*, rendering it a resounding no (“no entirely”).⁴¹ It is impossible to be sure which is correct, but the latter is strongly suggested by the rest of the passage, which begins with a reminder that Paul has “already accused” (*προητιασάμεθα*) both Jews and Gentiles (Rom 3:9). Yet this statement contains another potentially problematic first-person plural verb, namely, *προητιασάμεθα*. In this case, Paul himself is the subject of the verb, as happens

³⁹ Dunn argues that *τί οὖν; προεχόμεθα;* should actually be punctuated as one question (“what then do we plead in our defense?”), but this reading is unlikely (*Romans*, 1:145–48; he follows Nils Alstrup Dahl, “Romans 3:9: Text and Meaning,” in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honor of C. K. Barrett* [eds. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson; London: SPCK, 1982], 184–204). The words *τί οὖν* usually stand alone in Paul except when followed by *ἐροῦμεν* (“what then will we say?”; Rom 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:30). Dunn’s reading also requires the omission of the next two words (*οὐ πάντως*), but there is little textual support for this omission, and it is strange (if we follow the rules of textual criticism) that Dunn considers the *οὐ πάντως* a later addition if its inclusion creates a more difficult reading.

⁴⁰ Commentators often note that instances of the middle of *προέχειν* in the intransitive are not attested in any other Greek literature, but it is not usually mentioned that there is only a single example of an intransitive passive (Plut., *De Stoic.* 2.1038d). Either way, then, the middle-passive form of *προέχειν* in an intransitive sense is exceedingly rare.

⁴¹ The only other occurrence of *οὐ πάντως* in the NT is in 1 Cor 5:10, where it means “not entirely.” According to Moo, “not entirely” is the more natural meaning of *οὐ πάντως* (considered on its own), but in Rom 3:9 the expression may be an instance of hyperbaton (transposition), which places the emphasis on the *οὐ* (*Romans*, 200).

at one point in the previous verse (“just as we are slandered and some claim that we say”; Rom 3:8). The respective verbs in the question and answer in Rom 3:9 thus have different subjects: “What then? Do we (the Jews) surpass the Gentiles? Not at all. For we (the writers of this letter) have already accused all, both Jews and Gentiles.”

After the long series of quotations from the OT in Rom 3:10–18, another difficulty is encountered in Rom 3:19. How does the fact that the law speaks to the Jews (or “those in the law”) cause the whole world to be liable to judgment?⁴² The key is to recognize the relationship between Rom 3:19–20 and the list of quotations in Rom 3:10–18. According to Fitzmyer, the argument in Rom 3:19–20 follows from an unstated objection that these quotations do not concern the Jews but only outsiders (“there is no one righteous—apart from us”).⁴³ Paul therefore begins Rom 3:19 by noting that everything in the law speaks to those *in* the law. There is already a problem, however, because the law is not actually quoted in Rom 3:10–18, which is a compilation of texts from the Psalms and Isaiah. Fitzmyer resolves this problem by arguing that this compilation is a literary form known as *testimonia*, which in this case is a list of external witnesses regarding “what the law says” concerning humanity’s sinfulness.⁴⁴ Though this solution is not unusual, nowhere else does Paul refer to texts from outside the Pentateuch as “the law.”⁴⁵

⁴² Herbert Bowsher has argued that within the context of Rom 1:18–3:20 those “in the law” here must include Gentiles, but he overlooks Rom 2:12, where those “in the law” are Jews and the Gentiles are described as those “without the law” (“To Whom Does the Law Speak? Romans 3:19 and the Works of the Law Debate,” *WTJ* 68 [2006]: 295–303).

⁴³ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 333.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁴⁵ The only possible exception is the quotation of Isa 28:11–12 in 1 Cor 14:21 (“with different tongues and with the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me, says the Lord”), but Paul may have confused this verse with Deut 28:49, where God promises to set up a rival nation with a different language.

Although I do not agree that Rom 3:10–18 is a *testimonia* list in this sense, Fitzmyer’s initial hypothesis is correct that Rom 3:19–20 is a response to a potential objection that Rom 3:10–18 is not directed at the Jews. It is precisely because the texts in Rom 3:10–18 are *not* from the law that Paul states in Rom 3:19 that everything that the law says *does* speak to those in the law. Why this statement is important will soon become evident, but first Paul jumps ahead to the conclusion that the whole world—including the Jews—is to be silent before God. The proof that the Jews must also be silent is not given until the *next* verse, which quotes Ps 143:2: “because (διότι) by works of law ‘no flesh will be justified before him.’” Paul likely chooses Ps 143:2 because, as can be seen when it is quoted in full, this verse is a confession that first of all includes the Psalmist himself: “Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no living thing will be justified before you.” Paul takes this confession to mean that the Psalmist failed to be justified by “works of law” and so came to the conclusion that no one will be justified in this manner. The flow of thought in Rom 3:19–20 can therefore be paraphrased as follows (beginning with the objection that stems from Rom 3:10–18):

But you will say to me, “Not everything from the Psalms and prophets speaks to those in the law.” Yet we know that *everything* that the law says *does* speak to those in the law, and so the eventual consequence—as I will prove next—is that every mouth will be shut and all the world will be liable to judgment. For the Psalmist was speaking first of all about those devoted to “works of law” when he declared that “no flesh will be justified before him.” Therefore, everything that the law says to those in the law ultimately leads them to the conclusion that they, like everyone else, will *not* be justified. In other words, through the law is the knowledge of sin.

If this interpretation of Rom 3:19–20 is correct, there is no reason to view Rom 3:10–18 as a *testimonia* list which represents “the law.” Paul is not saying that the texts in Rom

3:10–18 are from the law, but that being “in the law” places the Jews in a special position to recognize that they too are sinners.

2.2.5.2. *Within Romans 1:18–3:20*

Throughout each stage of the preliminary argument, Paul has repeatedly hinted that sin is a universal human condition, but it is not until Rom 3:4 that he states explicitly that all people are liars. When therefore he declares in Rom 3:9 that he has “already accused” all of being sinners, all he means is that he has just called everyone a liar five verses earlier. He is not suggesting that the entire preliminary argument has been a direct defense of the universality of sin. Not even Rom 3:9–20 is principally a proof that all are sinners, but rather it is a proof *from* the universality of sin that the Jews do not “surpass” the Gentiles on account of their possession of the divine oracles. According to C. H. Dodd, this final rejection of Jewish advantage constitutes a “direct self-contradiction” of Rom 3:1–2, but Paul has been consistent.⁴⁶ He never suggests that the Jews possess an advantage which will excuse their sin. On the contrary, he says in Rom 2:25–29 that circumcision does not avail the disobedient Jew, and that the obedient Gentile will actually stand in judgment over him. Similarly, in Rom 3:1–4 the apparent unconditional advantage that the Jews enjoy does not at all preclude the possibility that some “lack faith,” or that all people are liars. When at length Paul asks directly in Rom 3:9 if the

⁴⁶ Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (MNTC 6; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960), 47. Dodd does not necessarily find the contradiction problematic. He considers it at least possible that Paul is only speaking of a temporary and relative advantage in Rom 3:1–2, and that Rom 3:9 then presents “an absolute view of the matter.”

Jews “surpass” the Gentiles, he replies as if the answer should be obvious. The Jews may possess the divine oracles, but it is precisely these that testify that “there is no one righteous” (Rom 3:9) and that “no flesh will be justified before him” (Rom 3:20).

2.2.5.3. Within the Broader Argument of Romans

Unlike some parts of the preliminary argument, Rom 3:9–20 is not difficult to relate to the rest of Rom 1–11. First, Paul’s rejection of justification by “works of law,” which is later shortened to “works” in the discussions of the Jewish patriarchs in Rom 4 and Rom 9–11, immediately becomes the negative counterpart of justification by faith in Rom 3:21–31. Second, the conclusion that the law brings the knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20) is recalled in Rom 7:7–11, where it is the law that allows sin to resurrect and to deceive, entice, and kill the one under the law. Finally, the notion that all are sinners recurs at numerous points throughout Rom 3:21–11:36. God offers righteousness, grace, and redemption to all precisely because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Life and righteousness are available to all in Christ just as sin and death spread to all through Adam (Rom 5:12–21). With the help of the law, it is revealed that human flesh is a servant of sin (Rom 7:7–25). The Spirit then frees believers from “the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). Although all have been “enclosed in disobedience,” eventually all will receive mercy just as believers have (Rom 11:32).

2.2.6. Summary of the Preliminary Argument

The preliminary argument has five parts, and its consistent message is that no one who is unjust has an excuse or an advantage before God. First, in Rom 1:18–32 Paul declares that God’s wrath is already being revealed upon idolaters precisely because they are “without excuse” (Rom 1:20). They have suppressed what is evident about the incorruptible God, and now that God has “handed them over” (Rom 1:24, 26, 28) to an unfit mind and body, they enthusiastically commit all kinds of egregious acts with full knowledge of the deserved consequence (death). Second, after luring the audience into condemning idolaters, in Rom 2:1–16 Paul suddenly turns to the second person and addresses an imaginary audience of judges, who are similarly “without excuse” because they “do the same things” for which they judge others (Rom 2:1). They too are foolish because they either suppose that they will escape their own judgment or they despise God’s mercy. They therefore will face eternal judgment on the day when God judges all according to their works. Here Paul digresses from his speech and argues that divine judgment is impartial and that possession of the law is a matter of indifference. All who sin will perish, while “the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom 2:13) even if they do not possess the law, as in the case of obedient Gentiles who “do by nature what the law requires” (Rom 2:14).

Third, in Rom 2:17–29 Paul interrogates an imaginary Jewish teacher who supposes that the law gives him reason to “boast in God/the law” (Rom 2:17, 23) but who disobeys the same commandments that he teaches, causing others to blaspheme. In response to an unstated objection that the Jews can take refuge in circumcision, Paul argues that the advantage of circumcision is forfeited by disobedience, and that true circumcision is a hidden reality which even Gentiles can possess through obedience to

“the just requirements of the law” (Rom 2:26). Fourth, in Rom 3:1–8 Paul poses several questions regarding Jewish advantage, the faithfulness/truth of God, the justness of divine judgment, and the basic obligation to do good. He concedes that the Jews’ possession of the divine oracles is a great advantage, but he also demands that all people be called liars, and he denies that their blame can be shifted to God simply because their lies and their injustice might have positive consequences. Finally, in Rom 3:9–20 Paul asks whether the Jews ultimately “surpass” the Gentiles. He responds firmly in the negative in light of the universality of sin’s domination, which he proves from the testimony of several verses from the Psalms and Isaiah. The initial list of texts, however, might seem to apply only to Gentiles, and so Paul adds that Ps 143:2 (“no flesh will be justified before him”) excludes the possibility of justification by “works of law.” Even if everything in the Psalms and Isaiah is not addressed to the Jews, everything in the law does speak to them, but what is revealed to them is that they, like everyone else, are sinners.

2.3. CONCLUSION

Although the preliminary argument of Romans has a considerable number of interpretive difficulties, I have argued that it is consistent. Judgment according to works has an important role within this argument because it establishes that obedience is the final criterion for all, and therefore that disobedient Jews cannot take refuge in any ethnic advantage. I also showed that while judgment according to works is never abrogated throughout Rom 1–11, from the beginning it is always qualified by the reality of divine mercy. The tension between judgment and mercy exists even within Rom 2:1–16, where

it is implied that divine patience is the norm before the day of wrath. The reality of the coming retributive judgment is then further qualified in the remainder of Rom 1–11.

First, while God remains just in offering Christ as a means of atonement, all who believe are graciously justified, redeemed, and granted forgiveness of their sins (Rom 3:21–26).

Second, the resurrection of Christ provides a special assurance that believers will be saved from future wrath (Rom 5:9–10). This assurance is made possible by the pattern of Adam and Christ, which maintains the principle of individual retribution but allows for a single action by a prototypical figure to influence the destiny of the many (Rom 5:12–21). Finally, in Rom 6–8 eternal life is described not as a wage but as a gift to those who have changed masters from sin to obedience. Nevertheless, they must remain in obedience in order for eternal life to be given, and so a new obligation is laid upon believers: their participation in the death and resurrection of Christ that has occurred through baptism must continue, and with the assistance of the Spirit they must “put to death the deeds of the body.” If they do not meet this obligation in the present, the consequence is dire: they are “about to die” (Rom 8:13).

CHAPTER 3: THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY ARGUMENTS

In the previous chapter, I argued that justification by faith qualifies judgment according to works by allowing for forgiveness of sins and an assurance of future salvation on the basis of faith. In the present chapter, I will make the case that this assurance provided by faith is itself qualified later in Romans. First, I will argue that Rom 1–11 cannot be reduced to justification by faith but instead centers on what I call “the faith event.” Second, I will examine what I call the letter’s primary and secondary arguments and attempt to show that it is through the faith event, not “faith alone,” that these two arguments can be related to one another.

3.1. THE FAITH EVENT AND ROMANS 1–11

The overall theme or thesis of Rom 1–11 has never been considered much of an enigma in Pauline studies. Most commentators agree that it is announced in Rom 1:16–17, and that it centers on Paul’s gospel and especially justification by faith.¹ There is a major problem with this view, however, because large portions of Rom 1–11 hardly fit under the category of “justification by faith.” As I tried to demonstrate in the previous chapter, Rom 1:18–3:20 has a complex relationship to the broader argument, and it

¹ James D. G. Dunn claims that Rom 1:16–17 is “the thematic statement for the entire letter” and places all of Rom 1–11 under the heading, “the righteousness of God from faith to faith” (Rom 1:17), or as he interprets it, “the righteousness of God—from God’s faithfulness to man’s faith” (*Romans* [2 vols.; WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988], 1:37, 50). Joseph A. Fitzmyer states similarly that Rom 1:16–17 constitutes “the major theme of the letter,” but that this articulation of the theme belongs more specifically with Rom 1:18–4:25, after which it is developed further in Rom 5–8 and again in Rom 9–11 (*Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 1993], 253).

cannot be reduced to the conclusions in Rom 3:9–20 that are immediately relevant to justification by faith, i.e., that all are sinners or that justification does not come through “works of law.” More relevant to the present chapter is Rom 6–8, which does not even mention πίστις (“faith”; the verb πιστεύειν appears in Rom 6:8, but in the context of believers’ participation in the resurrection of Christ). At the heart of this section of the letter is not faith but rather the significance of baptism and the Spirit. It is because believers have been “baptized into Christ Jesus” and “buried with him in baptism” (Rom 6:3–4) that they must not continue in sin, and it is through the Spirit that they are able to achieve the moral progress that is not possible under the law (Rom 8:4, 13).

It may be too ambitious, then, to seek to unite all of Rom 1–11 under a single theme. Nevertheless, the question remains: how do we relate justification by faith and Rom 6–8? My thesis is that this can be done through what I call the *faith event*, which is an initiatory event that Paul assumes his audience has experienced. The first component of this event is faith, which in Romans is the appropriate response to Paul’s gospel proclamation (“the obedience of faith”; Rom 1:5). At the center of this proclamation is the death and resurrection of Jesus, though it has other important elements, including the identification of Jesus as God’s son (Rom 1:3–4), the forgiveness of sins (Rom 3:24–26), and the seating of Christ at the right hand of God (Rom 8:34). The other two components of the faith event are baptism and reception of the Spirit. Those who believe the gospel do not merely assent and then go on their way, but rather they must submit to the rest of initiation. As Peter tells the early converts in Acts, “Be baptized each of you in the name

of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).²

The significance of all three components of the faith event can be readily observed throughout Paul’s letters, but it should be noted that the same component is not always given the leading role. In 1 Corinthians, for example, there is much greater emphasis on the Spirit, and the importance of both faith and baptism is initially downplayed. Concerned that he might somehow become a cause of disunity, Paul quickly denies that he was sent as a baptizer (“lest anyone of you say that you were baptized in my name”; 1 Cor 1:15). It is not until twelve chapters later that he reaffirms that through the Spirit baptism becomes a source of unity (“you were all baptized into one Spirit”; 1 Cor 12:13). With regard to faith, Paul at one point sounds surprisingly similar to James as he declares that he is “nothing” if his faith is not supplemented with love (1 Cor 13:2; cf. Jas 2:14–26, where works, especially works of love and mercy, must be added to faith). He then reiterates that faith is indeed the means of the Corinthians’ salvation (1 Cor 15:1–2).

In the case of Romans, by contrast, not only is faith much more prominent throughout the letter, but the three components of the faith event—in sequential order—are effectively built into the structure of the argument. The primary argument, which is concentrated mostly in Rom 3:21–5:21, concerns faith, but Rom 6–8, or the secondary argument, has to do with the significance of baptism and reception of the Spirit. In the case of Romans, if the interpreter becomes fixated on faith, the importance of the

² It is also noteworthy that when Paul in Acts encounters a group of believers in Ephesus, he immediately asks them if they have received the Spirit and which baptism they have received, without even considering the possibility that they had not been baptized at all (Acts 19:1–7).

secondary argument might be overlooked, and its precise relationship to the primary argument will likely be misrepresented. In my view, the only way that Romans can be understood properly is by giving due attention to all three components of the faith event: faith, baptism, and reception of the Spirit.

3.2. THE PRIMARY ARGUMENT OF ROMANS

Although I do not agree that all of Rom 1–11 can be reduced to justification by faith, this theme without question has a special place in the letter. I therefore identify the argument concerning faith as the *primary* argument of Romans. This argument does not span the entirety of Rom 1–11 but is mostly confined to the following three parts of the letter:

- I. Rom 1:16–17
- II. Rom 3:21–5:21
- III. Rom 10:5–13

The main part of the argument is Rom 3:21–5:21, while the other two parts appear in different sections of Rom 1–11. The first part is incorporated into the letter’s introduction in Rom 1:1–17, and the third part within the discussion of Israel in Rom 9–11. Thus all of Rom 1–11 is effectively bracketed with pieces of the letter’s primary argument. Yet despite their varying contexts, the three parts are consistent. Together they constitute a declaration and a defense of Paul’s confidence or “boast” that all who believe are justified, forgiven, and assured of salvation.

3.2.1. Romans 1:16–17

As I noted earlier, most identify Rom 1:16–17 as the thesis of Romans, but it would be more accurate to say that these verses are a preview of the letter’s primary argument. That is, they are a preview of the *positive* part of the primary argument, since they do not mention anything about the law or “works of law” (although the expression “Jew first and also Greek” hints that Paul means to tear down certain barriers created by the law). On the other hand, these verses are also fully integrated into the letter’s introduction in Rom 1:1–17, which emphasizes Paul’s mission to bring about “the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles” (Rom 1:5).³ This mission is the source of his eagerness to preach in Rome as well, but since he has been prevented so far, he writes to the Romans and shares his boast in the gospel (“I am not ashamed” here is a litotes for boasting; as will be seen, Paul does not actually use the word “boast” [καυκᾶσθαι] in connection with believers until Rom 5:2). More specifically, his boast is in the gospel (1) as God’s saving power for all believers, “Jew first and also Greek” (Rom 1:16), and (2) as the revealer of God’s righteousness by faith (Rom 1:17).

³ Much has been written on the expression “obedience of faith” (ὕπακοῇ πίστεως) in Rom 1:5, including several studies by Don B. Garlington, who agrees with Dunn (*Romans*, 1:17) that the genitive conveys the idea of an obedience that both “consists in faith” and “is the product of faith” (“The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans: Part I: The Meaning of *hypakoe pisteos* (Rom 1:5; 16:26),” *WTJ* 52 (1990): 223–24; see also idem, *The Obedience of Faith: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context* [WUNT 2d series 38; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1991]; Dunn and Garlington both follow Hermann Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* [trans. J. R. DeWitt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 237). It should be noted, though, that the kind of obedience envisaged later in Rom 6:15–23 (“slaves of obedience”) and Rom 8:1–17 is not tied directly to faith per se but is the consequence of baptism and reception of the Spirit. The expression “obedience of faith” thus can be considered as part of a “programmatic statement of the main purpose of the Roman letter” (Garlington, “Obedience,” 201) only by recognizing that faith implies the reception of baptism and the Spirit.

In both of these boasts, there is a clear emphasis on faith as the means by which God's power and righteousness are revealed. The universal power of the gospel, which crosses the boundary of Jew and Gentile, is operative specifically for "all *who believe*." The righteousness that the gospel reveals is "from faith to faith" (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν). In other words, faith is both the means and the consequence of the revelation—the cause *and* the effect.⁴ Finally, as proof of his second boast Paul quotes Hab 2:4, which confirms that "the just one" (or "righteous one") will indeed live "from faith" (ἐκ πίστεως).⁵ Through faith, the righteousness that properly belongs to God becomes a reality for the believer, who by faith is called "just."⁶

⁴ Dunn's translation of ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν in Rom 1:17 as "from *God's* faith to our faith" can only be reached by violating the principle of linear reading and looking ahead to Rom 3:3, which mentions "the faith/faithfulness of God" (*Romans*, 1:43–44). If we are to ignore the principle of linear reading, however, it makes more sense to compare the expression with the similar one in Rom 3:22, διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας, which Dunn renders, "through faith *in Jesus Christ* toward all who believe" (*ibid.*, 1:341).

⁵ Some have challenged the usual understanding of Hab 2:4 here and have argued that ἐκ πίστεως refers to *Christ's* faith/faithfulness (so Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* [SBLDS 56; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983], 150–57; Douglas A. Campbell, "Romans 1:17—A *Crux Interpretum* for the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate," *JBL* 113 [1994]: 265–85). This interpretation has not gained widespread acceptance, probably because the faith of *believers*, i.e., those who believe the gospel concerning God's son (Rom 1:1, 3), is consistently in view in Rom 1:1–17.

⁶ Although it used to be common to interpret δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as an objective genitive ("righteousness from God"), modern scholarship has become increasingly inclined to view it as a subjective genitive ("God's righteousness"), especially in light of the parallel expressions "power of God" and "wrath of God" in Rom 1:16, 18 (see the good, if somewhat dated review of the debate in J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry* [SNTSMS 20; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972], 1–14). Dunn (*Romans* 1:41) represents a more recent "both-and" trend (God is both "the just" and "the justifier"; Rom 3:26), but like the parallels in Rom 1:16, 18, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is best understood as something that belongs to God (thus it is properly a subjective genitive) and that is revealed precisely when it is bestowed or brought down upon others (thus also "the power of God *for all who believe*"; "the wrath of God *upon every impiety and injustice of human beings who suppress the truth in injustice*").

3.2.2. Romans 3:21–5:21

After a long preliminary argument in Rom 1:18–3:20, Paul finally resumes the primary argument in Rom 3:21–5:21, which can be divided into three sections:

I. Rom 3:21–31

A. Proclamation of the revelation of the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:21–26)

B. Questions regarding faith, the law, and “works of law” (Rom 3:27–31)

II. Rom 4

A. Question regarding Abraham and “works” (Rom 4:1–8)

B. Question regarding Abraham and circumcision (Rom 4:9–12)

C. Abraham, the law, and the promise concerning the nations (Rom 4:13–25)

III. Rom 5

A. The boast of believers (Rom 5:1–11)

B. Typology of Adam and Christ: grace abounds more than sin (Rom 5:12–21)

In the first section, Paul recapitulates his earlier boast concerning “the righteousness of God” before posing several questions involving the law or “works of law.” In the second section, he asks some questions regarding Abraham and argues that justification, forgiveness, and the Abrahamic promise regarding the nations were not—and are not—received by “works,” circumcision, or the law, but rather by faith. Finally, the apostle further declares the boast of believers, who are given hope in their afflictions and assurance of salvation, and he concludes with a proof that grace does indeed abound to all in Christ.

3.2.2.1. *The Argument of Romans 3:21–26*

In light of his conclusion in Rom 3:9–20 that the Jews have no advantage, that all are sinners, and that justification does not come by “works of law,” in Rom 3:21–26 Paul recapitulates his initial boasts from Rom 1:16–17. He reiterates that the righteousness of God has been revealed, but this time he argues that it is both independent of the law and recommended by it. The righteousness of God is not only “apart from the law,” but the law itself (as well as the prophets) even testifies to it (Rom 3:21). Furthermore, just as Paul had declared in Rom 1:16 that the gospel brings salvation “to all who believe, Jew first and also Greek,” in Rom 3:22 he states that God’s righteousness is likewise “unto all who believe,” though he first notes that it comes specifically “through faith in Jesus Christ.”⁷ He also omits the expression “Jew first and also Greek” and more clearly places everyone on equal terms: “For there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:22–23). It is because all are sinners that God’s righteousness is for all who believe, without any distinction between Jew and Gentile. In other words, because all of humanity stands in need of righteousness, God has graciously provided it to all who believe. Paul therefore concludes by arguing in Rom 3:24–26 that it is indeed by grace that God has done this, i.e., that God has “justified” (δικαιοῦν) believers. God’s offering of Christ as a means of redemption, atonement, and forgiveness was to demonstrate that God is simultaneously just and patient with sinners “in the present time”

⁷ There is no need to rehearse here the longstanding debate regarding the expression πίστις Ἰησοῦ/Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“faith of Jesus/Jesus Christ”; Rom 3:22, 26). A good history of this debate can be found in Debbie Hunn, “Debating the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Twentieth-Century Scholarship,” in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster/Hendrickson, 2009), 15–31. The present study adopts the traditional interpretation of πίστις Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive (“faith *in* Jesus Christ” rather than Jesus’ own faith), not least because it is the faith of *believers* that is constantly in view in the primary argument of Romans (not to mention in Galatians, where Paul immediately and unambiguously refers to faith “in Christ Jesus” [εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν] in Gal 2:16 right after he uses the expression πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ for the first time in any of his letters).

(as opposed to the time of the future revelation of God’s “just judgment,” which will be according to works; Rom 2:5–6). In short, God is both “just and the justifier of the one who is of faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26).

Paul again emphasizes faith throughout Rom 3:21–26. First, in Rom 3:22 he uses the *διά* + *εἰς* formula (*διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας*), which is synonymous with the *ἐκ* + *εἰς* of Rom 1:17 (*ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*; Rom 1:17), though he changes the object of the prepositions. In Rom 1:17, faith is both the means and the consequence of the revelation (“from faith to faith”). In Rom 3:22, it is faith specifically *in Jesus Christ* (*πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*) that is the means (“through faith in Jesus Christ”), and the *εἰς* points not to the consequence of the revelation but to the recipients (“unto all who believe”).⁸ Both of these changes makes sense in this context, since this passage is centered on Jesus Christ as the one through whom God demonstrates his righteousness to all people, all of whom have sinned and cannot obtain righteousness through “works of law.” The second way that Paul stresses faith is by interrupting the flow of thought in Rom 3:25 with *διὰ πίστεως*: God has offered Christ “as a means of atonement—through faith (*διὰ πίστεως*)—in his own blood.” The *διὰ πίστεως* here is of course grammatically troublesome, but it is inserted this way deliberately. It gives the reader the impression that faith keeps bubbling up to the surface of the argument, even in places where it does not seem to belong.⁹ Finally, Paul ends the passage by repeating *πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*

⁸ The parallel emphasis on faith in Rom 1:17 and 3:22 also helps to overcome the argument that an objective genitive in the latter (“through faith *in* Jesus Christ unto all who believe”) creates pointless repetition (see also the study of R. Barry Matlock, who shows that Paul would have no better way of bringing together the elements “through faith in Jesus Christ” and “unto all who believe”; “The Rhetoric of Πίστις in Paul: Galatians 2.16, 3.22, Romans 3.22, and Philippians 3:9,” *JSNT* 30 [2007]: 184–87).

⁹ Most attempt to connect the *διὰ πίστεως* in Rom 3:25 with the verb (*προέθετο*), with the preceding noun (*ἱλαστήριον*), or with the prepositional phrase that follows (*ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι*), but Dunn

(shortened to πίστις Ἰησοῦ; Rom 3:26), again specifying that it is faith in Jesus Christ that leads to justification.¹⁰ This double use of πίστις Ἰησοῦ/Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in Rom 3:21–26 further indicates that this expression is the alternative of ἔργα νόμου (“works of law,” which also appears twice; Rom 3:20, 28).

3.2.2.2. *The Argument of Romans 3:27–31*

Now that Paul has proclaimed his initial boast concerning justification by faith, in Rom 3:27–31 he follows with a rapid series of questions and answers. There is a particularly high concentration of the word “faith” in this passage (five occurrences in as many verses), but Paul’s point is not that “faith alone” is the means of justification.¹¹

is correct that it is most likely a parenthesis (*Romans*, 1:172). The apparent impossibility of connecting it grammatically with the sentence is precisely what gives it emphasis.

¹⁰ Dunn treats the shortening of πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ to πίστις Ἰησοῦ in Rom 3:26 as a potential anomaly (“‘Jesus’ by itself is not usual in Paul”; *Romans*, 1:175), but it is done to vary the expression. The result is that the name of Jesus Christ occurs in three different forms in the passage: “through faith in *Jesus Christ*” (Rom 3:22), “through the redemption that is in *Christ Jesus*” (Rom 3:24), and “the one who is of faith in *Jesus*” (Rom 3:26). Paul similarly varies the name in Gal 2:16, but in the last instance he shortens it to “Christ” (“through faith in *Jesus Christ*,” “we have believed in *Christ Jesus*,” “through faith in *Christ*”). Thus in Rom 3:26 he shortens it to “Jesus” not only to vary the name but also to vary the formula he used previously in Galatians. The reason that Paul takes such pains in Romans to change the expression is to draw attention to the importance of Jesus Christ as the distinctive means through which God’s righteousness is revealed (through Christ, not the law).

¹¹ As Fitzmyer puts it in his historical survey of *sola fide* (“by faith alone/only”) in Pauline exegesis, the use of *sola fide* as a “criteriological principle” in later systematic theology is a “theological extension of Paul’s teaching that presses beyond what he states” (*Romans*, 362). Douglas J. Moo, a proponent of *sola fide*, calls it an “extrapolation” that “brings out the true sense intended by Paul.” Moo’s point, though, is more about works than faith: “no works, whatever their nature or their motivation, can play any part in making a sinner right with God” (*The Epistle to the Romans* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 250–51). Moo also equates “faith alone” with “faith apart from works” (*ibid.*, 265). One therefore might question the usefulness of the expression *sola fide* as a shorthand if all the *sola* excludes is works (it does not, for example, exclude grace, nor does it imply that Christians have no need for works). Perhaps a more fitting shorthand would be something like ὅλως οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων (“wholly not by works”). Yet this still only concerns one portion of Paul’s argument, and it does not take into account anything that is said elsewhere in the letter regarding the necessity of obedience.

Rather his purpose is to defend his remarkable claim that faith, not “works of law,” is the means by which everyone, Jew or Gentile, can be justified. He does this by arguing that faith excludes boasting on the basis of “works of law,” that it preserves the unity of God, and that it thereby “establishes” the law. First, he begins in Rom 3:27 by asking, “Where then is boasting (καύχησις)?” The answer should be obvious, but Paul nevertheless provides it: “It is excluded.” He does so because it leads to the ensuing question (“Through which law?”), but also as part of a rhetorical ruse. Like the earlier litotes in Rom 1:16 (“I am not ashamed of the gospel”), it is meant to mask (temporarily, as will be seen) the fact that Paul himself is boasting of what believers receive through faith. He is not really excluding all boasting, but only a certain kind, a false confidence not unlike that of the hypocritical Jewish teacher in Rom 2:17–24 who “boasts (καυχᾶσθαι) in God/the law” (Rom 2:17, 23) yet disobeys the weightier commandments. As Paul has recently proved from Ps 143:2, all are to be silent before God with regard to justification by “works of law” (Rom 3:19–20). The problem with “the law of works,” then, is that it does not demand this silence, but rather it presumes the real possibility of justification by “works of law.”¹² “The law of faith,” on the other hand, only permits the boast of the believer, just as Paul declares, “We count a person justified by faith, apart from works of law” (Rom 3:28).

Second, in Rom 3:29–30 Paul appeals to the Greek Shema (LXX Deut 6:4) in order to show that it is fitting that God would provide a means of justification which is

¹² As Dunn rightly notes (*Romans*, 1:186), Paul himself was quite comfortable when he was a Pharisee to boast in his “righteousness that is in the law” (Phil 3:6; in Phil 3:3 he calls this boast a kind of confidence in the flesh). In Philippians, though, Paul is more immediately forthright about the fact that instead he now “boasts (καυχᾶσθαι) in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:3).

inclusive of both Jews and Gentiles. When he asks whether God “belongs to the Jews only” or “also to the Gentiles” (Rom 3:29), what he is asking is whether the Shema—which initially speaks of God as *Israel’s* God (“Hear Israel, the Lord *our* God”)—is a dictum of Jewish exclusivism or an affirmation that God belongs to all people. He concludes the latter on the basis of the second part of the Greek Shema, which declares that “the Lord is one” (Paul actually says “*God* is one,” perhaps because the same Lord who is *one* is also called Israel’s *God*; hence “God is one”). Because God is one, God justifies both the circumcised and the uncircumcised in the same way, i.e., “from faith” and “through faith” (Rom 3:30).¹³

In his final question in Rom 3:31, the apostle poses a false conclusion regarding what is accomplished “through faith”: is he thereby “nullifying” or “doing away with” (καταργεῖν) the law? He rejects this conclusion with μὴ γένοιτο (“may it never be”), and instead argues that he is in fact “establishing” (ἱστάναι) the law. He does not elaborate further, perhaps because Rom 3:29–30 already suffices. Since faith serves as the one means of justification for both Jews and Gentiles, it preserves that which establishes the law, namely, the unity of God, which is the underlying axiom of the Greek Shema, and by extension, of the entire law.

3.2.2.3. *The Question in Romans 4:1–8*

¹³ The old debate about whether the two prepositions (ἐκ πίστεως and διὰ πίστεως) in Rom 3:30 mean the same thing (so Augustine, *De spir. et litt.* 29, 50 [CSEL 60. 205]) or whether they have different meanings (so Origen, *Ep. ad Rom.* 3.10 [14.955–57]) should be decided firmly on the side of the former. As with the name “Jesus Christ” in Rom 3:21–26, Paul is only varying the expression so that he can effectively emphasize faith without the repetition coming across as dull or tedious.

The question in Rom 4:1 is not grammatically difficult, as is sometimes supposed, but it can appear clumsily expressed when read on its own.¹⁴ It becomes less awkward if it is read together with the following two verses, which provide two possibilities as to *what* Abraham has “found” and *how* he found it:

What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified from works, he has a boast, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Rom 4:1–3)

What Paul is asking in Rom 4:1, then, is whether Abraham has found a boast through being justified from “works,” or whether he has found righteousness by believing and having righteousness counted to him. The question introduces a lengthy discussion of Abraham, whom Paul will use throughout Rom 4 to defend and to develop further both his positive argument regarding the boast of those who are justified by faith and his negative claims in Rom 3:27–31 regarding the possibility of boasting on the basis of “works of law” (which he shortens to “works”), circumcision, and the law. Because Abraham is the exemplar of faith, it is natural that πίστις and πιστεύειν appear repeatedly in Rom 4—ten and six times respectively—and that they should be spread more evenly

¹⁴ The ingenious translation of Richard B. Hays, “Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?” is perhaps grammatically possible but is unnatural and goes against Paul’s usual style (“‘Have We Found Abraham to Be Our Forefather according to the Flesh?’ A Reconsideration of Rom 4:1,” *NovT* 27 [1985]: 76–98). The infinitive εὐρηκέναι indicates indirect discourse, but there is no reason to assume in indirect discourse that the verb of saying (ἐροῦμεν, “we will say,” in this case) has the same subject as the infinitive. In order for the translation of Hays to work, Paul would have needed to add ἡμᾶς (“we”) next to the infinitive so that Ἀβραάμ is not taken as the subject (τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; εὐρηκέναι ἡμᾶς Ἀβραάμ τὸν προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα). Furthermore, whenever τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν (“What then will we say?”) stands alone in Romans, the next sentence always has a finite verb, e.g., in Rom 6:1: “What then will we say? Should we continue (ἐπιμένωμεν) in sin that grace may abound?” Hays argues that it is “unparalleled” in the NT to use the verb εὐρίσκειν without an expressed object, but establishing precisely *what* Abraham has found is the whole point of the question: “What (τί) then will we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?”

throughout Rom 4, without any need for rhetorical flourish (as in Rom 1:17) or artificial parentheses (as in Rom 3:25).

3.2.2.4. *The Response*

Not only does Rom 4:2–3 help the reader to understand the question regarding what Abraham has “found,” it also indirectly provides the answer. In Rom 4:2, Paul considers the possibility that Abraham was justified by “works,” but he denies that the resultant boast (καύχημα) could be made before God. In other words, because it is impossible to boast before God that one is justified by “works,” this kind of righteousness and this kind of boast must not be what Abraham has found. In Rom 4:3, Paul simply quotes Gen 15:6 in order to show what Abraham *did* find. He obtained righteousness because he believed God, not because of his “works.”

Paul thus answers the initial question regarding Abraham, but his real concern is to show how *others* might find the same thing the patriarch did. First, in Rom 4:4–5 he contrasts two possible ways that something might be “counted” (λογίζεσθαι) to any person in the economy of justification. In Rom 4:4, he considers the case of someone who “works” in order to earn pay, and he concludes that the pay is “counted” as a matter of obligation and not grace. He does not attempt a direct refutation of this method of justification, though the implication is that this method is impossible, much like Abraham’s boast on the basis of “works.” In Rom 4:5, the apostle introduces an alternative, the pattern of Gen 15:6, which he interprets as a person having faith

specifically in the God “who justifies the impious.”¹⁵ This interpretation does not necessarily suggest that Abraham himself had been a sinner (thus Paul avoids offending anyone’s sensibilities on the matter), but it does allow the pattern to apply to those who *are* sinners. Regardless of whether Abraham was a sinner, anyone who believes in this same God who justifies sinners will receive the same benefit: “God counts his faith unto righteousness.”

Second, in Rom 4:6–8 Paul argues that those who have had their sins forgiven must have followed the method of Gen 15:6. As proof he cites Ps 32:1–2, which speaks of the happiness of the forgiven man, or “the man whose sin the Lord will never count (λογίζεσθαι).” Paul states that the benefit received by this man is “just like (καθάπερ)” that of the one who follows Gen 15:6, i.e., “the person to whom God counts (λογίζεσθαι) righteousness apart from works.” The forgiven man is happy precisely because he has received justification apart from his “works,” though in his case his “works” are apparently *sinful* ones, not something about which he might boast. Sinners therefore have all the more reason to follow the pattern of Abraham. They can only boast of a justification by faith, apart from “works.”

3.2.2.5. *The Question and the Response in Romans 4:9–12*

¹⁵ Moo says that Paul here must be assigning a new meaning to the word “justify” (δικαιοῦν) in light of his contradiction of Exod 23:7, where God declares that “I will not justify the wicked” (*Romans*, 264). Yet the contradiction is with the MT, whereas Paul surely has in the mind the LXX, which reads, “You shall not justify the impious (οὐ δικαιοῦσεις τὸν ἀσεβῆ).” Paul’s point is that Abraham, by believing “in the one who justifies the impious” (ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ), believes in a God who does something that no human is permitted to do.

The question in Rom 4:9 is rather straightforward, and in light of the foregoing argument the answer should be plain. The happiness of the forgiven man in Rom 4:6–8 is the consequence of a justification apart from “works,” and so whether he is circumcised should be irrelevant. This same happiness therefore should be not only “upon the circumcised, but also upon the uncircumcised” (Rom 4:9). Paul’s question regarding circumcision, however, is more than it seems. It exposes a potential Jewish presumption that if anyone shares in the happiness of the forgiven man, it is first of all the circumcised. In his response, Paul recalls the circumstances of Abraham’s justification in order to argue precisely the opposite. Because Abraham was justified by faith *before* his circumcision, not only is he the father of uncircumcised believers, he is *first and foremost* the father of uncircumcised believers. Faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness while he was “in uncircumcision” (Rom 4:10), and though his circumcision was a “sign” and a “seal” of this righteousness, his faith was “in uncircumcision” (Rom 4:11). Abraham thus is firstly “the father of all who believe through uncircumcision” (Rom 4:11), and secondly the father of the circumcised—though *not* those who are “of circumcision alone.”¹⁶ In order to be considered Abraham’s children, the circumcised must do something shocking: they must follow the example of Abraham’s “in-uncircumcision-faith” (ἡ ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ πίστεως; Rom 4:12).

3.2.2.6. *The Argument of Romans 4:13–25*

¹⁶ Dunn’s recognition that Paul is establishing the “primary role of faith” over circumcision does not go quite far enough (*Romans*, 211). For Paul the real question is whether the circumcised are even children of Abraham *at all* since Abraham is first of all the father of the *uncircumcised* who believe.

After the opening proclamation in Rom 3:21–26, the primary argument so far has been marked by a rather aggressive style of question and answer. Paul adopted this style in order to dispute the validity of any boast associated with “works of law,” but early in Rom 4:13–25 he decides to suspend temporarily the negative part of the argument of Rom 3:21–5:21. He also shifts his focus from Christ’s *death*, which has already brought believers happiness through the forgiveness of their sins, to Christ’s *resurrection*, which becomes the basis of believers’ future hope. In Rom 4:13–25, he describes this hope in terms of the promise that Abraham/his seed would be “the heir of the world.” The passage has two parts. The first is Rom 4:13–16a, where Paul argues that all believers can be sure that they, not those who are “of the law,” are the heirs. The second is Rom 4:16b–25, in which the apostle declares that Abraham is their father—and that they similarly are justified—because they share Abraham’s faith in God’s promise to raise the dead.

The first part is particularly difficult to follow, and so it will be helpful to consider the argument verse by verse. First, Paul notes that the promise to Abraham regarding his inheritance of the world did not originally come through the law but through “the righteousness of faith” (Rom 4:13). Second, he suggests that the consequences would be blasphemous if in fact “those of the law” were now the heirs. Not only would Abraham’s faith be pointless, but the promise would be nullified, in effect making God unfaithful (Rom 4:14). Third, Paul implies that it is actually *impossible* for the law to be the means of receiving the promise, and that the promise had to be given before the law. The reason is that “the law produces wrath.” How it does so is not immediately clear and must be inferred from what follows: “But where there is no law, neither is there transgression” (Rom 4:15). Thus the problem is that the law leads to transgression, which in turn

produces wrath.¹⁷ On the other hand, if there is not yet any law—as when the promise was made to Abraham—there is no opportunity for transgression, and therefore no wrath. Fourth, Paul concludes in Rom 4:16a that the promise therefore had to come from faith “so that it might be by grace” (rather than by the law, which produces wrath), allowing the whole seed, which does *not* include those who are “of the law alone” but only those who are “of the faith of Abraham,” to be guaranteed a share in the promise.¹⁸

The second part of Rom 4:13–25 begins in Rom 4:16b with Paul’s declaration that Abraham is “the father of us all” (that is, of all believers). He supports this statement in Rom 4:17a by noting that in Gen 17:5 God promised Abraham that he would be “the father of many nations.” Then, in Rom 4:17b–22, Paul digresses in praise of Abraham’s response to this promise, which he interprets as a promise *to raise the dead*. Thus Paul lauds Abraham for putting his faith in “the God who raises the dead and who calls the things that are not as if they were” as he believed this promise concerning himself and his seed (Rom 4:17b–18). Even though he saw “his own body already dead” and “the deadness of Sarah’s womb,” Abraham did not doubt God’s ability to fulfill this promise, i.e., to resurrect their dead bodies and make him the father of many nations (Rom 4:19–

¹⁷ As Moo puts it, “Violation of law turns ‘sin’ into the more serious offense of ‘transgression,’ meriting God’s wrath” (*Romans*, 276).

¹⁸ Although most commentators agree that Paul includes “the one who is of the law” among the seed (“not only to the one who is of the law, but also to the one who is of the faith of Abraham; so Dunn, *Romans*, 1:216; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 385; Moo, *Romans*, 278–79), it is quite difficult to make sense of this reading in this context, since in Rom 4:14 Paul has just rejected the possibility that those who are from the law are the heirs. A more literal translation of Rom 4:16 might suggest that Paul is in fact excluding “the one who is of the law *alone*” (οὐ τῷ ἐκ τοῦ νόμου μόνον; cf. Rom 4:12, “those who are of circumcision alone”). This translation is probably to be preferred, but the unexpected καί (“and”) makes the grammar difficult. It is as if Paul were trying to say two different things at once: (1) “not to the one who is of the law alone, but to the one *who is also* of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all”; and (2) “*not only* to the one who is of the law *who believes*, but also *to all of us whose father is Abraham through faith*. It also possible that the καί is simply superfluous and should be ignored in translation (so NAB: “not to those who only adhere to the law but to those who follow the faith of Abraham”).

21). It is precisely because Abraham believed this promise of resurrection that it is written that his faith “was counted to him unto righteousness” (Rom 4:22). Believers can be sure that this text applies also to them, since they similarly believe in the God who has *already* raised Jesus (Rom 4:23–24). They too are justified when they believe in the one “who was handed over for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25).

3.2.2.7. *The Argument of Romans 5:1–11*

Although there is little mention of faith in Rom 5:1–11, we should in no way conclude—as many have—that this passage does not belong with the primary argument.¹⁹ Quite to the contrary, this passage is at the heart of what the primary argument is all about, namely, the “boast” of those who are justified by faith. It is here that Paul finally uses the word *καυχᾶσθαι* (“to boast”) positively, and in fact the passage consists largely of a list of boasts. First, justification by faith brings “peace with God” (Rom 5:1) and causes believers to “boast in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2). Second, this boast is something that believers have even in the midst of “afflictions”

¹⁹ The word *πίστις* appears only once in many manuscripts, but others include the rather superfluous *τῇ πίστει* in Rom 5:2. If *τῇ πίστει* is original, it would seem that Paul is again emphasizing *πίστις* in the usual manner of the primary argument. Nevertheless, whether Rom 5 belongs with the primary argument continues to be disputed. Some view all of Rom 5 as a transition from Rom 3:21–4:25 to Rom 6–8 (so Matthew Black, *Romans* [2d ed.; NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 81; similarly Patricia M. McDonald, “Romans 5.1–11 as a Rhetorical Bridge,” *JSNT* 40 [1990]: 81–96). What has become increasingly common is the position that Rom 5 belongs with Rom 6–8. Moo, for example, says that the common themes and vocabulary in Rom 5:1–11 and Rom 8:18–39 form a sort of *inclusio* that brackets Rom 5–8 (*Romans*, 290–95). It is better, though, to view Rom 5 and Rom 8 as parallel: both form the climax of their respective arguments (Dunn, *Romans*, 1:242–44; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* [EKKNT 6; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener; Mannheim: Patmos, 2010], 286–87).

(Rom 5:3), since these afflictions, though unpleasant in themselves, have positive consequences: endurance, “proven character,” and still greater hope (Rom 5:3–4).²⁰ Third, this hope “does not disappoint” (another litotes for boasting, as in Rom 1:16) because believers have also received another component of the faith event, namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit, whereby “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts” (Rom 5:5). Fourth, believers have further proof of God’s love since Christ has done something that no one else would dare to do: he died for them not when they were just or good, but when they were sinners (Rom 5:6–8). Fifth, believers can be even more sure that Christ’s “life,” i.e., his resurrection, will save them from future wrath than they are that they have been justified/reconciled through Christ’s death (Rom 5:9–10). Finally, in the meantime believers are “boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:11).

3.2.2.8. *The Argument of Romans 5:12–21*

Paul completes his list of boasts in Rom 5 not with a final defense of faith—which will be reserved for Rom 10:5–13—but with a grandiose typology of Adam and Christ in Rom 5:12–21. The main purpose of this passage is to extol the “abundance” of the grace/gift of Christ by comparing its consequences to those of the trespass of Adam. The passage has two parts. The first is Rom 5:12–14, where Paul begins a comparison but soon digresses on the existence of sin and the reign of death between Adam and Moses.

²⁰ Fitzmyer’s apparently anti-Pelagian exegesis (afflictions are “endured with the aid of God”) misses Paul’s point (*Romans*, 397). The afflictions are thought of as something unpleasant, yet also *positive* because for believers they produce endurance, proven character (δοκιμή), and hope (cf. also 1 Pet 1:6–7, which speaks of trials [πειρασμοί] as necessary to test the “genuineness” [δοκίμιον] of faith). Thus one might say that for Paul the afflictions themselves *are* the aid of God.

In order to understand the importance of this digression, it is necessary to distinguish carefully between “sin” (ἁμαρτία) and “transgression” (παράβασις; the terms παράπτωμα [“trespass”] in Rom 5:15, 17–18 and παρακοή [“disobedience”] in Rom 5:19 are synonyms of παράβασις).²¹ Paul first speaks of *sin* entering the world, and it is sin that led to death for all people “because all sinned” (Rom 5:12).²² After noting that sin was “in the world” before the law, he adds that sin is not “accounted” without the law (Rom 5:13). In other words, it is not considered *transgression* without the law (Paul thus is saying the same thing as in Rom 4:15: “Where there is no law, neither is there transgression [παράβασις]”). Nevertheless, sin leads to death, and since sin prevailed after Adam, the result is that “death reigned from Adam until Moses, and even upon those who did not sin after the likeness of the transgression (παράβασις) of Adam, who is a type of the one to come” (Rom 5:14). Adam is therefore like Christ in that the consequences of his single act abounded unto the many. Adam’s act, however, was not merely an “original sin,” but an original *transgression*. This original transgression was so enormous that it subjected all of Adam’s descendants to both sin and death, regardless of whether they committed the same transgression as Adam or whether they were transgressors under the law that came later under Moses.

²¹ Ibid., *Romans*, 418.

²² The disputed ἐφ’ ᾧ (lit., “on which”; Rom 5:12) probably means something like “because.” Fitzmyer lists no less than ten interpretations of ἐφ’ ᾧ, and he himself argues for an eleventh (ἐφ’ ᾧ as a consecutive conjunction, “with the result that, so that,” though this would disrupt the immediate flow of thought; *Romans*, 413–17). Some read the ᾧ as a true relative pronoun, but the trouble is that the only likely candidates for an antecedent (either ἄνθρωπος or the first clause as a whole) are too far away from ᾧ, and the intermediate clauses would have to be relegated to a parenthesis: “Just as through one man (ἄνθρωπος) sin entered the world, (and through sin, death, and thus death spread to all people) *because of whom/which* (ἐφ’ ᾧ) all sinned.” Theodor Zahn tries to avoid this problem by taking *all* of the preceding clauses as the antecedent, but ἐφ’ ᾧ cannot flow logically from all of them at once (*Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* [Leipzig: Deichert, 1910], 263–67). It therefore makes the most sense to view the ἐφ’ ᾧ as an informal conjunction.

The second part of the passage is Rom 5:15–21, which consists of several comparisons which demonstrate that the grace/gift of Christ is more abundant than the original transgression Adam. This part of the argument is more neatly structured, and it can be outlined as follows:

- I. Comparison of the abundance of the trespass and of the gift (Rom 5:15)
 - A. The trespass and the gift are not alike;
 - B. The many died through one trespass;
 - C. The gift through one man, Jesus Christ, is more abundant unto the many;
- II. Comparison of the sentences that came to the many through the respective number of transgressions (Rom 5:16)
 - A. The gift not “as through one man sinning”;
 - B. Condemnation “from one”;
 - B. Justification “from many trespasses”;
- III. Comparison of the reigns that come through the trespass and through Jesus Christ (Rom 5:17)
 - A. Death reigned through one trespass;
 - B. The recipients of grace “will reign in life” through “the one, Jesus Christ”;
- IV. Comparison of the sentences that come to all through the trespass and through the just deed (Rom 5:18)
 - A. Condemnation to all through one trespass;
 - B. “Justification of life” to all through one just deed;
- V. Comparison of the moral status that the many are “appointed” through the disobedience/obedience of one man (Rom 5:19)
 - A. The many are appointed sinners through one man’s disobedience;
 - B. The many are appointed just through one man’s obedience;
- VI. Comparison of the abundance/reign of the trespass/sin and of grace in light of the law’s entrance (Rom 5:20–21)
 - A. The law and the multiplication of the trespass;
 - B. Grace abounded more than sin;
 - C. “Sin reigned in death”;
 - D. “Grace will reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”;

With the exception of Rom 5:20–21, a peculiar feature in the above verses is that Paul consistently notes the power of “one,” i.e., of one act or of one man (so also in the

unfinished comparison in Rom 5:12). He does this in order to praise the abundance of the gift, which is all the more glorious because it accomplishes so much through just one man and his single act. Paul also hesitates to compare the gift directly with Adam's trespass, as if the two are unworthy of comparison. "The gift is not like the trespass," he says, because the gift is more abundant (Rom 5:15). It also "does not come as through one man sinning" but instead "from *many* trespasses" (Rom 5:16).²³ The reason is that the law has since entered, leading to the multiplication of the trespass. This multiplication of the trespass has in turn led to an even greater proliferation of sin, but this only adds to the glory of the gift because "where sin has increased, grace has super-abounded (ὑπερπερισσεύειν)" (Rom 5:20).

3.2.3. Romans 10:5–13

Long after Rom 3:21–5:21, Paul finally concludes the primary argument in Rom 10:5–13, which is located in the very center of Rom 9–11. In this section of the letter he wrestles with the problem of Israel's rejection of the gospel, but in Rom 10:5–13 he takes a brief respite and offers a final defense of the primary argument. He has just prayed for his people's salvation in Rom 10:1, and his diagnosis of their error in Rom 10:2–4 culminated in the declaration that Christ, whom Paul identifies as the τέλος ("end") of the law, is the source of righteousness "for all who believe." In Rom 10:5–13, the apostle

²³ The unfinished comparison and the digression in Rom 5:12–14 also probably suggest hesitancy on Paul's part. The digression cuts off the initial comparison, leaving Rom 5:12 as an orphaned dependent clause (the ὥσπερ ["just as"] is never given a corresponding οὕτως καί ["thus also"; cf. Rom 5:19, 21]). The reader thus gets the impression that Paul decided to abort the comparison and to make certain qualifications first so that he could begin the comparison properly.

once more contrasts the two approaches to righteousness—“works of law” and faith in Christ—and proves that all who believe in Christ can boast of their salvation through their mutual Lord.

The first approach Paul summarizes in Rom 10:5 by quoting what Moses writes concerning “righteousness that is from the law” in Lev 18:5: “The one who does these things will live in them.” He does not attempt to interpret this verse with his characteristic τοῦτ’ ἔστιν (“that is”), nor does he repeat his earlier proof in Rom 3:19–20 concerning the impossibility of obtaining righteousness in this manner. The verse on its own suffices to demonstrate that “works of law” does not represent the τέλος of the law for all people. After all, it *de facto* excludes the Gentiles, even if it might seem to offer the Jews some hope of obtaining righteousness.

Paul introduces the second approach by means of personification.²⁴ “The righteousness from faith” itself speaks through Deut 30:12–14, though Paul quotes the text rather freely, combining it with part of Deut 9:4 (“do not say in your heart”) and interpreting each line with τοῦτ’ ἔστιν (“that is”).²⁵ He takes Deut 30:12–13 as a

²⁴ Some have argued that δέ in Rom 10:6 is not adversative and thus that Paul is not contrasting two approaches in Rom 10:5–13 (so William S. Campbell, “Christ the End of the Law: Romans 10:4,” *StudBib* 3 [1978]: 73–81; Robert Badenas, *Christ the End of the Law: Romans 10:4 in Pauline Perspective* [JSNTSupp 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985], 118–33; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], 76). As Dunn rightly claims (*Romans*, 2:602), though, the contrast is clear not only from the δέ itself but also from the flow of the argument as well as the similar contrast in Gal 3:10–12.

²⁵ According to Christopher D. Stanley, Paul’s loose quotation of Deut 30:12–14 would not have troubled the original hearers, who did not expect quotations always to be exact (*Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 342–43). It turns out that loose citation was a common phenomenon with this particular text (see, e.g., Bar 3:29–30 and Philo, *De post. Caini* 24 §§84–85; a detailed comparison can be found in *The Word is Near You: A Study of Deuteronomy 30:12–14 in Paul’s Letter to the Romans in a Jewish Context* [New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007]; whether Paul’s interpretation depends on *Tg. Neofiti* is disputed; see Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 591).

command not to doubt his message that Christ has been (or will be) “brought down” (καταγαγεῖν) from heaven and also “brought up” (ἀναγαγεῖν) from the dead (Rom 10:6–7).²⁶ “The righteousness from faith” then announces through Deut 30:14 that “the word” is already “in your mouth and in your heart,” i.e., that it is something that is not restricted to Jews but has been made known to all people. Paul concludes therefore that this “word” in Deut 30:14 is “the word of faith that we preach” (Rom 10:8), the latter of which is likewise confessed “in the mouth” and believed “in the heart” as believers acknowledge Christ’s lordship and resurrection in order to obtain the promise of righteousness and salvation (Rom 10:9–10). This promise is in accordance with Isa 28:16, which allows “all who believe in him” to boast openly of their salvation (“will not be put to shame” is yet another litotes for boasting; Rom 10:11), as well as Joel 2:32, which removes the distinction between Jew and Greek, uniting believers under the same Lord as they trust that he is generous to save “everyone who calls upon name of the Lord” (Rom 10:12–13).

3.2.4. Summary of the Primary Argument

The primary argument can be thought of as a proclamation and a defense of Paul’s “boast” concerning the gospel and faith. It begins in the letter’s introduction, where Paul declares his confidence that the gospel is God’s saving power for all believers and that it is the revealer of God’s righteousness (Rom 1:16–17). After a long preliminary

²⁶ Most commentators seem to assume that Paul is referring to Christ’s *first* coming (the incarnation) in Rom 10:6, but Dunn makes a strong case that Christ’s *second* coming is in view here (*Romans*, 2:605). The former seems more natural in this context, but it would be out of place within Paul’s letters as whole, and so Dunn’s position is difficult to rule out.

argument, he eventually resumes the primary argument in Rom 3:21–5:21, which has three parts. First, in Rom 3:21–31 he recapitulates his initial declaration and then defends it in opposition to justification by “works of law.” The revelation of God’s righteousness has come “apart from the law,” is available “through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe,” and is revealed through God’s gracious offering of Christ as a means of justification, redemption, and forgiveness (Rom 3:21–26). By “the law of faith”—the principle that faith is the means of justification for all people—it also excludes boasting on the basis of “works” and “works of law,” and by providing a single means of justification for both Jews and Gentiles it preserves the unity of God and thereby “establishes” the law (Rom 3:27–31).

Second, in Rom 4 Paul uses the example of Abraham to prove that justification, the “happiness” of the forgiven man, and the Abrahamic promise regarding the nations came/come through faith and not through “works,” circumcision, or the law respectively. Abraham did not “find” righteousness by “works” but by having his faith counted to him unto righteousness” (Rom 4:1–3). Similarly, the faith of the one who “believes in the God who justifies the impious” is counted unto righteousness by grace, not by obligation (Rom 4:4–5), and likewise the “forgiven man” in Ps 32:1–2 is happy precisely because he has received justification apart from “works” (Rom 4:6–8). This happiness is upon both circumcised and uncircumcised believers, and in fact Abraham is first of all the father of the latter, and secondly the father of the circumcised who follow his “in-uncircumcision-faith” (Rom 4:9–12). Moreover, because the Abrahamic promise regarding the nations came graciously through “the righteousness of faith,” and due to the impossibility of the promising coming through the law (which “produces wrath”), all believers can be sure

that they, and not those who are “of the law,” are the heirs of promise. They are also justified like Abraham because, by believing in “the God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,” they share his faith in God’s promise to raise the dead (Rom 4:13–25).

Third, in Rom 5 Paul at last uses the word “boast” openly with respect to believers as he lists several of their boasts and extols the “abundance” of the grace/gift of Christ in comparison to the trespass of Adam. Justification by faith brings “peace with God,” allows believers to “boast in hope of the glory of God” and even to “boast in afflictions” (Rom 5:1–3). These afflictions then lead to even greater hope, especially since believers have received God’s love through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:4–5). Christ’s death on behalf of them as sinners further proves God’s love for them (Rom 5:6–8), and, just as his death has justified and reconciled them, it is even more certain that Christ’s “life,” i.e., his resurrection, will save them from wrath (Rom 5:9–10). In the meantime, they are “boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:11). After all, Christ’s gift is far more abundant than Adam’s trespass, for as Paul shows in several comparisons, instead of bringing sin and death through one man and one trespass, it brings life and righteousness to all people through one man and one act of obedience, even though the entrance of the law has since caused the trespass to multiply (Rom 5:12–21).

Finally, much like the introduction to the primary argument, the conclusion is displaced from Rom 3:21–5:21. It is located in the heart of Rom 9–11, which concerns Israel’s rejection of the gospel. After praying for his people’s salvation and diagnosing their error with regard to “works” and the law, in Rom 10:5–13 Paul contrasts the two approaches to righteousness. There is “righteousness that is from the law” about which

Moses wrote in Lev 18:5, and there is “the righteousness of faith,” the latter of which speaks through Deut 30:12–14, telling all people not to doubt Christ’s first (or perhaps second) coming or his return from the dead, and announcing that “the word of faith” is already “in your mouth” and “in your heart” (Rom 10:5–8). This word is the promise that all who profess Christ’s Lordship and believe in his resurrection will receive righteousness and salvation (Rom 10:9–10). All who do “will not be put to shame” as they are united under the same Lord, who will generously save all who call upon his name, without distinction between Jew and Greek (Rom 10:11–13).

3.3. THE SECONDARY ARGUMENT OF ROMANS

So far I have examined the primary argument of Romans and have shown that this part of the letter concerns the boast (or boasts) of those who are justified by faith. Frequent emphasis is placed on faith, which allows believers to be assured not only of their justification and reconciliation but also of their future salvation from wrath. After the main part of the argument in Rom 3:21–5:21, the reader discovers that this assurance has added conditions in Rom 6–8. These chapters are not principally about faith but instead have to do with the other two elements of the faith event, namely, baptism and reception of the Spirit. The argument can be outlined as follows:

I. Romans 6:1–7:6

A. *Question*: Should believers sin in light of the abundance of grace?

Response: Participation in the Christ event through baptism (Rom 6:1–14)

B. *Question*: Should believers sin in light of their freedom from the law?

Response: A change of masters from sin to obedience (Rom 6:15–23)

C. *Extended Response* (to those “who know the law”): Death to the law and remarriage to the one who was raised (Rom 7:1–6)

II. Romans 7:7–25

A. *Question*: Is the law sin?

Response: Sin's opportunity through the law (Rom 7:7–12)

B. *Question*: Has something good become death?

Response: Sin's revelation through what is good (Rom 7:13)

C. *Extended Response*: The plight of the one under the law (Rom 7:14–25)

III. Romans 8

A. The consequences of possessing and living by the Spirit (Rom 8:1–17)

B. The “groaning” of creation and of the Spirit until the revelation of God's children (Rom 8:18–30)

C. Doxology of God's love (Rom 8:31–39)

The above can be thought of as a secondary or “helper” argument because its purpose is to complement the primary argument, which on its own might seem to imply that “faith alone” is sufficient for final salvation.²⁷ Even worse—and this is *Paul's* main concern—it could be twisted and slandered by some as an invitation to continue in sin or at least as a kind of moral libertinism. The main point of the secondary argument, then, is that believers must *not* continue in sin. Rather, because they have received baptism and the Spirit, they have been freed from sin and the law, and they have a new obligation which they must meet in order to obtain co-glorification with Christ.

3.3.1. Romans 6:1–7:6

²⁷ The recent trend, which has been inspired by the work of Robert C. Tannehill on the theme of co-crucifixion/resurrection in Paul (*Dying and Rising with Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology* [Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1967]), has been to read Paul in essentially participatory rather than forensic terms. Michael J. Gorman, for example, has argued that Rom 6–8 is actually the center of Romans, and that these chapters *define* justification by faith, such that faith and co-crucifixion amount to the same thing (*Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 73–79). Gorman's thesis, however, does not attend to the main question of Rom 6–8, which is whether the argument up to that point implies an obligation to sin. Few have followed Douglas A. Campbell's more radical proposal that the forensic understanding of justification should be “exegetically eliminated” altogether in favor of a purely participatory model (*The Quest for Paul's Gospel: A Suggested Strategy* [JSNTSup 274; London: Clark, 2005], 4; he suggests the rather unwieldy term “pneumatologically participatory martyrological eschatology”).

3.3.1.1. *The Question in Romans 6:1–14*

The argument of Rom 6:1–14 begins with a question: “What then will we say? Should we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom 6:1) This inference is of course absurd—an obligation to sin is, as it were, an obligation to do what one ought not to do—but there is a reason that Paul considers this particular inference. Earlier he noted that he had been “slandered” as one who holds to a backward ethic of “doing evil that good might come” (Rom 3:8), and so in Rom 6:1 he rephrases this ethic in terms of sin and grace and again sets the record straight. Furthermore, by targeting this particular ethic he is effectively inoculating the audience against an extreme form of moral libertinism, i.e., freedom from obligation *altogether*, which is a major problem in 1 Corinthians (“everything is permitted”; 1 Cor 10:23). A backward ethic is of course worse than libertinism, but to confront it in Rom 6:1 is rhetorically advantageous because it at least assumes that there *is* a moral obligation for believers. Paul’s question thus is not *whether* the primary argument implies an obligation, but *what* obligation it implies. In light of the abundance of grace received by faith, must believers continue in sin?

3.3.1.2. *The Response*

Paul rejects the ethic of Rom 6:1 with μή γένοιτο, and then responds in Rom 6:2–14 by arguing that believers have died with Christ through baptism, that their death with Christ implies a share in his resurrection, and that they therefore have a new obligation. First, he identifies believers as those who have “died to sin,” and he suggests that this

death makes it impossible to continue in sin (“how can we still live in it?” Rom 6:2). Second, he reveals how it is that believers have died: all who have been baptized—i.e., all who have experienced the second part of the faith event—have entered into Christ’s death and burial through baptism.²⁸ All believers have been baptized “into Christ Jesus,” and they therefore have been baptized “into his death” (Rom 6:3) and have been “co-buried (συνθάπτειν) with him” (Rom 6:4). Third, the purpose of this co-burial with Christ is to allow them to “walk in newness of life” just as Christ was raised from dead (Rom 6:4). After all, they have successfully been “co-grown (σύμφυτος) in the likeness of his death,” and so it follows that they will share in his resurrection as well (Rom 6:5).²⁹

Fourth, the baptized have participated in Christ’s death for another reason: to be freed permanently from slavery to sin by the complete destruction of their previous sinful body. The entire “old person” has been “co-crucified (συσταυροῦν)” with Christ, so that “we might no longer be slaves to sin” (Rom 6:6). This freedom from sin necessarily occurs because “a dead person has been justified from sin” (Rom 6:7).³⁰ Fifth, Paul reiterates that believers’ death with Christ implies a belief that they will also “co-live

²⁸ Dunn says that by the time of the writing of Romans the verb βαπτίζεσθαι (“to baptize”) had “already attained the status of a Christian technical term,” and that “Paul can simply assume that all those linked to a Christian congregation will be familiar with it” (*Romans*, 1:311). Dunn also notes that Paul assumes that the baptized have faith (“not forgotten, nor denied”; *ibid.*, 1:314), but what is more significant is Paul’s assumption that faith necessarily *implies* baptism, so that he can refer to believers also as “the baptized.”

²⁹ The logic here is similar to that of 1 Cor 15:35–49, where Paul defends the resurrection of the dead with the analogy of a seed that “dies” and then is “raised.” Thus participation in Christ’s death implies a share in his resurrection as well.

³⁰ The use of δικαιῶν (“to justify”; an important word in the primary argument) in Rom 6:7 seems rather forced (most commentators can only make sense of it by translating it in the rare sense of “to free”; so Dunn, *Romans*, 1:321; Moo, *Romans*, 177). It is possible that Paul included it here in order to show the inseparability of the primary and secondary arguments, but also as a hint that he is moving on from his discussion of forensic justification to another way of talking about righteousness.

(σὺζῆν) with him (Rom 6:8). He then reminds them that this life they hope to share will last forever. The risen Christ has been freed forever from death's mastery (Rom 6:9), and so his death is a permanent, "once-and-for-all" death to sin. He now "lives to God" as one who is free from both death and sin (Rom 6:10).

Finally, from the preceding argument Paul concludes in Rom 6:11–14 that believers have a new obligation, and he commands believers to think of themselves and to act in a new way.³¹ On the one hand, because of their death with Christ, believers must continue to "count" themselves among those who are "dead to sin." On the other hand, in light of their belief that they will share in Christ's resurrection, and because Christ himself already "lives to God," they are now obligated to count themselves among those who likewise "live to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11). Even if they do not yet share fully in Christ's resurrection, their death to sin means that they must not allow sin to "reign" in their body (Rom 6:12) or allow sin to use their bodily members as "weapons of injustice" (Rom 6:13). Instead he commands them to "present yourselves to God as if you are alive from the dead" (Rom 6:13), promising them that sin's reign over them is over since they are under grace and not the law (Rom 6:14).³²

³¹ The imperative in Rom 6:11–14 has often been interpreted as a kind of paradoxical command to "become what you are" (Dunn suggests "become what you are becoming"; *Romans*, 1:337), but the logic leading up to the imperative is more complex than that. What Paul describes is a *past* event (death with Christ through baptism) that implies a *future* event (resurrection with Christ) as well as a *present* obligation to live in a way that reflects both of these events. This present obligation follows because Christ's own death and resurrection are already complete and permanent, such that Christ "no longer dies" (Rom 6:9) but now "lives to God" (Rom 6:10), i.e., lives in a state of correct moral orientation.

³² Some commentators include Rom 6:12–14 with the next passage (so Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 444; Dunn, *Romans*; 1:335), but the presence of the word "grace" (χάρις) in Rom 6:1 and 6:14 forms a sort of *inclusio* around the passage. A new though related question involving the law is then introduced in Rom 6:15. This question turns out to be a major pivot in the argument because it shifts the discussion toward the subject of the law.

3.3.1.3. *The Question in Romans 6:15–23*

Paul’s declaration at the end of Rom 6:14 that “you are not under the law but under grace” introduces the law into the argument of Rom 6–8, and in Rom 6:15 it leads him to ask another version of his previous question: “What then? Should we sin, because we are not under the law but under grace?” Again the apostle successfully steers clear of the question of moral libertinism, and here we can make a better guess as to why he has been dodging it. In declaring believers free from the law, he himself might be open to the charge of libertinism. He therefore controls the discussion carefully and prevents the audience from even considering this charge. Instead of asking whether there *is* an obligation under grace, he asks whether the obligation under grace is somehow the *opposite* of that under the law.

3.3.1.4. *The Response*

After again repudiating an obligation to sin with *μὴ γένοιτο*, in Rom 6:15–23 Paul speaks “in human fashion” (Rom 6:19) and articulates believers’ obligation in terms of slavery, arguing that the benefits of being a slave to sin are as nothing when compared to the alternative. First, in Rom 6:16 he tells believers that if they “present” themselves as obedient slaves of either sin or obedience, they are indeed “slaves to the one you obey,” and that the consequence is either death or righteousness. This argument is subtly forceful, but it also contains some humor. On the one hand, it gently forces latent libertines to admit that they are slaves. Paul does not insist that everyone is indeed a

slave, but instead simply considers two possible masters, sin and obedience, and leaves the audience to come to the recognition on their own that there can be no other alternative; they actually *must* be slaves to one or the other. On the other hand, the audience will find what seems to be a hidden joke if they think about the argument literally. Paul defines a slave as one who obeys a master, but to be a slave of sin would be to obey an act of *disobedience*. Conversely, a slave of obedience would be one who “obeys obedience.” This bit of levity again makes the pill of slavery easier for the potential libertine to swallow.

Second, Paul recalls with thanksgiving in Rom 6:17 that his audience has already come to obey “the pattern of teaching to which you were entrusted.”³³ He then notes in Rom 6:18 that at the point when they came to obey this pattern, they were freed from sin only to be re-enslaved to righteousness. Thus the audience is once more left to reach the conclusion on their own that they have no choice but to be enslaved to one or the other. The only real choice is which one to serve. Finally, in Rom 6:19–23 Paul commands believers to serve righteousness with their bodily members, and he shows the benefits of doing so by comparing them to the consequences of serving sin. When they were slaves of “impurity and lawlessness,” the result was further lawlessness, but now they must serve righteousness with their bodily members in order to obtain holiness (Rom 6:19). Even if it once seemed good to be free from righteousness, they profited nothing except shame and death (Rom 6:20–21, 23). Fortunately, after their emancipation from sin, they

³³ What exactly this “pattern of teaching (τύπος διδασκαλίας)” refers to remains a mystery. Most view it as some sort of “baptismal summary of faith” (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 449) to which believers commit. Few have accepted Dunn’s argument that τύπος here actually refers to Christ himself as an example (“the pattern of teaching to *whom* you were handed over”; *Romans*, 1:343).

became slaves of God, who not only provides holiness but grants them eternal life (Rom 6:22–23).

3.3.1.5. *The Extended Response in Romans 7:1–6*³⁴

The preceding passage suffices to demonstrate why those under grace should not remain slaves of sin, but it does not defend Paul’s original premise in Rom 6:14–15 that believers are free from the law, nor does it say why freedom from the law is a good thing in the first place.³⁵ In Rom 7:1–6, then, Paul speaks to believers “who know the law” and uses the analogy of remarriage to argue that they are no longer wed to the law, that their marriage to the law was unfruitful, and that they are now free to be remarried to Christ and thereby receive greater benefits. This is no ordinary remarriage, however. According to the law, a woman is released from “the law of her husband” upon her *husband’s* death (Rom 7:2–3), but believers seek to be wed to another even though their previous husband did not die.³⁶ In fact, they have no hope of their previous husband dying, since this

³⁴ Many quite reasonably include Rom 7:1–6 with the rest of Rom 7 (so Dunn, *Romans*, 1:357–58; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 454–56), but these verses follow closely from Paul’s statement in Rom 6:14–15 regarding freedom from the law. Although Rom 7 has a certain unity owing to its consistent focus on the law, τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν (“What then will we say?”) in Rom 7:7 introduces a new set of questions, and the apostle does not even speak with his own voice in the remainder of the chapter.

³⁵ Dunn argues that the declaration in Rom 6:14–15 that believers are free from the law actually follows from Rom 5:12–21, but this is unlikely. Nowhere in Rom 5:12–21 does Paul suggest that the law is one of the “dominant powers of the old age” (or “the age of Adam”), or that believers have now entered a new eschatological “epoch” under which they are freed from the old powers (*Romans*, 1:339–40). Rather the notion that believers are free from the law is only declared in Rom 6:14–15 (a fitting place for this in light of Paul’s argument that believers have died with Christ) and then defended *later*, in Rom 7:1–6.

³⁶ This incongruity in the analogy has led some, most notably C. E. B. Cranfield, to the conclusion that there is no analogy at all, and that Rom 7:2–3 is only an illustration of the principle in Rom 7:1 that the law rules one “as long as one lives” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975–1979], 1:335). Moo correctly notes, though, that the parallels between Rom 7:2–3 and Rom 7:4 cannot be ignored (*Romans*, 413–414). The incongruity is likely

husband is the law itself, which rules them for as long as they live (Rom 7:1).³⁷ In order to be freed lawfully from the law, they themselves have to die, but strangely enough this death has been accomplished through their participation in the death of their *new* husband, through whom they have been “put to death (θανατοῦν) with respect to the law” (Rom 7:4).

Just as happened with the change of masters in the previous passage, this new relationship comes with greater benefits than the old. When believers were trapped or “confined” (κατέχειν; Rom 7:6) in their marriage to the law, they were still “in the flesh.” The law then aroused “sinful passions” within their fleshly members, profiting them nothing but death (Rom 7:5). Fortunately, by participating in Christ’s death—i.e., through baptism (Rom 6:3–4)—they are able to remarry “the one who was raised from the dead” and “bear fruit for God” (Rom 7:4). They must still serve a husband, but they no longer serve “in the oldness of the letter.” They can now serve in a new way, “in the newness of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6), since through the faith event they were not only baptized into Christ’s death but were also given the Spirit.

3.3.2. Romans 7:7–25

deliberate, because it helps draw attention to the unusual circumstances (death with Christ) of the remarriage that believers experience.

³⁷ Some today (and in Paul’s day as well) might wonder why Paul does not consider the possibility of divorce, but as Dunn correctly notes, in this passage the apostle has in mind Jewish law, not Roman, the former of which did not (according to Deut 24:1) allow women to divorce their husbands (*Romans*, 1:360). The word ὑπὸ ἀνδρός (“under a man/husband”; Rom 7:2), which is rarely translated literally (both Dunn [*Romans*, 1:358] and Fitzmyer [*Romans*, 454] render “a married woman”), also reinforces that the woman is bound under the man.

3.3.2.1. *The Question in Romans 7:7–12*

The argument throughout Rom 6:1–7:6 was concerned with the consequences of baptism, but in the last verse the focus began to change to the Spirit, which is what allows believers to continue serving God after their death with Christ through baptism. Before turning to the subject of the Spirit, however, Paul has some unfinished business regarding the law. More specifically, he must show further why believers should want to be free from the law. He has already given a partial explanation in Rom 7:5, where he says that it is through the law, or their old *husband*, that sinful passions, i.e., their old *master*, were operative within them. In order to make the problem clear, the apostle asks whether their old husband is to be *identified* with their old master: “What then will we say? Is the law sin?”

3.3.2.2. *The Response*

After denying that the law is sin with his usual *μὴ γένοιτο*, Paul unexpectedly begins a long speech in the first-person singular which lasts for the rest of the chapter. The long history of interpretation of this “I” in Rom 7:7–25 goes well beyond the concerns of this study, but it should be mentioned that few today are convinced the “I” represents a believer. On the other hand, it is also problematic to view the “I” as if Paul were simply remembering his former perspective as a Pharisee. It is true that the person in Rom 7:7–25 is someone under the law, but as some have noted, this person

nevertheless represents a Christian view of the law.³⁸ In other words, the “I” is the old Paul, but as if he had already possessed his new perspective on the law as well as his authority as an apostle. This imaginary “I” thus applies to believers inasmuch as they could find themselves in a similar situation if they do not continue on in the newness of the Spirit but return to the oldness of the letter.³⁹

In Rom 7:7–12, this imaginary Paul who is under the law speaks out and argues that the law, though good, gave personified sin an “opportunity” to do its worst to him. First, it is through the law that he came to know sin, particularly lust (Rom 7:7). When the law commanded him not to lust, through the commandment sin multiplied and “produced in me every lust” (Rom 7:8). Second, the law leads to the opposite of its apparent purpose. It does not put an end to sin or bring new life, but in fact it is *sin*, which had been “dead,” that “comes back to life” (ἀναζῆν), deceiving and killing the one who had previously been alive (Rom 7:8–9, 11). The imaginary person under the law thus discovers a kind of paradox: the law’s command is simultaneously “unto life” and yet

³⁸ So Otto Kuss, *Der Römerbrief übersetzt und erklärt* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1957–78), 482–83; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 465.

³⁹ Whether the speech of the imaginary Paul can be considered a form of *prosopopoeia* (Gr. προσωποποιία) is debatable. R. Dean Anderson, Jr. insists that Rom 7:7–25 cannot be *prosopopoeia* because “there are no signals in the text that Paul introduced another speaker” (*Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* [CBET 18; rev. ed.; Louvain: Peeters, 1998], 231 n. 81). Yet it may be that Paul simply is not following the convention of introducing the speaker. In fact, not introducing the speaker adds to the drama. It is only as Paul persists in using the first-person singular (instead of his usual first-person plural) throughout Rom 7:7–25 that the reader comes to the realization that the one speaking is not the apostle. Paul then erases all doubt with a parenthetical thanksgiving (in the first-person plural) in Rom 7:25. If the reader has not yet surmised that the one speaking is someone other than the apostle, this interjection in Rom 7:25 is a clear indication that the first-person singular is not him. On the other hand, because the speaker is not introduced and is not immediately distinguishable from the apostle, he comes across as a sort of alter-ego, and so perhaps *prosopopoeia* is not the best descriptor of the device that Paul uses—or we might say *invents*—in Rom 7:7–25.

“found for me to be unto death” (Rom 7:10). Despite the latter, on account of the former the law and the commandment remain irrevocably “holy, just, and good” (Rom 7:12).

3.3.2.3. The Question and Immediate Response in Romans 7:13

The previous question was whether the law is *sin*, and so in Rom 7:13 the imaginary Paul asks whether the law—which he here calls “the good”—has become *death* (at least in his case). The question arises from his contention that the law is good and yet “unto death” (Rom 7:10). The imaginary Paul responds by reiterating that it is *through* the good that sin brings death. In the process, sin not only reveals itself but makes plain just how “exceedingly sinful” it is. The law thus remains good and has not been somehow twisted into something evil. Nevertheless, sin is able to use it as an instrument of death.

3.3.2.4. The Extended Response in Romans 7:14–25

In his speech so far, the imaginary Paul has made the case that the law is good, but that sin nevertheless has taken advantage of the law and has deceived and killed him. In order to dissuade believers further from returning to the law, in Rom 7:14–25 he testifies to his terrible plight under the law as one who wants to do good but is unable to perform it in the flesh. The passage can be divided into two parts. First, in Rom 7:14–20 the imaginary Paul argues that in place of the performance of good, personified sin “dwells” in the flesh and does not carry out the good that the one under the law wants to

do. He knows that the law is not only good but even “spiritual” (a remarkable admission in light of the letter/Spirit contrast in Rom 7:6), but unfortunately he himself is not spiritual but “fleshly” and “sold under sin” (Rom 7:14). He therefore lives in a state of moral impotence, doing what he hates rather than what he wants to do (Rom 7:15). The fact that he does something contrary to what he wants to do proves that he himself is convinced of the goodness of the law, and that it must actually be sin “dwelling” in him that is performing it (Rom 7:16–17). After all, the thing he wants to do is indeed *good*, but the performance of good is not what “dwells” in his flesh (Rom 7:18). Instead what he does is *bad*, and again, the fact that he does it without wanting to do it proves that indwelling sin is the one performing it (Rom 7:19–20).

Second, in Rom 7:21–25 the imaginary Paul describes his awful discovery that there must be two conflicting laws within him. Because he himself wants to do what is good and clings to God’s law “in the inner person,” there must some other law in his bodily members, “the law of sin,” that is warring against “the law of my mind” and imprisoning it (Rom 7:21–23). He therefore is a miserable person who is crying out for someone to save him from “this body of death” (Rom 7:24). After the real Paul interjects with thanksgiving for the savior whom God has already provided, the imaginary Paul offers one last grim thought: under the law the interests of his mind and of his flesh are divided, and he therefore serves two masters. With his mind—which is the “I” in most of the passage, the “inner person” who loves God’s law and does not consent to the bad that he actually does in the flesh—he serves the law of God, but with his flesh he serves the law of sin (Rom 7:25).

3.3.3. Romans 8

3.3.3.1. *The Argument of Romans 8:1–17*

Now that the imaginary Paul has helped to dissuade believers from seeking to be under the law, in Rom 8:1–17 the apostle shows the benefits of living by the Spirit and contrasts them with the consequences of living by the flesh. The passage has two parts. First, in Rom 8:1–11 Paul declares that those who live by the Spirit obtain freedom from sin and condemnation, the ability to do what the law requires and to please God, and the promise of resurrection, all of which are impossible through the law and for those who live by the flesh. Those who are “in Christ Jesus” do not receive condemnation, but rather the “law” of the life-giving Spirit has freed them from that same “law of sin and death” that the imaginary Paul has just described (Rom 8:1–3).⁴⁰ The only thing that has been condemned is the *sin* in their flesh. The law was unable to do this, but by sending his son, God has not only condemned sin in the flesh but has allowed the “just requirements of the law” to be fulfilled by believers, or those who “walk by the Spirit” rather than by the flesh (Rom 8:3–4). After all, those who “are according to the Spirit” also “think the things of the Spirit,” and the result is life and peace. Those who “are according to flesh” likewise “think the things of flesh,” but the result is death and an inability to please God (Rom 8:5–8). So long as the Spirit of God and of Christ dwells in them, believers belong

⁴⁰ Dunn’s claim that “the law of the Spirit of life” and “the law of sin and death” both refer to the Torah (either the Torah used as “an instrument of divine power” or the Torah “manipulated by sin and death”) is rather forced (*Romans*, 1:416–19). It is better to view each of these expressions as a play on words (so Fitzmyer, though he goes too far when he says that Paul “indulges in oxymoron” with the expression “law of the Spirit,” since Paul has already conceded in Rom 7:14 that the law is spiritual; *Romans*, 482).

to Christ and are indeed those who are “in the Spirit” and not “in the flesh.” The Spirit brings life and righteousness to the body that is “dead because of sin,” and they can be certain that, just as God raised Christ, so God will eventually “bring life to your mortal bodies through the same Spirit dwelling in you” (Rom 8:9–11).

Second, in Rom 8:12–17 Paul argues that this promise of life has certain conditions, and that those who meet these conditions are God’s children and are entitled to co-glorification with Christ. He begins by reiterating that believers are not obligated to sin, but this time he does not issue any commands as he did earlier in Rom 6. Instead he concludes that believers “are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh” (Rom 8:12). Next he states the conditions of both life and death. The latter will result if believers return to living “according to the flesh,” the former if “by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). As in Rom 6:11, their participation in the death of Christ has continued significance in the present, but here believers have a more active role as they put to death the body’s deeds. If they do so under the Spirit’s guidance, they can be sure that they are God’s children, since all whom God’s Spirit guides are also God’s children (Rom 8:14).⁴¹ In fact, the Spirit that believers have received through the faith event is “the Spirit of adoption,” and so they already call out to God as their father and are no longer “slaves unto fear” (Rom 8:15). Additionally, they have the dual testimony of the Spirit and of their own spirit that they are indeed God’s children (Rom 8:16). They therefore are “coheirs (συγκληρονόμος)” with Christ, and as such they are entitled to the promise of life, or as Paul puts it here, to be “co-glorified (συνδοξάζειν)”

⁴¹ The connection between “by the Spirit” in Rom 8:13 and “guided by the Spirit” in Rom 8:14 is not usually noted, and Fitzmyer even includes Rom 8:13 with the preceding passage (*Romans*, 492).

with Christ. Yet there is another condition, one that is more passive: they first must “co-suffer (συμπάσχειν)” with him (Rom 8:17).

3.3.3.2. *The Argument of Romans 8:18–30*

So far in Rom 8 Paul has taken a more congenial approach by avoiding the imperative, but even as he ends Rom 8:1–17 on a note of hope (“so that we might be co-glorified”), he does not want the audience to get the wrong idea. He wants them to know that the condition of co-suffering is not impossible, but also that the task will be difficult. He therefore spends all of Rom 8:18–30 giving believers reasons to be encouraged that they will endure and achieve co-glorification. First, their present sufferings are as nothing when compared to their future glory, and all of creation agrees. It “eagerly awaits” the glory of God’s children, who are naturally free from decay, because it hopes to be freed from its unwilling slavery to decay (Rom 8:18–21). It therefore “co-groans (συστενάζειν)” and “co-travails (συνωδίνειν)” as it awaits the revelation of God’s children (Rom 8:22). Believers too, despite their possession of the Spirit, participate in this groaning as they await bodily adoption and redemption (Rom 8:23).⁴² Whatever salvation they have experienced has been in hope, which by definition is something

⁴² Commentators regularly note that Paul here switches to speaking of adoption as a future rather than as a present reality. Most view the switch in terms of the tension of the “already-not-yet” (so Dunn, *Romans*, 1:474–75; Moo, *Romans*, 520–21), but it is also possible to conceive of two distinct adoptions, or adoption events, one of which is the result of the other. The first is the past adoption that they have already received and in which they continue to share so long as they put to death the body’s deeds under the Spirit’s guidance (Rom 8:13–15). This adoption then leads to an inheritance of co-glorification, which believers will receive if they co-suffer with Christ (Rom 8:17). This inheritance *is* the second adoption event. When it occurs, believers’ bodies will be redeemed, and they will no longer experience the Spirit/flesh dualism that they must suffer under the first adoption.

unseen and awaited through endurance (Rom 8:24–25). Their present groaning is merely something that they must temporarily endure until their hope becomes a reality.

Second, not only does creation co-groan with believers, but the Spirit “likewise” assists believers with its own “unutterable groans” (Rom 8:26). These groans are a form of intercession and are necessary because believers are weak and ignorant of the way that they should pray. Despite their ignorance, “the one who searches hearts” knows what the Spirit intends (Rom 8:27). Finally, because both creation and the Spirit help believers in their present suffering and weakness, Paul concludes that “all things work together” for their sake (Rom 8:28). They are “those who love God” and who are “called according to his purpose,” and so God has foreknown them, predestined them, called them, justified them, and glorified them. God’s son has preceded them in glory, but he is “the firstborn of many brethren” since God has predestined believers to be “conformed (σύμμορφος) to the image of his son” (Rom 8:29–30).

3.3.3.3. The Argument of Romans 8:31–39

In Rom 8:31–39, Paul concludes the secondary argument and further assures believers that as God’s chosen ones they will make it through every possible trial and eventually receive “all things,” i.e., co-glorification. The passage consists of a series of rhetorical questions, all of which begin with τίς (“who/what?”; or πῶς, “how?”). In each case the implied answer is “no one/thing” (or “in no way”), and the reason is always given either immediately before or immediately after the question. No one can be against believers, because God is for them (Rom 8:31). Because God did not spare his own son,

in no way will God withhold “all things” from them (Rom 8:32). No one can accuse “the elect of God,” i.e., believers, because God is “the justifier” (Rom 8:33). No one can condemn them, because the risen Christ intercedes for them at the right hand of God (Rom 8:34). Finally, no earthly peril and no created thing of any kind can separate them from God’s love because God himself, who is “the one who loves us,” is the means by which they triumph over them (Rom 8:35–39).

3.3.4. Summary of the Secondary Argument

The secondary argument complements the primary argument because in it Paul insists that believers must not continue in sin, that through baptism and the Spirit they have been freed from sin and the law, and that they have a new obligation if they are to be co-glorified with Christ. The argument has three parts. First, in Rom 6:1–7:6 Paul argues believers must not continue in sin in light of the abundance of grace and their freedom from the law. Through their baptism “into Christ Jesus,” believers have died with Christ and are free from the law, and so they will also share in his resurrection and are commanded to live in a way that reflects both their death to sin and their life with Christ (Rom 6:1–14). They have thus changed masters from sin to obedience, and they are to serve righteousness with their bodily members in order to receive holiness, for slavery to sin profits death, while being a slave to God results not only in holiness but in the gift of eternal life (Rom 6:15–23). Moreover, those “who know the law” are no longer bound to their unfruitful and lifelong marriage to the law, which allowed “sinful passions” to arise within their bodily members. By participating in Christ’s body they

have been “put to death with respect to the law,” so that they can now be wed to “the one who has been raised from the dead” and serve God “in the newness of the Spirit” (Rom 7:1–6).

Second, in Rom 7:7–25 Paul speaks through an imaginary version of himself that is still under the law and argues that being under the law is something negative, since it is the law that allows sin to do its worst. Though the imaginary Paul insists that the law is good and is not to be equated with sin or with death, it is the law that gives sin an opportunity to “come back to life” and then deceive and kill him (Rom 7:7–13). Sin therefore “dwells” in his flesh and performs the evil that he hates rather than the good that he wants to do. The imaginary Paul thus discovers that, despite his inner love of the law, there are two conflicting laws within him, “the law of my mind” and “the law of sin,” and that he serves two masters: the law of God with his mind, and the law of sin with his flesh (Rom 7:14–25).

Third, in Rom 8 Paul contrasts the benefits of walking by the Spirit with the consequences of living by the flesh, and he reassures believers that they will endure and meet the conditions of the ultimate benefit, which is co-glorification with Christ. Those who live by the Spirit have been freed from sin and condemnation, have the ability to do what the law requires, the ability to please God, and the promise of resurrection, all of which are impossible through the law and for those who live by the flesh (Rom 8:1–11). The promise of life, however, has conditions. Believers must actively “put to death the deeds of the body” with the Spirit’s assistance, and if they do they can be sure that they are God’s adopted children and God’s heirs. They therefore will inherit co-glorification with Christ, but there is a passive condition: they must co-suffer with him (Rom 8:12–

17). With regard to this passive condition, believers have every reason to be encouraged. All of creation “co-groans” with them because it too hopes to be freed from decay, and the Spirit assists them with “unutterable groans.” Thus “all things work together” for them, and as “those who love God” they can be sure that God’s plan is for them to be “conformed to the image of his son” (Rom 8:18–30). As “the elect of God,” no one can be against them, in no way will God withhold “all things” from them, no one can condemn them, and no earthly peril or created thing of any kind can separate them from God’s love (Rom 8:31–39).

3.4. CONCLUSION

Just as the three components of the faith event are inseparable, so too are the primary and secondary arguments of Romans. The primary argument concerns the assurance provided by faith, which is not only a means of justification but also allows believers to boast in the hope of salvation. The secondary argument qualifies this boast so that it is not misunderstood as an invitation to continue in sin or as a form of moral libertinism. It is not concerned so much with faith but with baptism and reception of the Spirit, the other two components of the faith event. The argument of Rom 1–11, then, is not only about justification by faith and should not be thought of in terms of “faith alone.” Because believers have also been baptized and have received the Spirit, they must cease from sin, obey God, and co-suffer with Christ in order to receive co-glorification.

CHAPTER 4: ROMANS 9–11: SPECIAL ARGUMENT CONCERNING ISRAEL

The previous chapter was about the importance of the faith event in the interpretation of Romans and distinguished the letter's primary and secondary arguments. This chapter is concerned with what may be considered the most difficult section of the letter: Rom 9–11. I will proceed in two steps. First, I will discuss the problem of how to relate Rom 9–11 to the rest of the letter. Second, I will examine the argument of this section and make the case that it allows for the possibility that believers might fall away into unbelief.

4.1. ROMANS 9–11 WITHIN THE BROADER ARGUMENT

It used to be thought that Rom 9–11 is little more than an excursus, a mere supplement to Rom 1–8. This view developed because Rom 9–11 has its own introduction and conclusion, and because it is preoccupied with a special problem regarding Israel that hardly surfaces earlier in the letter.¹ In reaction to this view, others have since argued the opposite, that these chapters are the very heart of Rom 1–11.² Both

¹ According to C. H. Dodd, a proponent of this view, these chapters were likely a pre-written sermon that was “incorporated here wholesale to save a busy man’s time and trouble in writing on the subject afresh” (*The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* [MNTC 6; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960], 150).

² This understanding of Rom 9–11 goes back to the earliest days of modern scholarship, e.g., Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings: A Contribution to the Critical History of Primitive Christianity* (2 vols.; London: Williams and Norgate, 1873–75), 1:315 (original German ed.: Stuttgart: Becher & Müller, 1845). N. T. Wright has more recently identified Rom 9–11 as the “climax” of the broader argument (*The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 248–49; so also Neil Elliot, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul’s Dialogue with Judaism* [JSNTSup 45; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990], 270; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993], 541).

of these views go too far. In no way can Rom 9–11 be considered the main argument of the letter, for as Douglas J. Moo and others have observed, Paul’s discussion of Israel’s election does not follow directly from anything in Rom 1–8.³ In fact, Rom 9–11 could almost be read entirely on its own and still be well understood (a notable exception is Paul’s use of the word “works,” which must be read in light of Rom 3–4).

On the other hand, to remove Rom 9–11 from the letter would lead to a misunderstanding, but not so much of these chapters themselves. Instead their removal would cause a distortion of the primary and secondary arguments of Romans.⁴ The reason is that, while Paul affirms in Rom 9–11 that the Gentiles have obtained righteousness by faith, he also warns his Gentile audience that they could become just like unbelieving Israel. This warning occurs near the climax of Rom 9–11, which can be outlined as follows:

I. Introduction: Paul’s grief over Israel (Rom 9:1–5)

II. Romans 9:6–29

A. God’s word has not failed (Rom 9:6–13)

1. The children of the flesh and the children of the promise
2. Election apart from “works”

B. *Question*: Is there injustice with God?

Response: God has mercy and hardens as he chooses (Rom 9:14–18)

³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 551; Moo follows Werner Georg Kümmel, “Die Probleme von Römer 9–11 in der gegenwärtigen Forschungslage,” in *Die Israelfrage nach Röm 9–11* (ed. Lorenzo de Lorenzi; Rome: Saint Paul’s Abbey, 1977), 15; Jean-Noël Aletti, *Comment Dieu est-il juste? Clefs pour interpréter l’épître aux Romains* (Parole de Dieu; Rome: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), 150–55, 201–2. R. Dean Anderson, Jr., may be correct that Rom 3:1–8 is a kind of “prolepsis” of Rom 9–11 (*Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* [CBET 18; rev. ed.; Louvain: Peeters, 1998], 216), though Rom 9–11 is not simply a continuation of these earlier verses, as suggested by the following: Egon Brandenburger, “Paulinische Schriftauslegung in der Kontroverse um das Verheissungswort (Röm 9),” *ZTK* 82 (1985): 3–5; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (2 vols.; WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988), 2:519–20; Charles Davison Myers, “Chiastic Inversion in the Argument of Romans 3–8,” *NovT* 35 (1993): 45–46.

⁴ N. T. Wright’s claim that Rom 1–8 and Rom 9–11 are “ultimately incomprehensible” without each other goes too far (“The Messiah and the People” [D.Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1980], 220). It is better to think of Rom 1–8 as *incomplete* without Rom 9–11.

- C. *Rebuttal*: Why does God still find fault? Who has resisted his will?
Response: The vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy; the calling of the Gentiles and the remnant from Israel (Rom 9:19–29)

III. Romans 9:30–10:21

- A. The present situation of Israel and the Gentiles; Paul's prayer for his people (Rom 9:30–10:4)
 B. Conclusion of the primary argument (Rom 10:5–13)
 C. The prerequisites of faith and the problem of disobedience (Rom 10:14–21)

IV. Romans 11:1–24

- A. *Question*: Has God rejected his people?
Response: The remnant and the rest (Rom 11:1–10)
 B. *Question*: Has Israel fallen?
Response: God's plan to make Israel jealous; the analogy of grafting; warning not to boast over those who have been cut off (Rom 11:11–24)

V. Conclusion: The mystery of Israel's hardening and salvation (Rom 11:25–36)

Most of the above argument constitutes a defense of God's word and justice in light of the unexpected situations of Israel and the Gentiles that have occurred as the result of Israel's unbelief and the Gentiles' reception of righteousness by faith. As part of this defense, Paul warns the Gentiles against presumption, and thus he qualifies both the primary and secondary arguments. Although he has assured salvation on the basis of faith and has implied that believers are the elect (ἐκλεκτοί; Rom 8:33), in his warning to the Gentiles he admits that they could fall away into unbelief, and thus that they should not be entirely sure of their election as God's children.

4.2. THE ARGUMENT OF ROMANS 9–11

4.2.1. Romans 9:1–5

Although the overall argument of Rom 9–11 is greatly concerned with the problem of Israel’s present situation, Paul does not initially discuss this problem directly. He also does not begin with any kind of transition from the previous passage.⁵ A careful reader might be wondering at this point whether Paul’s apparent identification of believers as ἐκλεκτοί, a term used for Israel in the LXX (e.g., Isa 42:1; Ps 104:6), calls into question the election of Israel, but Paul does not attempt to tackle this problem either in Rom 9:1–5, at least not head-on. Instead he simply expresses his grief over his people and lists their many blessings, and thus implies something about Israel’s present situation as well as the cause of this situation: despite all their blessings, because his people have not accepted their own Messiah as believers have, they have not received the benefits of election that believers already enjoy.

First, Paul declares the greatness of his grief, but before doing so he swears that he is telling the truth, appealing to Christ, his conscience, and the Holy Spirit (Rom 9:1–2). It might seem odd and unnecessary to begin the argument in this way, but as will soon be seen, Paul is attempting to convey to his audience that he is beside himself with grief,

⁵ Dunn notes the asyndeton (lack of conjunction) in Rom 9:1, which he interprets as an indication that “a pause was intended between 8:39 and 9:1,” but he downplays the lack of transition between the two chapters (*Romans*, 2:522–23). Many interpreters have noticed that the problem of Israel is not stated right away, but most treat the delay as insignificant. Moo, for example, claims that the “key tension” in Rom 9–11 is not stated explicitly until Rom 11:28, but he observes no real build-up to this tension and considers it apparent from the beginning (*Romans*, 548). Similarly, Dunn says that the problem of Israel’s failure is “not yet explicit” in Rom 9:1–29, but that “it was clearly enough implied from the beginning” (*Romans*, 2:536–37, 591). Others, by contrast, take Paul’s silence on the problem of Israel to mean that he is only concerned about Israel’s exclusion of the Gentiles, and that he actually has no doubt regarding Israel’s own salvation apart from the gospel (so Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* [Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987], 135–50; John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1983], 197, 212). Not surprisingly, this position has been met with wide criticism; see, e.g., E. Elizabeth Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9–11* (SBLDS 109; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 176–205; Frank Thielman, *From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework to Understanding Paul’s View of the Law in Galatians and Romans* (NovTSup 61; New York: E. J. Brill, 1989), 123–32; Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 129–33.

almost to the point of insanity. By emphatically swearing that he is telling the truth and calling on God to confirm his sincerity, he reassures the audience that he remains in his right mind. Furthermore, his sudden shift in tone from triumph in Rom 8 to solemnness and sorrow in Rom 9 signals that the argument of Rom 1–11 is not yet complete.

Believers may prevail over every peril as the elect, but there are still some lingering problems that must be addressed.

Second, Paul attempts to demonstrate his near insanity as he confesses that he almost desires to be “accursed from Christ” if it would somehow help his people (Rom 9:3). This confession reveals that it is indeed his people’s current situation that is the source of his distress, though he does not mention here what they may have done—or not done—to cause this situation. Nor does he describe their present predicament, but he does provide a hint. The intensive “I myself” (αὐτὸς ἐγώ) seems to suggest that what Paul has in mind is a kind of wildly altruistic substitution (“I myself *rather than they* be accursed”), and so it follows that his people are themselves accursed from Christ, or at least currently alienated from Christ and in danger of becoming accursed as well. Consequently they have not received the benefits of life in the Spirit that the apostle has just guaranteed to believers in Rom 8. Paul’s people are his ἀδελφοί (“brethren”) and his “kinsmen according to the flesh,” but they are not among those whom he addresses throughout Romans as ἀδελφοί, the “many brethren” who have been predestined to share the image of God’s son (Rom 8:29).⁶

⁶ Dunn rightly points out that “my kinsmen according to the flesh” is added as an appositive to ἀδελφοί for the sake of clarity precisely because Paul ordinarily uses ἀδελφός with reference to believers. Dunn’s contention, however, that Paul here reflects the “martyr aspiration” does not go far enough (*Romans*, 2:525). Paul is playing with a more absurd form of martyrdom that is rooted in the mentality of “doing evil that good may come” (in this case, seeking damnation to save others), the same mentality that he has so vehemently opposed in Rom 3:8 and Rom 6–8.

Third, despite all that his people presumably lack, Paul lists several blessings that still belong to his people, whom he calls “Israelites” here rather than “Jews” (Rom 9:4–5). The first item that he puts on the list is adoption (υιοθεσία), a term that provides another clue regarding the problem of Israel.⁷ On the one hand, adoption is rightly included on the list, for there are a number of places in the OT where Israel is declared to be God’s son and where the people of Israel are said to be God’s children.⁸ On the other hand, Paul has recently argued that it is those who are led by the Spirit who are God’s children, and that it is believers who have received “the Spirit of adoption” and who have the hope of bodily adoption (Rom 8:14–15, 23). It would seem that Israel has not received this “Spirit of adoption,” for Paul stands apart from his people as he gives God the highest praise that from them also comes “the Christ according to the flesh” (Rom 9:5).⁹

⁷ Although υιοθεσία is never used in the LXX or in any Jewish literature contemporary to Paul, Dunn shows that it is appropriate here at least for stylistic purposes: the form creates a parallel with νομοθεσία as part of the pattern -θεσία, -α, and -αι (ibid., 2:522, 526). Fitzmyer considers the absence of the word “election” [ἐκλογή] here “striking,” even though this word is eventually used in connection with the people of Israel in Rom 11:28 (*Romans*, 543; Paul also mentions election in connection with Jacob/Israel himself in Rom 9:11). Moreover, as Dunn notes, some notion of election is implicit in the word υιοθεσία (God choosing Israel to be a son). Dunn argues further that Paul’s switch to the term “Israelites” is to emphasize that the Jews are God’s elect (thus Paul does not really neglect to mention election in Rom 9:1–5), but it is questionable whether for Paul the word “Israelite” is immediately interchangeable with “elect” (*Romans*, 2:526). After all, only a couple of verses later “Israel” is used as a synonym for “seed of Abraham” (Rom 9:6–8).

⁸ Some notable examples include Exod 4:22 (“Israel is my son, my firstborn”); Deut 14:1 (“You are children of the LORD your God”); Isa 43:6; Jer 31:9; Hos 1:10 (though Paul quotes this verse with reference to the Gentiles in Rom 9:25–26); Wis 9:7.

⁹ The meaning of the line of praise at the end of Rom 9:5 has long been debated, but Dunn has shown convincingly that the clause should be regarded as independent and not as an appellation declaring Christ to be God (ibid., 2:528–29; not that Paul would have necessarily opposed the latter in principle). Fitzmyer defends the popular view that it is an appellation (*Romans*, 549), but the flow of thought in Rom 9:1–5 makes this view unlikely (“a jump to describe the Messiah as ‘God over all’ would be unexpected, to say the least”; Dunn, *Romans*, 2:529). Fitzmyer’s view does lessen the awkwardness of the asyndeton before the clause, but his own interpretation would create another—and much more awkward—asyndeton a few words later (“who is God over all, blessed forever” rather than the more natural, “the God who is over all [be] blessed forever”).

4.2.2. Romans 9:6–29

4.2.2.1. *The Argument of Romans 9:6–13*

Paul's burst of praise at the end of Rom 9:1–5 puts an abrupt end to his lugubrious tone, but he continues to avoid any direct description of the problem of Israel's error or its present situation. He has already given the reader enough for the moment, and so he promptly moves on to what is his chief goal in Rom 9–11: to defend the word and justice of God in light of the problem of Israel. He begins in Rom 9:6–13, where he attempts to prove that God's word, i.e., the promises regarding the election of the patriarchs, has not "failed." The passage overall is rather difficult, but it can readily be divided into two parts, both of which rely on an unstated supposition regarding Israel's error and the reality of its present situation. First, in Rom 9:6–9 Paul argues that not all the fleshly descendants of Israel are in fact the "Israel" that is considered "the seed of Abraham" and "God's children." This part of the argument has often been misunderstood because of the problem of ὅτι in Rom 9:7. There are only two possibilities for the interpretation of ὅτι, but the difference turns out to be quite significant:

οὐδ' ὅτι εἰσὶν σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ πάντες τέκνα, ἀλλ' ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα.

First possibility: "Nor [are they] all children [of Abraham] *because* (ὅτι) they are the seed of Abraham, but rather, 'In Isaac shall your seed be named.'"

Second possibility: "Nor [is it the case] *that* (ὅτι) all the children [of Abraham are] the seed of Abraham, but rather, 'In Isaac shall your seed be named.'"

Most interpreters used to prefer the first choice (ὅτι as “because”), probably since it connects the subject of the sentence with that of the preceding verse: “For not all who are from Israel are Israel. Nor are [all who are from Israel] all children because they are the seed of Abraham, but rather, ‘in Isaac shall your seed be named.’” This reading, however, does not actually make a lot of sense. It suggests strangely that “all who are from Israel” are indeed the seed of Abraham, but that they are not for this reason *children* of Abraham.¹⁰ Yet the identity of the *seed* is precisely what Paul is calling into question in this passage.

The second choice (ὅτι as “that”), on the other hand, makes more sense both within the verse and in its immediate context. Within Rom 9:7, what Paul is limiting is the seed, so that it does not include all the children: “Nor are all the children the seed of Abraham, but rather, ‘in *Isaac*—i.e., not in *all* the children—shall your seed be named.’”¹¹ The point is that, while Abraham had multiple children (and with different women: Ishmael through Hagar, Isaac through Sarah, and six sons through Keturah), it was in Isaac alone that the seed was “named.” This is confirmed by several parallels within Rom 9:6–8 which would be created if indeed ὅτι here means “that.” Not only is

¹⁰ Brendan Byrne (*Sons of God—Seed of Abraham: A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of all Christians in Paul against the Jewish Background* [AnBib 83; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979], 130–31) attempts to make sense of the usual translation of Rom 9:7 by reading “children” as short for “the children of God” in Rom 9:8, but this requires an unlikely interpretation of the τοῦτ’ ἔστιν (“that is”) in Rom 9:8, which more naturally refers back to Paul’s quotation of Gen 21:12 (“in Isaac shall your seed be named”) and not to Rom 9:7 as a whole. Furthermore, the line of thought actually becomes more jumbled, for Rom 9:8 would mean that, as Abraham’s seed, the Israelites *are* the children of God, even though this is precisely what Paul is supposedly denying in Byrne’s interpretation of Rom 9:7.

¹¹ According to Dunn (a proponent of the second interpretation), by limiting the seed in Rom 9:7–8 Paul does the opposite (or “converse”) of what he did earlier in Rom 4:16, where he emphasizes that all who follow Abraham’s faith are included in his seed (*Romans*, 2:540). The grammar of Rom 4:16 is difficult, however, and it may be that a similar element of Jewish exclusion is present there as well (“*not* to the one who is of the law alone”).

there is a grammatical parallel between οὐχ οἷον ὅτι (“it is not such that”; Rom 9:6) and οὐδ’ ὅτι (“nor [is it such] that”; Rom 9:7), but all of the contrasts in Rom 9:6–8 suddenly line up neatly if the second interpretation is chosen:¹²

not all from Israel	are Israel
not all the children [of Abraham]	are the seed of Abraham
	but in Isaac shall your seed be named
not the children of the flesh	are the children of God
	but the children of the promise are counted
	as the seed

The argument of Rom 9:6–8 is that not all the fleshly descendants of *Israel* are “Israel” in the same way that not all the fleshly descendants of *Abraham* are “the seed of Abraham.” Scripture records that Abraham had many children, but the word concerning Isaac’s birth in Gen 18:10, 14 (“around this certain time I will come, and Sarah will have a son”) was different because it was “of a promise” (Rom 9:9).¹³ Thus the reader can conclude that if indeed Paul’s people as a whole have not obtained “the Spirit of adoption” and are not God’s children, God’s word regarding Abraham’s seed has not failed. On the contrary, it is to be expected that a large number of the fleshly descendants of Israel are not “Israel,” the promised few who, like Isaac, are “counted as the seed” and thus are God’s children.

The second part of the passage is Rom 9:10–13, where Paul moves on to the more difficult task of defending God’s plan concerning Jacob and Esau that “the greater will

¹² Moo, *Romans*, 575. Dunn’s description of οὐδ’ ὅτι in Rom 9:7 as a “resumption” of οὐχ οἷον ὅτι in Rom 9:6 perhaps goes too far (*Romans*, 2:540). Despite the grammatical parallel, οὐδ’ ὅτι follows logically from οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ (“for not all who are from Israel are Israel”; Rom 9:6), a statement that Dunn seems to write off as rather obvious and hardly in need of Rom 9:7–9 to prove it (“Israelites should not need reminding”; *ibid.*, 2:547). The distinction between “those from Israel” and “Israel” is a fine one, though, and so it is not surprising that Paul spends so much space defending it.

¹³ Commentators commonly note that the genitive ἐπαγγελίας (“of a promise”) in Rom 9:9 is placed first in the sentence for the sake of emphasis (“of a promise is this word,” or “this word is [one] of promise”; so Dunn, *ibid.*, 2:541; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 561), but they do not discuss why Paul uses it as a predicate. The reason is that there is an implicit contrast: “*of a promise* is this word,” i.e., it is of a different character than the words regarding the birth of Abraham’s other children.

serve the lesser” (or “the elder will serve the younger”; Gen 25:23). Just as Isaac was chosen over his elder brother Ishmael before Isaac was born, Jacob was chosen over his elder twin Esau, but in this case his election is announced before *either* is born. Additionally, this time the elder brother is explicitly rejected (“Esau I have hated”; Mal 1:3), even though neither brother had yet “done anything good or bad.” Paul concludes therefore that the promise was given in advance “so that the plan of God which is according to election might remain, not from works but from the one who calls” (Rom 9:11–12).¹⁴ In other words, God’s promise regarding Jacob and Esau has not failed even if Israel has not obtained the benefits of election by “works.” Jacob himself was not chosen because of his “works,” nor was it for this reason that Esau was rejected. In short, God’s plan of election is non-retributive. “The one who calls” chooses in advance before retribution is even a possibility.¹⁵

The argument of Rom 9:6–13 is indeed difficult, but the biggest problem is that, as I have shown, each part of the passage depends on an unstated supposition regarding

¹⁴ As in Rom 9:6–9, here Paul applies terms to Israel (or Jacob) that elsewhere are used with reference to believers. The presence of πρόθεσις (“purpose” or “plan”), ἐκλογή (“election”), and καλεῖν (“to call”) in Rom 9:11–12 recalls the previous chapter, where Paul refers to believers (or “those who love God”) as those who are “called (κλητοί) according to his purpose (πρόθεσις)” (Rom 8:28; also καλεῖν in Rom 8:30) and as “the elect (ἐκλεκτοί) of God” (Rom 8:33). Thus Paul in Rom 9:10–13 is again blurring the line between Israel and believers.

¹⁵ According to Dunn, “Paul here goes out of his way to counter” the position of Philo in *Leg. All.* 3.88, which has to do with God’s foreknowledge of works (*Romans*, 2:543). Philo’s point, though, is primarily *moral* and does not represent an attempt to explain or defend the justness of God’s election of Jacob or rejection of Esau before their birth. Commenting on Gen 25:23, Philo does say that God knows the faculties that all creatures will possess as well as the “works and passions” (or “works and experiences”; τὰ ἔργα καὶ πάθη) that they will have before God has finished fashioning them. The lesson that Philo draws from this is that God views virtue as freedom, and vice as slavery, even when these are not “perfect” (τέλειον). Only a “small breeze” (μικρὰ αὔρα) of virtue is enough, and even the beginning (γένεσις) of vice “enslaves reason” (δουλοῖ τὸν λογισμὸν; *Leg. All.* 3.89).

present Israel. If these suppositions are made explicit, as in the following paraphrase, the argument becomes much easier to follow:

It is not the case that God's word concerning the election of Israel's patriarchs has failed. First, God's word concerning the seed of Abraham is true *even if present Israel has not obtained the benefits of election on the basis of fleshly lineage*. For not all from Israel are "Israel," i.e., the seed of Abraham or God's children. After all, neither are all of Abraham's children his seed, but rather God says to Abraham that "in Isaac—not all the children—will your seed be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are God's children, but rather the children of the promise are considered the seed. For Abraham had many children of the flesh, but the word concerning Isaac is of a promise: "At this certain time I will come, and Sarah will have a son."

Second, God's word concerning Jacob and Esau is true *even if present Israel has not obtained the benefits of election by works*. Not only was the promise concerning Sarah's son made in advance without considering the flesh, but God's plan regarding Jacob and Esau was similarly announced to Rebekah in advance without considering their works. This happened when Rebekah had conceived Jacob and Esau from one man, Isaac our father. For it was when Jacob and Esau had not been born nor done anything good or bad—so that the plan of God which is by election might remain, not by works but by the one who calls—that it was said to her, "The greater will serve the lesser," just as it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

This paraphrase may seem a rather modest attempt to articulate all that Paul is implying in this passage, but it is important not to read too much into the argument at this point.¹⁶

¹⁶ Particular caution is necessary, for example, in the case of the restricted sense of "Israel" in Rom 9:6, about which there is wide disagreement. Some equate "Israel" here with the church or "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16), so that the term includes all believers, both Jews and Gentiles (Hans Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought* [trans. James C. G. Greig; ed. John Riches; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984], 17; Wright, *Climax*, 250). Others limit the term to Jewish believers, who represent a "spiritual Israel" (Moo, *Romans*, 574; similarly Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 560). Dunn suggests that the debate is beside the point, and that "Paul's argument concerns the character and mode rather than the fact of election" (*Romans*, 2:540). It is more likely, though, that Paul is deliberately ambiguous. After all, he has good reason for doing so. On the one hand, he does not wish to alienate the Gentiles and treat them as wholly separate from Israel. He therefore equates "Israel" with terms that elsewhere are inclusive of Gentiles (the seed of Abraham, the children of the promise, and the children of God). On the other hand, he has just recounted in Rom 9:1–5 that his people have been given blessings that are peculiar to them, and so he does not go so far as to bestow the name "Israel" directly on the Gentiles (not to mention many Gentiles may not have *wanted* to be called by another ethnic name, even one that is meant as a sign of God's blessing). In any event, regardless of what Paul means exactly by the restricted sense of "Israel" in Rom 9:6, he is not too heavily invested in this sense, for throughout the rest of Rom 9–11 he regularly refers also to the disobedient members of his people simply as "Israel."

The reason that Paul does not clearly delineate the problem of Israel here is that it is not his primary concern in Rom 9–11. His first order of business is much more basic: to dispel any doubts regarding the truth of the Scriptures and the election of Israel’s patriarchs apart from any consideration of the flesh or “works.”

4.2.2.2. *The Question in Romans 9:14–18*

Paul’s conclusion regarding the election of Jacob and Esau may help to prove that God’s word is true, but another question regarding the *justness* of God naturally arises. Paul not only denies that God’s plan of election is rooted in “works,” but by connecting Mal 1:3 with Gen 25:23, he suggests that this plan involves the *rejection* of some before they are able to manifest any “works” worthy of rejection. Paul therefore asks, “What then? Is there injustice with God?” (Rom 9:14). The question is intended to be both logical and absurd at the same time. It is the normal conclusion that Paul expects the reader to draw, but it is unsupportable from a believer’s point of view. For this reason he asks the question with μή so that there is no doubt that the expected answer is the negative (“There is no injustice with God, is there?” μή ἀδικία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ;).

4.2.2.3. *The Response*

After forbidding the above conclusion with μή γένοιτο (“may it never be”; Rom 9:14), Paul does not counter with a direct refutation. Quite to the contrary, he presses the point further that humans, even after they are born and are old enough to do good or bad,

have no say in God's plan of election. The reader almost gets the impression that for Paul the question regarding divine injustice in Rom 9:14 is invalid, but in Rom 9:15–18 he does provide some insight into the intention behind God's plan. The passage has two parts, each of which consists of an OT quotation and a short conclusion. In both cases, especially the second, it is helpful to know something about the original context of the quotation in order to grasp fully the flow of thought. First, Paul quotes LXX Exod 33:19, which is part of God's response to Moses' request to see God's glory, a request that God grants before declaring that "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom 9:15). From this Paul makes an inference about the source of divine election/mercy: it comes "not from the one who wills, nor from the one who runs, but from the God who has mercy" (Rom 9:16).¹⁷ In other words, the gift of seeing God's glory, just like the gracious election of Jacob, is rightly God's to give, regardless of the worthiness of the recipient. Even though Moses was Israel's greatest prophet, the privilege of beholding God's glory was not given because he wanted it or because he was able to strive and obtain it. Nor did it derive from an unjust God, for it was the gift of "the God who has mercy."

Second, Paul quotes God's words to Pharaoh in LXX Exod 9:16, but he draws a rather unexpected conclusion: God not only has mercy as he chooses but also actively *hardens* (σκληρύνειν) whomever he wishes (Rom 9:17–18). This conclusion does not immediately seem to follow because hardening is not mentioned in Exod 9:16. Rather it is found in the previous passage of Exodus (as well as several others), where God is

¹⁷ Dunn says that the subject of the sentence in Rom 9:16 is "not specific" and "should be left vague in translation" (ibid., 2:552), but the subject can be inferred from the context: it is the mercy that derives from "the God who has mercy."

responsible for hardening (LXX σκληρύνειν) Pharaoh's heart (Exod 9:12; also 4:21; 7:3; 14:4, 17). In Exod 9:16, God then tells Pharaoh why he was spared, or as Paul quotes it, "raised up" (ἐξεγείρειν), from the plagues.¹⁸ There are two reasons: "so that I might demonstrate in you my power" and "so that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Thus the implication is more than what Paul includes in his conclusion in Rom 9:18. God does harden whomever he wishes, but his stated purpose in doing so is not unjust. God raised up Pharaoh so that he would become a spectacle of God's power as well as the means by which God's saving name would be made known to all people. The hardening of Pharaoh was thus for the glory of God and for the benefit of the many.

4.2.2.4. *The Interlocutor's Rebuttal in Romans 9:19–29*

Recognizing that he has hardly given a satisfying reply to the previous question regarding divine justice, in Rom 9:19 Paul anticipates a rebuttal from an imaginary interlocutor that will force him to be more direct about the problem of God's rejection of the hardened: "You will say then to me, 'Why does he still find fault? For who has resisted his will?'" These two questions imply that God's rejection of the hardened would not only be unjust but also absurd, if not downright capricious. The fact that none has resisted God's will suggests that resisting it is impossible, and therefore that it would be

¹⁸ Fitzmyer suggests that ἐξεγείρειν (LXX διατηρεῖν; MT 725) in Paul's quotation of 9:16 may also have a second meaning: God "raised up" Pharaoh "in the sense that God introduced him into human history for a definite purpose" (*Romans*, 567). On this reading, Exod 9:16 reads much like the prophecy of Moses that God would "raise up (LXX ἀνιστάναι; MT 27) a prophet like me" (Exod 18:15).

unfair to fault the hardened for failing in this regard.¹⁹ It would also seem ridiculous for God to fault them for failing to do what he does not want them to do anyway. These are real conundrums, and it is for this reason that Paul makes use of an imaginary interlocutor rather than following his usual habit of posing a false conclusion and responding with μή γένοιτο.

4.2.2.5. *Paul's Response*

Paul's response in Rom 9:20–29 can be divided into two sections. In Rom 9:20–23, Paul counters the interlocutor's questions with four of his own. The first three expose the presumptuousness of the interlocutor by reminding him of his status in relation to God. This becomes even more evident if we supply answers to Paul's questions. Who is the interlocutor to question God? He is no one. Will the created thing ask its creator why it has been made as it has (Rom 9:20)? Of course not, for it is nothing but inanimate matter which the creator shapes as he wills. Does the potter not have every right to make from the clay "this unto honor, and that unto dishonor" (Rom 9:21)? Of course he does, since both the clay and the honor belong to the potter.

These initial questions help to knock much of the wind out of the interlocutor's apparent attempt to challenge God, but, as in the previous passage, Paul does not want to declare the interlocutor's question regarding divine justice completely invalid. He

¹⁹ Dunn argues that the second question ("Who has resisted his will?") is primarily about the *fact* that no one has ever successfully resisted God's will (*Romans*, 2:556). The point, though, is that it must therefore be *impossible* to resist God's will (the RSV even translates, "Who *can* resist his will?" but most commentators agree that this is too loose a rendering of τίς ἀνθέστηκεν). By phrasing the question in the way that he does, Paul emphasizes that resisting God's will has *always* been impossible. No one has ever been able to resist it, and so the hardened have absolutely no chance of doing so.

therefore poses a fourth, less aggressive question in Rom 9:22–23 and again provides some insight into God’s plan. Interestingly, this is not the first time that he has spoken to an imaginary interlocutor about God’s intention toward the hard of heart. In the apostrophe to the judge in Rom 2:1–5, Paul says that God’s patience with the hypocritical and spiteful judge is meant to be a guide to repentance (μετάνοια), but that the judge will face wrath on account of his persistent “hardness” (σκληρότης). In Rom 9:22–23, Paul takes this line of thought a step further in light of his recent quotation of Exod 9:16 and Exod 33:19. He considers a possible scenario in which the respective destinies of the vessels of wrath and of the vessels of mercy are intertwined. According to this scenario, the patience that God shows toward “the vessels of wrath” has more than one purpose. It is not only to demonstrate God’s wrath and power, as with God’s hardening of Pharaoh, but also to reveal “the wealth of his glory” to “the vessels of mercy,” as when God revealed his glory to Moses.²⁰ Whether Paul actually believes this scenario to be the case cannot be immediately determined because the sentence in Rom 9:22–23 is an incomplete conditional, that is, a long protasis without an apodosis. Most translations imply a pure hypothetical by supplying a “what” at the beginning (“what if?”), whereas the Greek sentence does not actually provide enough information to ascertain whether the condition is real or hypothetical. When read on its own, the sentence is simply a hanging “if” clause.

²⁰ Fitzmyer argues that the participle θέλων (“wishing”) in Rom 9:22 is concessive (“*although wishing*”) because Paul states in the main clause that God “bore with much patience the vessels of wrath” (*Romans*, 569). In other words, God wished to demonstrate his wrath and ability, but instead he decided to show patience. As Moo rightly points out, though, this view destroys the parallel with God’s purpose regarding the hardening of Pharaoh in Rom 9:17 (*Romans*, 2:605). The point in Rom 9:22 is that, paradoxically, God patiently restrains his wrath in order to demonstrate his wrath and his ability.

In Rom 9:24–29, however, which is the second part of the passage, Paul gives some indication that the condition is at least partly true with regard to the present situation of Israel and the Gentiles. First, in Rom 9:24 he interrupts the conditional and identifies the vessels of mercy:

If God, wishing to show his wrath and to make known his power, has born with much patience the vessels of wrath fashioned for destruction, and so that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon the vessels of mercy that he prepared for glory—whom he has also called, us, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles. (Rom 9:22–24)²¹

Believers therefore are the vessels of mercy, and the depth of God’s mercy toward them has been seen especially in the inclusion of the Gentiles, who are now called “my people,” “beloved,” and “children of God” as was promised in Hosea (Rom 9:25–26; LXX Hosea 1:10; 2:25[MT 2:23]).²² Second, despite the fact that vessels of mercy have been called from the Jews as well, in Rom 9:27–29 Paul describes the present members of Israel as if they were mostly vessels of wrath. He does so by quoting two texts from

²¹ Most translations (so KJV, RSV, NIV, many others) place the question mark after Rom 9:24, but most commentators agree that it belongs after Rom 9:23, and that Rom 9:24 begins a new sentence, and perhaps even a new section altogether (Dunn, *ibid.*, 2:570; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 572; Moo, *Romans*, 611). That Rom 9:24 begins a new sentence is indicated by the double object (οὓς and ἡμᾶς, “whom” and “us”) and the fact that the relative pronoun οὓς begins the clause and precedes ἡμᾶς. The reason that the punctuation is important is that it decides whether Paul is affirming in Rom 9:24 that believers are indeed the vessels of mercy, and thus whether the scenario in Rom 9:22–23 is purely hypothetical or not.

²² The two quotations from Hosea and Isaiah are joined in Paul’s mind by at least two things. First, both texts mention that the number of the members of Israel is “like the sand of the sea” (though Paul omits this part in his quotation of Hosea). Second, they say nearly opposite things about the destiny of this great multitude of Israelites. In Hosea, God apparently calls all Israelites to be children of God, but in Isaiah only a remnant is to be spared. Paul resolves this problem by applying the text from Hosea principally to the Gentiles (his omission of Hosea’s reference to the numbering of the Israelites thus is deliberate) and the one from Isaiah to Israel. Although this does appear violence to Hos 2:1, which in its original context clearly is *not* referring to the Gentiles, Robert B. Foster has provided a plausible explanation as to why Paul’s treatment of Hosea would have been acceptable in a first-century exegetical context. Much as he does with Isa 65:1–2 in Rom 10:20–21, Paul “atomizes” Hos 2:1 such that one half of the verse refers to Israel (specifically the Israel of Isa 10:22–23), and the other half to the Gentiles (“Renaming Abraham’s Children: Election, Ethnicity, and the Interpretation of Scripture in Romans 9” [Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2011], 171–76).

Isaiah, who laments that God has only promised that a remnant from Israel will be “saved” (Rom 9:27; LXX Isa 10:22–23). The prophet also “foretold” the cry of this present-day remnant (or “seed”) that Israel would almost become entirely a vessel of wrath like Sodom and Gomorrah (Rom 9:28–29; LXX Isa 1:9).

4.2.3. Romans 9:30–10:21

4.2.3.1. The Argument of Romans 9:30–10:4

Beginning with the second half of the previous passage, Paul has already begun to shift his focus away from his defense of the word and justice of God, and so in Rom 9:30–10:21 he holds this defense in abeyance and asks what conclusion should be drawn at this point (“What then will we say?” Rom 9:30). In his response in Rom 9:30–10:4, he finally provides a direct description of the present situation of both Israel and the Gentiles. The passage has two parts. First, in Rom 9:30–33 he argues that the Gentiles have unwittingly obtained righteousness instead of Israel, and he also indicates (either implicitly or explicitly) what the Gentiles and Israel have done to cause this situation. Since the once “not-beloved” Gentiles have now been called to be God’s beloved people and children (Rom 9:25–26), Paul concludes that the Gentiles have now obtained righteousness as well. Furthermore, because they are Gentiles they are by definition (at least from Paul’s perspective as a Jew) those “who do not seek righteousness,” and so they have apprehended it without even seeking it. Paul then hints that the way that they

have attained it is by having faith, for the righteousness that they have received is nothing other than “the righteousness that is from faith” (Rom 9:30).

Israel, by contrast, has not completely neglected the quest for righteousness, but has strived after a “law of righteousness.”²³ Nevertheless, Israel has apparently failed to obtain righteousness because it has not apprehended or “arrived at” the law (Rom 9:31).²⁴ Israel’s mistake is that its pursuit of the law or law of righteousness has not derived from “from faith,” and so it has wrongly concluded that the law of righteousness is something that is apprehended “from works” (Rom 9:32).²⁵ Moreover, Paul implies, through their lack of faith the Israelites have rejected the one who would allow them to obtain the righteousness that they (indirectly) seek in their quest to attain the law or law of righteousness. Fulfilling the prophecy of LXX Isa 28:16, they have “stumbled over the stone of stumbling” (Rom 9:32) that God placed in Zion, even though God has promised that “the one who believes in it/him will not be put to shame,” i.e., not put to shame among the righteous (Rom 9:33).

²³ Commentators often consider the phrase “law of righteousness” unexpected because the parallel is with “righteousness” in Rom 9:30, not “*law of righteousness*” (the meaning of which is also, according to Moo, “inherently unclear”; *Romans*, 622). Paul’s point, though, is that Israel has not exactly sought righteousness either. Israel’s chief concern has been keeping the law, and, as he will soon argue, on “establishing their own righteousness” rather than submitting to “the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:3).

²⁴ Dunn rightly argues that the “law” that Israel has failed to reach in Rom 9:31 is the Mosaic Law, but here it is *also* a shortened form of “law of righteousness,” an expression that Dunn acknowledges has a sort of double meaning (the “law of righteousness” is the Mosaic Law ; *Romans*, 2:581–82). The reason that Paul shortens the expression is not simply to gain “maximum shock effect” (*ibid.*, 2:582) but to emphasize that Israel has misunderstood (“not arrived at”) the law.

²⁵ There is general agreement that, in light of the previous verse, διώκειν (“pursued”) is the verb to be supplied in the first part of Rom 9:32 (“Israel has not *pursued* it from faith, but as if it is from works”). Fitzmyer claims that supplying this verb is potentially problematic since “the righteousness that is from faith” is a gift rather than something to be pursued (*Romans*, 578). Yet in 1 Cor 14:1, after telling the Corinthians to “pursue” (διώκειν) love, Paul commands them also to “seek after” (ζηλοῦν, a synonym of διώκειν) spiritual gifts (one of which is faith; 1 Cor 12:9). For Paul, there is nothing at all problematic about the notion of pursuing gifts.

Second, in Rom 10:1–4 Paul suggests that Israel’s present situation is not irreversible as he states his prayer and witness for his people. These verses are a turning point in Rom 9–11, for it is here that Paul for the first time indicates that he is not entirely certain that present Israel is indeed largely “a vessel of wrath fashioned for destruction” (Rom 9:22).²⁶ Although believers are the ones he now calls “brethren,” he still prays earnestly for his people’s salvation (Rom 10:1), and he bears witness that they are not maliciously opposed to God. On the contrary they have a real, if ignorant, “zeal for God” (Rom 10:2). It is because of this ignorant zeal, whereby they “seek to establish their own righteousness,”²⁷ that they have rejected “the righteousness of God” and have failed to acknowledge Christ’s role as the τέλος (“end”) of the law and the stone that God has placed in Zion as the source of righteousness “for all who believe” (Rom 10:3–4).²⁸

²⁶ Dunn says that the use of ἀδελφοί (“brother”) in Rom 10:1 to refer to believers “when his thoughts are on his natural brothers and kinsmen” gives the word “particular poignancy” (*Romans*, 2:585). On the other hand, it is important to note that the sadness in this verse is also mixed with the possibility of hope. After all, if Paul’s prayer for his people is answered, he will be able to address his fellow Israelites too as “brethren” in the deeper sense (rather than the more qualified “my brethren, my kinsmen according to flesh” in Rom 9:3).

²⁷ Dunn is correct that ἴδιος in Rom 10:3 does not mean “their own” in the sense that it is obtained by human effort (contra Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament* [trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols; New York: Scribner, 1951–55], 1:285), but it also does not mean “their own” as simply “an expression of covenant status” that excludes Gentiles (Dunn, *Romans*, 2:587). Paul contrasts “their own righteousness” with “the righteousness of God,” and so ἴδιος here first of all suggests that Israel has (albeit inadvertently) sought a form of righteousness that does not derive from God’s own righteousness (as revealed in the gospel; Rom 1:16–17). Thus Israel’s error is not unlike that of the idolaters in Rom 1:18–32, whom Paul accuses of foolishly seeking the glory of created things rather than that of the creator.

²⁸ There is considerable debate over the syntax of Rom 10:4 as well as the meaning of the word τέλος in this verse. Dunn makes the case that the εἰς belongs with νόμος (“the law unto righteousness,” a parallel to “the law of righteousness” and “the righteousness that is from the law” in Rom 9:31; 10:5; *ibid.*, 2:590), but Moo points out that in the NT εἰς is rarely adnominal, i.e., connected to a noun, and so concludes that in Rom 10:4 it likely follows from the entirety of what precedes (“Christ is the τέλος of the law, with the result that [εἰς] there is righteousness for everyone who believes”; *Romans*, 637–38). Regarding the meaning of τέλος, commentators are split over whether the word here means “end” in the sense of temporal cessation or “goal” in a teleological sense. Robert Badenas is a strong advocate of the teleological sense and notes the presence of this same sense in Rom 3:21–22, where Paul says that the law (and the prophets) testify to the righteousness of God that comes through faith (*Christ the End of the Law: Romans 10.4 in Pauline Perspective* [JSNTSupp 10; Sheffield: JSOT, 1985], 141; Fitzmyer also prefers this view, rejecting the possibility that the word here has both senses; *Romans*, 584). As Dunn rightly argues, though, the

4.2.3.2. *The Argument of Romans 10:5–13*

Paul's initial discussion of the present situation of Israel and the Gentiles has made heavy use of the language of the primary argument of Romans, including the contrast between faith and "works," the expression "the righteousness of God," and the reference to Christ as the source of righteousness "for all who believe." With this language the apostle has surreptitiously been building up to a final defense of the primary argument in Rom 10:5–13. As I have already argued in the previous chapter, this defense is essentially a contrast of the two main approaches to obtaining righteousness. Within the context of the heavily scriptural argument of Rom 9–11, the passage can be thought of as a series of scriptural proofs of a central claim of the primary argument: that all who believe Paul's message concerning Christ will receive righteousness and salvation. First, while Lev 18:5 promises life to the one who does what Moses has written (Rom 10:5), "the righteousness from faith" speaks out in Deut 30:12–13 (along with a line from Deut 9:4, "do not say in your heart"), urging the hearer not to doubt that Christ has (or perhaps, *will*) come or that he has been raised from the dead.²⁹

teleological sense can easily imply cessation, and the word τέλος is sufficiently ambiguous that it is difficult to exclude either of these meanings in Rom 10:4 (*Romans*, 2:589). On the one hand, that righteousness is the consequence of the law's τέλος suggests that Paul has in mind the "goal" of the law. On the other hand, in the next verse he mentions another kind of righteousness that comes from doing the literal law ("the righteousness that is from the law"; Rom 10:5). It is therefore likely that he also has some idea of cessation in mind. Since Christ is the τέλος of the law, the literal law is no longer to be thought of as the means of obtaining righteousness.

²⁹ It is impossible to determine with certainty whether καταγαγεῖν ("to bring down") in Rom 10:6 refers to the *first* or *second* coming of Christ. Dunn argues for the latter (*ibid.*, 2:615), but either way Paul's overarching point remains the same: do not doubt his message concerning Christ.

Second, Deut 30:14 announces the nearness of “the word of faith,” which according to Paul is equivalent to his message that all who acknowledge Christ’s lordship and resurrection both outwardly (“in the mouth”) and inwardly (“in the heart”) will receive righteousness and salvation (Rom 10:6–10). Third, the prophets confirm that this message of faith is a means of salvation for all who believe. As proof Paul repeats Isa 28:16, with the addition of an expegetical $\pi\alpha\tilde{\varsigma}$ (“All who believe in him will not be put to shame”) and quotes Joel 2:32, which does not distinguish between Jew and Greek as it promises salvation to “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord” (Rom 10:11–13). Finally, Paul further supports the inclusiveness of this promise by alluding to the Greek Shema (LXX Deut 6:4). In short, just as he did earlier in Rom 3:29–30, he uses the logic of the second part of the Greek Shema in order to broaden the scope of the first. Because the second part of the Greek Shema establishes that “the Lord is one,” Paul extends the first part, which affirms that the Lord is *Israel’s* God. Thus he concludes that “the same Lord is Lord of all” (Rom 10:12), that is, of all who call on the name of the Lord and receive salvation.

4.2.3.3. *The Argument of Romans 10:14–21*

Now that Paul has completed the primary argument, in Rom 10:14–21 he returns to his description of the present situation of Israel and the Gentiles. The passage moves along at a rather brisk pace and is quite difficult to summarize without omitting critical portions of the argument, and so in this case it will be helpful to review the major points piecemeal. First, through a series of rhetorical questions Paul reasons that there is a

certain chain of causes or conditions which are necessary in order for the promise of Joel 2:32 to be realized: calling on the name of the Lord requires faith, which in turn requires hearing, a preacher, and that preachers be sent (Rom 10:14–15). Through a paraphrase of LXX Isa 52:7, Paul then implies that this last condition, which is temporally the first in the chain, has been met. The beauty of the feet of “those who preach the gospel (εὐαγγελίζεσθαι) of good things” has been seen (Rom 10:15), and so the preachers have indeed been sent. The presence of εὐαγγελίζεσθαι in LXX Isa 52:7 indicates that they are preachers of the *gospel*, and therefore that they are the initiators of the specific chain of causality that Paul has in mind, the one that culminates in all believers calling on the name of the Lord in order to be saved.

Second, before confronting the specific problem of Israel’s unbelief, Paul laments more generally that not all have believed or “obeyed” the gospel.”³⁰ In this brief moment of grief, he exaggerates the level of unbelief and considers the sentiment of LXX Isa 53:1 to be an appropriate response: “Lord, who has believed our message (ἀκοή)?” (Rom 10:16). He also seems perplexed as to the cause of the unbelief that he has encountered, since for him LXX Isa 53:1 actually confirms the logic of the chain that leads to salvation. “Faith comes from hearing (ἀκοή)” in the same way that “hearing (ἀκοή) comes through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).³¹ In other words, the preaching of the word of Christ

³⁰ There is no reason to suppose that ὑπακούειν in Rom 10:16 serves as a reminder of the connection between faith and the moral requirements of believers (so Dunn, *ibid.*, 2:622). Paul has already taken pains in Rom 6–8 to establish that grace implies no obligation to sin, and he will soon devote all of Rom 12–13 to moral exhortation. In Rom 10:16, ὑπακούειν (“to obey,” “to heed”) is likely used simply for the sake of variation and is a synonym of πιστεύειν (“to believe”), just as the noun ὑπακοή is (more or less) synonymous with πίστις in the earlier expression ὑπακοή πίστεως (“obedience of faith”; Rom 1:5).

³¹ The wordplay involving ἀκοή, which can mean either the thing that is heard or the act of hearing, is well known, and there is now a virtual consensus that it has the former sense in Rom 10:16 (=LXX Isa 53:1) and the latter sense in Rom 10:17. It has also become increasingly accepted that, in light of the parallel with ῥῆμα πίστεως (“word of faith”; Rom 10:8), ῥῆμα Χριστοῦ (“word of Christ”; Rom 10:17)

automatically causes one to hear the message, and in the same way the hearing of the message should, as if by necessity, lead to faith in the hearer.

Third, in Rom 10:18–21 Paul insists that all have heard the message, but that the ignorant Gentiles have responded in faith while Israel has been disobedient. This part of the passage is neatly structured but is surprisingly hard to follow. It consists of two false conclusions regarding the problem of unbelief, both of which Paul counters simply by quoting Scripture, forcing the reader to rely entirely on the logic of his argument to determine how he is interpreting it. The first false conclusion still relates to the more general problem of unbelief. If hearing leads to faith, and some have not believed, then some must not have heard. Paul rejects this conclusion and replies with Ps 19:4, which for him refers to the fact that the words of the preachers of the gospel have reached “to the ends of the world” (Rom 10:18).³²

The second false conclusion is where the argument becomes difficult. The key is to notice that Paul does not ask whether Israel has “heard” (ἀκούειν) but whether Israel has “known” (γινώσκειν), i.e., known the message that has now been preached throughout all the earth. He uses γινώσκειν in anticipation of the two OT quotations in Rom 10:19–20, both of which mention those who at one time *were* without knowledge.

is most likely an objective genitive (“the word about Christ”) as opposed to a subjective genitive (“the word from Christ”). As Dunn points out, though, the latter sense is not thereby excluded (“the word of which Christ is content and author”; *Romans*, 2:623).

³² Most commentators agree that Paul is not appealing to the authority of Ps 19:4 but is simply borrowing the language of this verse, perhaps as a sort of hyperbole (so Moo, *Romans*, 667). It is possible, however, that Paul in a sense *is* appealing to the authority of Ps 19:4. The clue is found in the pronoun αὐτῶν (“their”), which lacks an immediate antecedent in Rom 10:18. Within the context of Romans, the αὐτῶν can only refer back to the preachers of the gospel (Rom 10:15), but within Ps 19 it refers to the heavens, the firmament, the days, and the nights (Ps 19:1–2). Paul may be claiming that the message of the preachers is so great that the preachers belong on this list. Thus Ps 19:4 must also apply to them, and in fact *primarily* to them. It is only in a metaphorical sense that the “words” of the heavens have been heard, but the words of the preachers have *literally* been heard by all people.

Paul's point is not simply that Israel has "known," but that Israel, despite its knowledge, has effectively been upstaged by those who once had *not* known, i.e., the Gentiles.³³ Thus Moses "first" speaks to Israel of the ignorant Gentiles in Deut 32:21, revealing God's plan to make Israel jealous and angry with a "non-nation" that is "without understanding" (ἄσύνετος; Rom 10:19).³⁴ Since Moses established that the ignorant ones in Scripture are the Gentiles, Isaiah must have been "declaring boldly" (ἀποτολμᾶν) in Isa 65:1 that this plan regarding the Gentiles has now come to pass. What has happened is that the ignorant Gentiles, or "those who have not sought me," have now unwittingly found God (Rom 10:20), just as Paul argued earlier that they have found righteousness without seeking it (Rom 9:30). Yet he has also claimed that Israel, despite its many blessings, has ignorantly disregarded the righteousness of God (Rom 10:3). He therefore applies the next verse in Isaiah to Israel. While the ignorant Gentiles have found God without seeking him, the people of Israel now seem to be even more ignorant than the Gentiles, even though *God* has sought *them* out ("all the day I have stretched out my hand"). The reason is that they have not heeded the gospel but are a "disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom 10:21; Isa 65:2).

³³ It has been noted that Rom 10:19 conflicts with Paul's earlier claim in Rom 10:3 that Israel is "ignorant" of the righteousness of God. Dunn says that the difficulty posed by the apparent contradiction is not significant (ibid., 2:624), but the problem is not so easily dismissed. Paul it seems is genuinely baffled regarding whether Israel is truly ignorant. At first he speaks as if Israel's ignorance is manifest, but upon further reflection he determines that it is impossible for Israel to have been ignorant. The tension is at least partly resolved, though, in Rom 11 as he concludes that Israel has been blinded (Rom 11:9–10) and temporarily hardened (Rom 11:25).

³⁴ It is usually argued that Paul includes πρῶτος ("first") in Rom 10:19 in order to emphasize that God's plan regarding Israel and the Gentiles is announced early in Scripture (so Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 599) or is found in both the Law and the Prophets (so Moo, *Romans*, 668–69). Both of these options are reasonable, but Paul's primary reason for including πρῶτος probably derives from an assumption on his part that Scripture must be consistent. By speaking "first" in Deut 32:21, Moses establishes a precedent in Scripture that the ignorant ones are the Gentiles, and so the Gentiles must also be in view in Isa 65:1 (regardless of what is apparent from the context).

4.2.4. Romans 11:1–24

4.2.4.1. *The Question in Romans 11:1–10*

Whatever the difficulties of the final verses of the previous passage, the OT quotations in these verses have a clear role in steering the argument back to Paul's defense of God's word regarding Israel after a lengthy detour in Rom 9:30–10:21. Not only does Deut 32:21 reveal that God has a plan involving both Israel and the Gentiles, but Isa 65:1–2 proves that this plan is already coming to pass. In Rom 11:1, then, Paul asks whether the fulfillment of God's plan, as well as Israel's negative response to God's invitation, means that God has now "rejected (ἀπωθεῖν) his people" (Rom 11:1). In other words, has God broken the promise of 1 Sam 12:22 and Ps 94:14 that "the Lord will not reject (LXX ἀπωθεῖν) his people"? The question is quite forceful, for if "God's people" is equated with the "disobedient and gainsaying people" of Isa 65:2, it would seem that God *has* rejected his people.³⁵

4.2.4.2. *The Response*

³⁵ As Dunn has shown, there are many other texts in the LXX that use ἀπωθεῖν negatively with reference to Israel (Judg 6:13; 2 Kgs 23:27; Ps 44:9, 23[LXX 43:10, 24]; 60:1, 10 [LXX 59:3, 12]; 74[LXX 73]:1; 78[LXX 77]:60, 67; 108:11[LXX 107:12]; Jer 7:29; Lam 2:7; 5:22; Ezek 5:11; 11:16; Hos 9:17), but Dunn misses the point in his claim that in these texts "the thought of God rejecting his *people* was entertained" (*Romans*, 2:634; emphasis mine). Only 1 Sam 12:22 and Ps 94[LXX 93]:14 specifically mention God's "people" (LXX λαός), and so for Paul the critical question is whether this people (the one that God has promised not to reject) is the same as the "disobedient and gainsaying people (LXX λαός)" of Isa 65:2.

With his customary *μὴ γένοιτο*, Paul denies that God has broken his promise, and instead he suggests that the identity of God's people is known only to God, and that there is currently a remnant of Israelites who are among the elect. God's acceptance of the remnant does not mean that the rest from Israel have been rejected, only that they—at least for now—have been hardened and blinded. Thus, far from arguing that God has rejected his people, Paul does not claim that *anyone* from Israel has been decisively rejected. First, he reminds the audience that he himself is an Israelite of known lineage (Rom 11:1).³⁶ This reminder has a dual purpose. On the one hand, Paul (whose election is hardly questionable) is living proof that God's promise has not entirely failed. There is at least a *person* from Israel that God has accepted, if not a *people*.³⁷ On the other hand, as will soon be seen, Paul is an exceptional case. He may be sure of his own election, but he does not claim to know the full number of God's people.

Second, Paul limits the expression “God's people” so that their identity cannot be so easily determined. God's people does not necessarily equal all Israelites, but rather the people whom God promised not to reject—and whom God *has* not rejected—are “his people *whom he has foreknown*.” In other words, God's people are not those whom human beings recognize as such but those whom only God has known through divine

³⁶ That Paul happens to come from the tribe of Benjamin, as opposed to some other tribe, seems immaterial. It is unlikely that Paul mentions his descent from Benjamin for some special reason, e.g., because it shows that he is an Israelite “with no mean connections” (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 604), or because it represents Israel's hope that God's people will be reunited (Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* [trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 299). Paul probably mentions his tribe simply to demonstrate that he is certain of his lineage even though he is a Hellenized Jew of the Diaspora.

³⁷ Dunn rightly argues that Paul in Rom 11:1 is not presenting himself as effectively equivalent to God's “people” (Dunn, *Romans*, 2:635). It should be noted, though, that Paul's own membership in God's people is being put forth as evidence that God could not have completely rejected his people.

foreknowledge. As proof Paul quotes 1 Kgs 19:10, 14, where God answers Elijah's testimony "against Israel" and reveals that at that time there was still a sizable minority who had been prevented from abandoning God. Elijah in his despair had concluded that "I alone remain," but God corrects him and insists that "I have kept seven thousand men for myself who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (Rom 11:2–4). Like Elijah, Paul is convinced of his own election, but he has learned from the story of Elijah that he should not assume that all of Israel has abandoned God. As in Elijah's time, there is currently a remnant of Israelites who have been preserved. Paul does not claim to know the exact number, but he is certain that a remnant exists in his own time, and that it has been preserved "by the election of grace" and not by "works" (Rom 11:5–6). Thus the identity of the elect cannot be known without a special revelation, since "works" are not necessarily an indicator of election. God revealed to Elijah that seven thousand had been preserved, but Paul does not suggest that this number applies to his own day, or that he has received a similar revelation. His reference to the seven thousand implies only that the present remnant is considerably larger than just the apostle himself.

Finally, since "works" are not the basis of election, Paul concludes that Israel has failed to obtain what the elect have obtained, and that "the rest" from Israel have been blinded. What exactly the elect have acquired in Israel's place is not made clear. It is doubtful at this juncture that it is the "law of righteousness" that Paul said Israel has pursued (Rom 9:31).³⁸ It could be election itself, but this too seems unlikely, since it goes without saying that the elect have obtained election. It is most likely that Paul has in mind

³⁸ Moo hears at least an echo of Rom 9:31 here (*Romans*, 680), but the echo appears more linguistic than substantive.

the *benefits* of election, e.g., righteousness, salvation, etc.³⁹ In any event, the distinction between Israel and the elect in Rom 11:7 implies that the two terms are not equivalent. Who then *are* the elect? Paul has already suggested that believers are “the elect of God” (Rom 8:33), and here the Gentiles are certainly not excluded from the elect, but in Rom 11:7 he has in view chiefly the elect *from Israel*, that is, the remnant (λεῖμμα; from λείπειν). This remnant has received the benefits of election, but “the rest” (οἱ λοιποί; also from λείπειν) from Israel have not therefore been rejected. Rather they have been hardened or “thickened” (πωροῦν, a synonym of σκληροῦν). As in Deut 29:4, God has dulled them with a “spirit of stupor” (an expression borrowed from LXX Isa 29:10) and has made it so their eyes and ears do not function (Rom 11:8). As in LXX Ps 69:23–24, the purpose of their blindness is to make them stumble over their own table and to keep their backs bent (Rom 11:9–10).

4.2.4.3. *The Question in Romans 11:11–24*

In the previous passage, Paul again hinted that there is hope for Israel. Not only is there an indefinite number of Israelites who have been preserved, but “the rest” from Israel have not necessarily been rejected. Nevertheless, they have stumbled as a result of the blindness that God has caused, and so next Paul considers what is in store for the blinded members. More specifically, he asks whether they have “stumbled in order that they might fall” (Rom 11:11). That is, will the stumbling of the present members of Israel

³⁹ So Dunn, *Romans*, 2:640 (“the benefits of a sustained covenant relationship, including final vindication”).

lead to a permanent falling away from grace?⁴⁰ If so, much of Israel has effectively been rejected like Esau. If not, there is hope even for the blinded members.

4.2.4.4. *The Response*

Despite the clues that Paul has given regarding his hope for Israel, he has not stated plainly that he has any firm expectation that his prayer for his people's salvation will ever be answered. He has thus built up considerable suspense regarding Israel, and with his last *μη γένοιτο* in Romans he reveals that the blinded members of Israel have *not* stumbled so as to fall. He then turns to his Gentile audience in Rom 11:11–24 and makes the case that they too should want the stumbling members of Israel to be saved, since their salvation would—and, he implies, *will*—have unimaginably positive consequences for the whole world. He also warns the Gentiles against complete certainty regarding either their own election or the continued stumbling of Israel.

The passage has two parts. First, in Rom 11:11–15 Paul argues that God's plan is to make Israel jealous, that Israel's mistake has had a positive effect on the world, and that its eventual inclusion would have even greater consequences. Here Paul relies heavily on his earlier quotations of Deut 32:21 and Isa 65:1–2 in Rom 10:19–21, but this time he finds a stunning possibility of cosmic hope hidden within these verses. Because it was Israel's disobedience (whether idolatry, as in Deut 32:21, or rejection of the gospel) that instigated God's decision to allow the Gentiles to upstage Israel, Paul concludes that

⁴⁰ It is the consensus that *πίπτειν* in Rom 11:11 denotes a *permanent* fall. According to Dunn, it can be thought of either as a fall from which one cannot get up or as a disqualifying fall ("the sprawling on one's face that puts a runner out of the race"; *ibid.*, 2:653).

Israel's disobedience has had extraordinarily positive consequences for the Gentiles: "by their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles in order to make them jealous" (Rom 11:11). Furthermore, while Israel's resultant jealousy may seem unpleasant, it likewise will have a positive effect, both for Israel and for the Gentiles. The consequence for Israel, Paul implies, is salvation, which in turn will lead to greater "wealth" for the world and the Gentiles specifically. Because Israel's disobedience and subsequent loss and exclusion has led to "the reconciliation of the world," it follows that the wealth that would come through Israel's full inclusion would be far greater, including nothing less than "life from the dead" (Rom 11:12, 15).⁴¹ Paul therefore deliberately attempts to make Israel jealous by "glorifying" his ministry to the Gentiles, hoping that he will have a role in saving some (Rom 11:13–14).

Second, through a speech to a wild olive branch in Rom 11:16–24 Paul warns Gentile believers that they should not be too proud of their present status in relation to Israel, and that their situation—as well as that of Israel—is reversible. Before addressing the wild olive branch, he begins by stating a simple principle: the branches are holy if the root is holy (Rom 11:16). This principle further supports Paul's hope for Israel, but it also serves as a transition to the speech to the wild olive branch. The root that Paul has in mind, and which will be in view throughout the speech to the wild olive branch, is undoubtedly the "root" of Israel, i.e., the patriarchs, and of course for Paul this root

⁴¹ Moo has made a strong case on the basis of NT parallels, as well as from the flow of Paul's argument, that "life from the dead" in Rom 11:15 must refer first of all to a literal and not (as in the story of the prodigal son; cf. Luke 15:24) to a metaphorical resurrection (*Romans*, 694–96). The latter, though, is not excluded by the former but is assumed. It is Israel's metaphorical resurrection, i.e., its salvation, that will lead to its inclusion, which will then result in a literal, cosmic resurrection.

indeed *is* holy.⁴² Throughout the ensuing speech, it will be assumed that the descendants or “branches” of Israel are naturally holy as well.

Next Paul addresses the Gentiles as if they are a wild olive branch, which he commands not to “boast against the branches” that are from Israel’s root if in fact some branches have been cut off (and they have, as Paul will soon concede) and the wild branch grafted in their place (Rom 11:17). Here he uses the second-person singular, perhaps suggesting that the speech is directed to the Gentiles not just collectively but also individually.⁴³ He also reminds the Gentiles that as an olive branch they remain anatomically dependent on the root, and that the reverse does not somehow become true now that they have been grafted into a new tree (“you do not support the root, but rather the root supports you”; Rom 11:18). He concedes that the natural branches were cut off for the wild branch’s sake, but the reason for this is that the natural branches lacked faith. The wild branch, on the other hand, only maintains its status (or “stands”) in the tree because of its continued faith. Paul therefore warns the wild branch not to “think high thoughts.” Instead it must have fear, for God’s harsh treatment of the natural branches

⁴² There is a near consensus that the root in Rom 11:15 refers to the patriarchs. As Moo points out (ibid., 699), the root is identified later in Rom 11:28 (“they are beloved *because of the fathers*”). The accompanying metaphor of the “firstlings” (ἀπαρχή) in Rom 11:15 (an apparent interpretation of Num 15:20–21) also seems to suggest that Paul has in mind the original ones whom God set apart (Dunn’s contention that the ἀπαρχή here refers to believers is forced [*Romans*, 2:659]). Less certain is what exactly Paul means by “holy.” Moo insists that here it denotes a cultic holiness that does not imply that Israel has been “set apart by God for salvation” (*Romans*, 701). The problem with this view is that the Gentiles are immediately said to partake of this holiness (or “fatness”; Rom 11:16). It seems that for Paul Israel does naturally possess a true holiness, but that the benefits of this holiness have been forfeited (if only temporarily) through Israel’s present unbelief.

⁴³ Most discussion of the metaphor in Rom 11:16–24 concerns why someone would go through the trouble of grafting a wild olive branch into a cultivated olive tree (instead of the other way around). Moo rightly cautions, though, that Paul gives the reader no indication of how much he knows (or does not know) about arboriculture, and so it is may not be wise to read too much into the apparent strangeness of the metaphor (ibid., 702–3).

suggests that at some point God could be equally harsh to the wild branch (Rom 11:19–21). In short, the wild branch must remember both “the kindness *and* severity of God.” God has been severe to the fallen branches and kind to the wild branch, but there is a condition for God’s kindness to stay upon the wild branch: “*if you remain in his kindness, otherwise you too will be cut off*” (Rom 11:22).⁴⁴ In other words, the wild branch must continue in faith. Conversely, the natural branches will be grafted back in so long as the condition of *unbelief* does *not* remain. If they turn from their unbelief, not only can God graft them back in, but it will be easier to graft the natural branches back into the “cultivated olive tree” of Israel than it was to take “from what is by nature a wild olive tree” and graft it into the cultivated tree (Rom 11:23–24).⁴⁵

4.2.5. Romans 11:25–36

The preceding passage is the only one since Rom 9:1–5 that does not quote Scripture, but it is nevertheless a critical part of Paul’s defense of God’s word. By rejecting the proposition that Israel has fallen, the apostle has set the stage for a final reaffirmation in Rom 11:25–36 of the promise of Israel’s salvation as well as Israel’s role

⁴⁴ The use of πίπτειν in Rom 11:22 to refer to the “fallen” branches seems to conflict with Paul’s earlier denial in Rom 11:11 that the stumbling members of Israel have “fallen” (πίπτειν), but Dunn correctly notes that the metaphor in each verse is different (*Romans*, 2:665). Only in Rom 11:11 does πίπτειν suggest a permanent fall.

⁴⁵ Moo calls the wording of the first clause in Rom 11:24 “confusing” and denies that κατὰ φύσιν (“by nature”) is modifying ἀγριέλαιος because it is “tautologous to call a wild olive tree wild” (*Romans*, 708). There really is nothing difficult about this clause, however. The verb ἐξεκόπη is transplanted from its more natural position (either after σύ or at the end of the clause) so that the emphasis is placed on the origin (σὺ ἐκ...ἀγριελαίου), and so that ἀγριέλαιος—which is at the end of the clause—will parallel καλλιέλαιος at the end of the next clause (“if you have been cut off from what is by nature a *wild* olive tree, and have been grafted against nature into a *cultivated* olive tree”). In light of this parallel, the charge of tautology is unwarranted.

in the salvation of the world. Wishing the Gentiles to be neither ignorant (as they once had been) nor “wise among yourselves” (as they now could become if they do not heed the warning in the previous passage), Paul reveals the “mystery” of God’s plan: that Israel has experienced “a hardening in part” which will last “until the fullness of the Gentiles enters,” and that this process will in turn be the means by which the promise of Isa 59:20–21 that “all Israel will be saved” will be fulfilled (Rom 11:25–27).⁴⁶ In the meantime, the disobedience of the hardened members of Israel has led to apparent paradoxes. First, the hardened members remain “beloved” even though they have become “enemies.” It is for the benefit of the Gentiles that they have become enemies, but it is “because of the fathers” that they remain beloved, since God never revokes (or “regrets”) his gifts or calling when it comes to election (Rom 11:28–29). Second, the Gentiles have received mercy after their own disobedience and because of Israel’s present disobedience, and so it follows that Israel will receive mercy in the same way (Rom 11:30–31). Thus God’s plan for all involves both “enclosing” them in disobedience and having mercy, the former eventually giving way to the latter (Rom 11:32). Finally, the apparent paradoxes

⁴⁶ Some have held that καὶ οὕτως in Rom 11:26 is temporal (“and then”; so C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [2d ed. BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1991], 223), but, as Fitzmyer has observed, οὕτως never has a temporal sense elsewhere in Greek literature (*Romans*, 622). Dunn interprets the καὶ οὕτως as consequential (“and so”; *Romans*, 2:681), but in this context it more likely means “and in this manner.” The “manner” to which Paul refers must be inferred from the previous verse, which (in light of Rom 11:11–15) implies that the hardening of Israel is actually the means by which the full inclusion of the Gentiles will occur. Thus Israel’s hardening will lead first to the salvation of the Gentiles *and likewise* (καὶ οὕτως) to Israel’s salvation (Paul makes this same point more clearly in Rom 11:31). As for what Paul means by “all Israel” in Rom 11:26, the once popular view that it refers directly to the church (both Jews and Gentiles who believe) has been all but abandoned (a notable exception is Wright, *Climax*, 249–50). The notion of a *Sonderweg* (“a special way”) by which Israel can be saved apart from Christ is more recent (Franz Mussner, “‘Ganz Israel wird gerettet werden’ (Röm 11,26): Versuch einer Auslegung,” *Kairos* 18 (1976): 241–55; also his *Tractate on the Jews: The Significance of Judaism for Christian Faith* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 94; Gager, *Origins* 92–99; Gaston, *Paul*, 147–48). This view also has met with widespread rejection, not least because it runs contrary to just about everything Paul says about salvation in Romans (see Reidar Hvalvik, “A ‘Sonderweg’ for Israel: A Critical Examination of a Current Interpretation of Romans 11.25–27,” *JSNT* 38 [1990]: 87–107).

within this plan are ultimately a reason to marvel at the inscrutable wisdom of God, who has no equal as the source, means, and end of all things and the one to be glorified forever (Rom 11:33–36).

4.2.6. Summary of Romans 9–11

There is little question that Rom 9–11 is the most difficult section of the letter, but I have argued that these chapters can be understood as essentially a defense and a reaffirmation of God’s word concerning Israel, especially Israel’s patriarchs, in light of the present situation of Israel and the Gentiles with regard to the gospel. First, in Rom 9:1–5 Paul expresses his grief over his fellow Israelites and lists their many blessings. Here he implies that they have rejected their Messiah, and thus that they have not received the benefits of election described in Rom 8.

Second, in Rom 9:6–29 Paul defends God’s word concerning the patriarchs while also building up to an evaluation of the present situation of Israel and the Gentiles. Even if Israel has not obtained the benefits of election by fleshly lineage or by “works,” God’s word has not “failed” because not all the fleshly descendants of Israel are the “Israel” that is “the seed of Abraham” and “God’s children” (Rom 9:6–9). Furthermore, God’s plan regarding the election of Jacob and the rejection of Esau was announced in advance in order to show that it derives “not from works but from the one who calls” (Rom 9:10–13). This plan of election does not imply injustice on God’s part, but God does show mercy and harden as he chooses in order to demonstrate that he is the source of mercy, to show his power, and to spread his name to all people (Rom 9:14–18). It may seem unjust

for God to fault the hardened, but no one has the right to question God, who as the potter can make vessels of honor and of dishonor, and who may wish to demonstrate his wrath and ability by showing patience to “the vessels of wrath” and “the wealth of his glory” to “the vessels of mercy” (Rom 9:19–24). As it turns out, believers are “the vessels of mercy,” and God’s mercy toward them has been seen in the inclusion of the Gentiles, who are now called “my people,” “beloved,” and “children of God.” Israel, by contrast, would be entirely a vessel of wrath if not for Isaiah’s promise that a remnant would be saved (Rom 9:25–29).

Third, in Rom 9:30–10:21 the apostle suspends his defense of God’s word, and, in light of the primary argument of Romans, he finally provides a direct description of the present situation of Israel and the Gentiles. The Gentiles have unwittingly obtained “the righteousness that is from faith,” but Israel has strived in vain after a “law of righteousness” that operates by “works.” It has “stumbled over the stone of stumbling,” i.e., Christ, even though God has promised in LXX Isa 28:16 that “the one who believes in it/him will not be put to shame” (Rom 9:30–33). Israel’s situation is not completely hopeless, though, for Paul still prays for his people’s salvation and testifies that they have a sincere, but ignorant, “zeal for God.” It is because of this ignorant zeal that they “seek to establish their own righteousness,” reject “the righteousness of God,” and fail to acknowledge Christ’s role as the τέλος of the law and the source of righteousness “for all who believe” (Rom 10:1–4).

Here Paul takes the opportunity to complete the primary argument by contrasting the two main approaches to obtaining righteousness. While Lev 18:5 promises life to the one who does what Moses has written, “the righteousness from faith” speaks out in Deut

30:12–14. It forbids one to doubt Christ’s (first?) coming or his resurrection, and it announces the nearness of “the word of faith,” which is Paul’s message that all who acknowledge Christ’s lordship and resurrection both outwardly and inwardly will receive righteousness and salvation (Rom 10:5–13). Thus there is a certain chain of conditions: calling on the Lord’s name requires faith, which in turn requires hearing, a preacher, and that preachers be sent. This chain has been set in motion, for the beautiful feet of the preachers have been seen, but unfortunately “not all have believed the gospel.” They have indeed heard, and Israel too has “known,” but according to Deut 32:21 God’s plan is for those who *had* been ignorant, i.e., the Gentiles, to upstage Israel, and Isa 65:1–2 confirms that the ignorant have found God and that Israel is a “disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom 10:14–21).

Fourth, in Rom 11:1–24 Paul returns to his defense of God’s word, begins to articulate his hope for Israel’s salvation, and warns the Gentiles against overconfidence regarding their status in relation to Israel. God has not broken the promise of 1 Sam 12:22 and Ps 94:14 and “rejected his people,” for Paul himself is an Israelite, and the identity of “the people *whom he has foreknown*” is not evident to anyone but God. As in Elijah’s time, there is currently a remnant from Israel that has been preserved from abandoning God, but Paul does not apply the revealed number in 1 Kgs 19:14 (“seven thousand men”) to his own day. All he claims is that a remnant now exists “by the election of grace” and not by “works.” He concludes therefore that Israel has failed to obtain what the elect have obtained, and that instead “the rest” from Israel have been “thickened” and blinded and therefore have stumbled (Rom 11:1–10).

Having built up a great deal of suspense regarding Israel, he now reveals that this stumbling will *not* lead to a permanent downfall. God's plan is to make the stumbling members jealous, and Paul himself is committed to this task by "glorifying" his ministry to the Gentiles, since the eventual inclusion of the stumbling members would bring unimaginable wealth to the world, including "life from the dead" (Rom 11:11–15). Yet Paul warns Gentile believers not to be too proud of their present status, and he suggests that the respective situations of Israel and the Gentiles are reversible. Speaking to them as a wild olive branch, Paul affirms that Gentile believers have been grafted into a cultivated tree (Israel) with a holy root (the patriarchs), but he commands them not to "boast against the branches" that have been cut off. Moreover, they must continue to "fear," to remember both the "the kindness *and* severity of God," and to "remain in his kindness" and not fall away into unbelief, which is the only thing that is currently preventing God from grafting the natural branches back into the cultivated tree (Rom 11:16–24).

Finally, in Rom 11:25–36 Paul reaffirms the promise of Israel's salvation as well as Israel's special role in the salvation of the world. The "mystery" of God's plan is that Israel has experienced a "hardening in part" which will last "until the fullness of the Gentiles enters," and that this process will in turn lead to the fulfilment of the promise of Isa 59:20–21 that "all Israel will be saved." In the meantime, apparent paradoxes have resulted from the disobedience of the hardened members. They have become "enemies" for the benefit of the Gentiles, but are "beloved because of the fathers." Their disobedience has brought mercy to the once disobedient Gentiles, and so it will lead to mercy for them as well. Thus God's plan involves both disobedience and mercy for all, the former eventually giving way to the latter (Rom 11:25–32). This plan may involve

apparent paradoxes, but in the end these are a reason to marvel at God's inscrutable wisdom and to praise God forever (Rom 11:33–36).

4.3. CONCLUSION

Paul's defense of God's word in Rom 9–11 not only supplements but also qualifies the primary and secondary arguments of Romans. Believers are assured of salvation by faith in the primary argument (which is reaffirmed in Rom 10:5–13), and in the secondary argument they are called God's adopted children through the Spirit and are therefore identified as the elect. In Rom 9–11, however, Paul insists that God's promises concerning Israel have not failed, and that the Gentiles should not be too confident of their status in relation to Israel. They must continue to "fear," to remember "the severity of God" toward the unbelieving members of Israel, and to "remain in his kindness" and not fall away into unbelief. In short, they should not be entirely certain of their future salvation or of their election as God's children.

CONCLUSION

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The first perceived incompatibility regarding judgment and justification can be resolved by distinguishing four terms in Romans. The term “the doers of the law” in Rom 2:13 is part of a positive allusion to Lev 18:5, which Paul takes in an inclusive sense and places in opposition to a literalistic understanding of the Greek *Shema* and its command to “hear” the law. The meaning of “the work of the law” in Rom 2:15 is similar to that of “the doers of the law,” but it is part of what I have identified as a “counter-allusion” to Jer 31:33 and is opposed to the letter or word (*λόγος*) of the law. “Works of law” is the alternative of faith in Christ and is not viewed in a positive way. Paul’s decision to reject “works of law” wholesale as a means of justification creates two apparent holes in the argument: he does not acknowledge that the works of the law include what he calls the law’s “just requirements,” nor does he mention the means of grace and atonement already available through the law.

The fourth term to be distinguished is “works.” When used in Rom 3–4 and Rom 9–11, this term is a shortened form of “works of law,” although the two expressions are not always interchangeable. In different contexts, the term “works” is associated variously with boasting in “works of law,” earning justification, God’s preannounced plan of election, and the preservation of a remnant from Israel. This new rhetoric against “works” was perceived as potentially problematic by Paul’s contemporaries. The writers of James, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, and Titus all reassert the positive role of “works” in

justification, but they also detach the Pauline rhetoric against “works” from its implicit connection to “works of law.”

In order to overcome the second perceived incompatibility, I argued that both judgment according to works and justification by faith are qualified in various ways throughout Rom 1–11. First, judgment according to works is qualified both within Rom 1:18–3:20, which I call a preliminary argument, and later in the letter. Within the preliminary argument, it establishes that obedience is the final criterion for all, and therefore that disobedient Jews cannot take refuge in any ethnic advantage. Before the judgment, however, divine mercy is the norm. This is implied in the speech to the judge in Rom 2:1–5 and even in the denunciations of idolaters in Rom 1:18–32.

In the remainder of Rom 1–11, there are several ways that grace abounds before the final judgment. While God remains just in offering Christ as a means of atonement, all who believe are graciously justified, redeemed, and granted forgiveness of their sins (Rom 3:21–26). The resurrection of Christ then provides a special assurance that believers will be saved from future wrath (Rom 5:9–10). This assurance is made possible by the pattern of Adam and Christ, which maintains the principle of individual retribution but allows for a single action by a prototypical figure to influence the destiny of the many (Rom 5:12–21). Finally, in Rom 6–8 eternal life is described not as a wage but as a gift to those who have changed masters from sin to obedience.

Second, the assurance of salvation provided by faith is itself qualified. At the heart of the structure of Rom 1–11 are the primary and secondary arguments of Romans, and these are united through what I call “the faith event,” which consists of faith along with baptism and reception of the Spirit. The primary argument of Romans concerns the

confidence or “boast” of believers and often places emphasis on faith, which is what allows those who are justified by faith to boast in hope, in their afflictions, and in God. The secondary argument ensures that this boast is not misunderstood as an invitation to continue in sin or as a form of moral libertinism. Because believers have been baptized and have received the Spirit, they are commanded to live in a way that reflects both their death to sin through baptism and their resultant life with Christ. Their eventual co-glorification with Christ also has conditions: with the Spirit’s assistance they must “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13) and co-suffer with Christ.

Finally, while believers are assured of salvation by faith in the primary argument, and are called God’s adopted children and “the elect of God” (Rom 8:33) in the secondary argument, in Rom 9–11 Paul warns believers that they should not be entirely certain of their salvation or of their election. God’s promises concerning Israel have not failed, and believing Gentiles should not be too confident of their status in relation to Israel. They must continue to “fear,” to remember “the severity of God” toward the unbelieving members of Israel, and to “remain in his kindness” and not fall away into unbelief themselves. Otherwise they might become just like the hardened members of Israel who have been cut off from Israel’s holy root.

2. FURTHER STUDY

A major reason that the *Joint Declaration* was possible was that both Catholics and Lutherans were willing to begin with Scripture as a starting point and to seek “a

common way of listening to the word of God in Scripture.”¹ The result was a new synthesis of Paul’s doctrine of justification, but in its omission of any reference to judgment according to works, this synthesis was missing a critical element. Paul’s warning of an eschatological judgment according to works establishes the principle of divine retribution in a way that actually assumes the present reality of divine mercy. The principle thus retains its validity for believers. Furthermore, Paul takes it for granted that faith does not exist independently of the faith event. Believers have been baptized and have received the Spirit, and so they are both empowered and required to obey God, and they have no absolute assurance of salvation on the basis of “faith alone.”

As it turns out, the synthesis of Paul in the *Joint Declaration* already notes that justification “occurs in the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism.”² Similarly, the document later sets the Lutheran notion of *sola fide* firmly within the context of the other two components of the faith event. It is “by the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism” that salvation is given to believers, such that “in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person.”³ In this way the *Joint Declaration* already implicitly acknowledges the inseparability of faith, baptism, and reception of the Spirit. Whether this century will produce a document as ecumenically significant as the *Joint Declaration* is uncertain, but in future attempts to articulate Paul’s doctrine of justification it would be fruitful to consider the significance of all three components of the faith event not only in Romans but also in Paul’s other letters. Much attention has

¹ The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), §8.

² Ibid., §11.

³ Ibid., §25, 28.

already been given to the role of faith in these letters, but the importance of baptism and of the Spirit should not be overlooked. For Paul, it is these that “work together” with faith (Jas 2:22). It is these that the demons lack.

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