

# Addressing Some Problem Passages in Romans

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## Introduction

The letter of Paul to the saints in Rome is generally acknowledged not only to be among the most profound documents in the Bible, but also in all of literature as well. It is his supreme inspired statement of God's plan of justification of sinful man through faith in His Son. Although not written in signs and symbols and not apocalyptic in nature as is the book of Revelation, many of its passages have nonetheless taxed the talents of expositors for centuries.

One might almost imagine that Peter had just finished reading the Romans epistle when he wrote:

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:15–16).<sup>1</sup>

Note especially three things Peter recognized about some of Paul's writings (perhaps including Romans): (1) They were difficult to understand, (2) at least some of his words were being twisted, contorted and made to mean things which the great apostle never believed or taught, and (3) the ones who turned Paul's Gospel Truth into error did so to their own damnation.

While the overwhelming bulk of material that Paul wrote is straightforward and understandable (Eph. 3:4; 5:17), Bible students still find some of his statements very challenging, especially in the Romans letter. Some handle these difficult passages with great carelessness and/or deliberate deception thereby making them mean things Paul could not have meant. We must consistently apply two closely-related cardinal principles of hermeneutics in dealing with any ambiguous or difficult passage, whether from Paul or any other inspired author:

1. If the Scriptures speak plainly, simply, or explicitly on the same subject or doctrine elsewhere, the plain and simple must always govern our understanding of the difficult or figurative.
2. Difficult passages must never be interpreted so as to conflict with what the Bible teaches elsewhere.

Thus in some cases, while we may not know precisely **what Paul meant**, we may certainly be able to rule out one or more **things he did not mean**.

Since the sixteenth century Reformation the Romans letter has especially been considered fertile soil by Calvinists and *faith-only* salvation advocates. However, we shall see in

the course of our study of some of their favorite passages that they are “wresting” the teaching of Paul and are certainly doing so to their own destruction. This is tragic enough, but the tragedy is compounded by the fact that those who follow their false doctrines will also be destroyed with them (Mat. 15:14). Of course, not all of the problem passages in Romans have given rise to false doctrines; some of them may be interpreted in more than one way without involving any Scriptural contradiction.

Let us now take up some of the problem passages in the great Romans letter in the quest to come to a better understanding of them.

### “From Faith unto Faith”

For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16–17).

What does Paul mean when he says that “a righteousness of God” is revealed in the Gospel “from faith unto faith”? Many and varied have been the explanations of this phrase, some of them quite inventive, as the following sampling will show:

1. From faith in the Old Testament to faith in the New Testament
2. From one degree of faith to another
3. By faith alone or faith “from beginning to end”
4. It is parallel with Romans 3:22: “Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe...”
5. The Gospel must begin in one’s humble faith and can only be received by one who has faith
6. The Gospel plan of righteousness is revealed by faith and produces faith

I reject all of these as either missing the point and/or being fraught with damnable error.

To begin with we must discern the meaning of the *righteousness of God* in this context. It does not refer to the righteousness which God possesses, for this had already been revealed in the Old Testament. Paul’s use of *righteousness of God* in Romans 10:3 is instructive: “For being ignorant of **God’s righteousness**, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the **righteousness of God**” (emph. DM). *God’s righteousness* and *righteousness of God* are both used here in reference to **God’s plan for man’s righteousness** through the Gospel—the means (i.e., “power” [1:16]), which God provides whereby man may be counted righteous or just in spite of his sins. The Jews refused to obey the Gospel and they thereby forfeited the “righteousness of God.” This righteousness is “of God” because He is its source.

Thus in Romans 1:17 we could substitute *plan of salvation* or *scheme of redemption* for *righteousness of God* and have the sense of it.

Now, in what sense is God's plan of righteousness for man "from faith unto faith"? This phrase rendered literally is "out of faith unto (*eis*, in order to) faith." Paul is saying in the first place that man's justification before God itself (not the revelation of it) is "out of faith." That is, faith produces it, it proceeds and results from the faith of the believer. In what sense is it "unto" or "in order to" faith? Does not the revelation of God's plan whereby He will forgive us and pronounce us "righteous" serve as an inducement to men to believe and obey Him and thus claim His promise? This I perceive to be Paul's meaning in Galatians 2:16:

Yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed on Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law: because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Note that he says that the knowledge (revelation) of God's plan of justification (righteousness) by faith produced faith in him because he desired that justification.

I believe Grubbs is correct in paralleling a similar phrase in Romans 1:5 ("unto obedience of faith among all the nations") with "unto [in order to] faith in verse 17:

We regard this statement in the fifth verse as equivalent to the statement in the passage on which we are commenting, as regards the relation of the Gospel message to its great object, indicated by the briefer phrase *in order to faith* in the one case, and by the fuller phrase *in order to the obedience of faith* in the other case.<sup>2</sup>

Lard captured the meaning of the verse in his paraphrase: "In the gospel is revealed God's justification by belief, *eis pistin*, for belief; it is revealed for, or to induce a certain end, to induce belief."<sup>3</sup> Roy Deaver's succinct statement of its meaning is helpful: "The meaning is: the righteousness which God desires to be in our lives is the result of faith, and that this plan for producing righteousness causes faith."<sup>4</sup>

### **"By Nature...Law unto Themselves...Work of the Law Written in Their Hearts"**

For when Gentiles that have not the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are the law unto themselves; in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them (Rom. 2:14–15).

Paul's aim in Romans 2 was to show that all of the Jews stood condemned before God, just as in chapter 1 he had shown that all of the Gentiles were under His condemnation. He thus concluded: "What then? Are we [Jews] better than they [the Gentiles]? No, in no wise: for we before laid to the charge both of Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin" (Rom. 3:9; cf. v. 23). In Romans 2:9–11 Paul had already stated the general premise that God would condemn

those who worked unrighteousness and that He would reward those who worked that which was good, “of the Jew first and also of the Greek: for there is no respect of persons with God.” In verses 12 and 13 Paul spoke of Gentiles as having “sinned without law.”

Lamentably, brethren James Bales, Dan Billingsly, and others have fastened upon this and the immediately following verses as an alleged proof text for part of their marriage, divorce, and remarriage heresies. They argue that the Gentiles were under no law or covenant from God in the Old Testament and likewise, those who are not Christians since the enactment of the New Covenant—the Law of Christ—went into effect, are not amenable to it. Therefore, they conclude, God’s law for marriage (as restated by Christ in Mat. 19:9) does not apply to those who are not Christians.

This phrase, *sinned without law*, obviously does not mean that the Gentiles who lived while the Mosaic Law was in force were not accountable to any law from God. Had this been so they could not have sinned: “Where there is no law, neither is there transgression” (Rom. 4:15). What is meant is that they were without a written law from God, which he gave the Jews in the Law of Moses. Yet, the Gentiles had some sort of law, else, as already noted, they could not have been judged sinners. (In fact, no human has ever lived who was not accountable to a system of revealed law from God.)

In verse 13 Paul rebuked the Jews for their pride in possessing the written, revealed law, while the Gentiles had no written law. In effect, he told the Jews that there was no special virtue in possessing or even in merely hearing (though necessary) the reading of the law, as many of them apparently supposed. Rather, the virtue was in doing, obeying, the law—whatever law one might be under.

This brings us to verse 14 in which Paul set forth the fact that, while the Gentiles did not have a formal written law (covenant) from God (there is no article before the first and third appearances of *law* in this verse in the Greek, indicating **any** system of written law), yet, at least some of them had done “the things of the law [the definite article is present here, indicating the Law of Moses].” How did they do the things or works of the Law of Moses, not having the written law to teach them? They did it “by nature.”

Some (e.g., Bales, Billingsly) erroneously suppose this to be some inborn, innate system of guidance or principle, by which one may know the will of God, apart from His revealed Word (Bales calls it the “law in the heart”; Billingsly calls it “the great moral law”).<sup>5</sup> When they apply this to the Christian age, they allege that those who have not obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation are not accountable to the New Covenant (the Law of Christ, the Gospel) and thus will

not be judged by it. Again, this frees every unbeliever from God's law for marriage, divorce, and remarriage. (Of course, it also frees every unbeliever from any obligation to obey the Gospel so as to be saved and become a Christian, implying universal damnation!)

Remember the point Paul was making—the Gentiles did not have a **written** law, as did the Jews. Thus when he said a Gentile might do the works of the Law of Moses “by nature” he means “...without a written law, and not necessarily nature wholly unenlightened by divine truth.”<sup>6</sup> All of the Gentile world, even as the Jews, had descended from the patriarchs (e.g., Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, et al.) to whom God had delivered various laws, both moral and religious, as can be seen in the early chapters of Genesis. Biblical records thus speak of Gentile priests and prophets. The Gentile world never ceased to be under these laws God gave to the earliest men, even after He gave His written covenant (the Law of Moses) to the house of Israel. While the Gentiles as a whole had grievously apostatized from those patriarchal principles, at least some of them nonetheless retained some of them in their consciousness by means of long-standing tradition. This knowledge of God's law, handed down from their ancient fathers, had passed through so many generations that its Divine source had been forgotten by them. Thus when some of the Gentiles did that which agreed with certain requirements of the Law of Moses, they did so “by nature” that had been developed in them through many generations all the way back to the laws God gave to their earliest ancestors.

While Gentiles did not have written law, they had the above-described “natural” law and by this means they became a “law unto themselves.” This does not mean that they were free to do whatever they desired without offending God. Remember, Paul stated the premise midway through this verse (14) that they were doing some of the “things of the law [of Moses].” Many such requirements of the law might have been, and likely were, done by Gentiles (they at least knew such ordinances of God as honesty, chastity, justice, respect for parents, et al. [Rom. 1:32]). The Jews had the written Law from God. The Gentiles had no written law, but having the remnants of the laws given to the patriarchs still in their consciousness (the moral principles of which coincided with the Law of Moses), they were thus “the law unto themselves.” Therefore, all that Paul was saying was that when a Gentile did “by nature” that which corresponded with a requirement of the Law of Moses, he served as “the law unto himself,” just as the written law was a law unto the Jew. The first phrase of verse 15 amplifies this idea, namely, that only those Gentiles who demonstrated the “work of the law” by their practice in certain respects were indeed “the law unto themselves.”

Now, what about “the law written in their hearts”? Does this refer to some innate, inborn sense of right and wrong that men possess? Certainly not. In the first place, the law of which Paul wrote here was the Law of Moses, as the context clearly shows. In the second place, Paul said it was “the **work** of the law” (emph. DM), not the law itself that was written in the hearts of Gentiles. “The construction of the Greek shows plainly that it was the work of the law, and not the law itself, that was written on the hearts of the Gentiles.”<sup>7</sup> There is no innate, inborn law relating to our duties to God and to one another in this context or any other. I wholly agree with Lard’s conclusion concerning all such theories: “A natural or inborn sense of right equivalent to the ‘law’s work,’ or what it requires, I deem a very hazardous assumption.”<sup>8</sup>

### “Justified by Faith Apart From...Works”

Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law? of works? Nay: but by a law of faith. We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law (Rom. 3:27–28).

Does Paul teach here that man does not have to obey the commands of God’s law to be saved? Does he teach here that man is saved by merely believing in Christ with the intellect, apart from any action on his part, that is, by “faith only”? As a reaction to the corrupt system of meritorious works native to Roman Catholic theology, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformers, led by Martin Luther, decided that Paul was actually teaching justification by faith **alone**. Thus, as is rather well-known, Luther even added the word *alone* after *faith* in verse 28 when he issued his translation of the New Testament in 1522.

Numerous examples of this fundamental misunderstanding are extant in the Protestant creed books, one of which declares, “Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.”<sup>9</sup> Again, following the lead of Luther, Protestant theologians generally have indiscriminately and mistakenly concluded that any and all “works” (including obedience to God’s commands to the sinner) are excluded in obtaining justification. In fact, it is a necessary corollary to the *faith-only* position to deny the necessity of any act of obedience as a condition of salvation or of receiving the remission of sins. This denial usually focuses primarily upon the necessity of baptism.

The works which do not justify in this context are “the works of the law” (literally, “the works of law,” cf. v. 20). There is not any system of mere law that can save because such salvation would require that one keep said law to perfection. However, none (except the Christ) has been able to do this. While no mere man is able to earn or merit his salvation by perfect

law-keeping, this by no means excludes works of obedience which the Lord has placed between the sinner and salvation.

James 2:24 may at first appear to be a contradictory statement to Romans 3:28. Just as Paul used Abraham as an example of one who was justified by faith (Rom. 4:1–3), James used him as an example of one who was justified by works (2:21–23), and then declared: “Ye see that by works a man is justified, and **not only by faith**” (2:24, emph. DM). Protestant theologians have largely ignored these verses because they are a source of embarrassment to them, having followed Luther’s *faith-only* credo. When Luther came upon this statement from James, which so obviously and pointedly denied his *faith-only* perversion, and which emphasizes the proper role of the works of men in their salvation, he rejected the teaching of James as contradictory to that of Paul. In fact, he labeled the letter of James “a right strawy epistle” and disavowed its equality with Paul’s letters (an apt demonstration of the power and danger of blind prejudice).

But do we have here a contradiction? No. Inspired writers, under the influence of the one Spirit of God did not and could not contradict each other. James did not contradict Paul, but he indeed contradicted the common Protestant perversions of Paul. Neither Paul nor any other inspired writer ever taught “salvation by faith alone,” although they consistently teach salvation by faith. Both of Paul’s letters that Protestants hold to be the principal sources of “justification by faith only” (i.e., Romans and Galatians) contain strong disclaimers of this very doctrine. In both the opening and closing words of the Romans letter Paul set forth the kind of faith that justifies as an obedient (i.e., acting, working) faith (1:5; 16:26). Likewise, in the very heart of his argument to the Galatians he taught that the faith that avails anything before God is one that works: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love” (5:6). Thus Paul taught that **faith standing alone** avails nothing. It is almost as though Paul anticipated the *faith-only* error as a perversion of his teaching and placed these safeguards against it in these letters so that men would be without excuse in so misconstruing him—as indeed they are!

The works by which James says a man is justified are not works of merit or works of perfectly keeping the law; rather, they are acts of obedience that demonstrate genuine faith. Just as Paul taught salvation by faith, but not by “faith only,” likewise James taught salvation by works, but not by “works only.” The perfect blending and balance of the two is seen in Paul’s statement to the Galatians, quoted above.

Whiteside has a good summary statement on Romans 3:28:

Paul is not contrasting faith and the obedience of faith, but he is contrasting justification by works of law and justification by faith. In chapter 1:5 he speaks of “the obedience of faith”—that is, obedience of which faith is the source or foundation—an obedient faith.... To make works of law refer to the obedience of faith is to enshroud ourselves in a fog of confusion from which we will not be able to emerge with any clear ideas of the gospel plan of salvation.<sup>10</sup>

### “Nay, We Establish the Law”

Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law (Rom. 3:31).

Seventh Day Adventists cite this passage as evidence that the Ten Commandment Law is still in effect, thus justifying their sabbath-keeping. Those who add mechanical instruments of music to the worship of God in the Christian Age cite this passage as evidence that the Law of Moses is still in effect, thus justifying use of those instruments because they were used in Old Testament worship. Is Paul teaching here that the Law of Moses has not been done away? No, not at all.

1. It is by no means conclusive that Paul was specifically referring to the Law of Moses.
2. Paul was not contradicting here what he plainly taught in Romans 7:1–6, namely, that men are dead to and discharged from the Law of Moses.
3. Paul was not contradicting here what he plainly taught in many other passages, namely, that the law has been fulfilled and its authority nullified (Gal. 3:23–25; Eph. 2:14–16; Col. 2:14; Heb. 9:16–17; 10:1–10; et al.).

What then did Paul mean when he denied making the law of none effect, but even established it, through faith? He had strongly emphasized in the preceding verses that none could be justified by the works of the law (v. 20). The righteousness (justification) which God provides is through faith in Christ (v. 21–22, cf., v. 28). The anticipated response was, “By this teaching you are saying that our revered law is worthless, of no account.” So Paul asked, “Do we then make the law of none effect through faith?”

Paul was referring to law in general, rather than to the Law of Moses in particular. There is no definite article before “law” in either use of the term in verse 31 in the Greek text (as indicated in the ASV footnote). In fact, of the ten times Paul used the word *law* in this chapter (vv. 19–31), he referred to the Law of Moses specifically only three times, as indicated by the definite article (twice in v. 19, once in v. 21). Since (1) Paul was arguing the case that all who would be saved, whether Jew or Gentile, would be saved by a “law of faith” or by faith (vv. 27–30) and that (2) no Gentile was ever under the Law of Moses, therefore, (3) Paul was saying that none could ever be saved by **mere law of any sort** (i.e., the Law of Moses or the unwritten law the Gentiles had received through tradition from their fathers). Therefore, *law* throughout

this context, including verse 31, includes the Law of Moses, but also embraces the law principle in general. Law in itself cannot save because it demands perfect obedience (Gal. 3:10) and none (save the Christ) has ever been able to perfectly obey (Rom. 3:23).

Paul did not want them to think he was antinomian in his doctrine. He was not saying law was either unnecessary or bad. He was saying it was incapable of justifying. Law per se is not rendered valueless by being powerless to save. Contrariwise, the justifying principle itself is a “law of faith” (v. 27). The purpose of law is to reveal and condemn sin (v. 20; 7:7). The need and value of law (which reveals us to be sinners) are established through God’s plan for our justification by faith.

### **“Ye Are Not Under Law, But Under Grace”**

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? God forbid (Rom. 6:14–15).

Tolerance is the prevailing and general attitude concerning religion, morals, and behavior generally in our time. Such terms as *authority, law, obedience, and commandments* relating to religion are ugly and negative terms, conveying concepts to be despised. For some time professed believers in Christ have emphasized God’s grace almost to the exclusion of His wrath and judgment against sin and error—and to the exclusion of His Law. These attitudes have infiltrated the church of the Lord through some vigorous liberal elements, with various churches, schools, and journals dedicated to advancing them as rapidly as possible.

Certain corollaries are implied by this view of God and His Word and of the religion of His Son among our brethren, for example:

1. The New Testament is not to be viewed as a body of spiritual law, but merely as a “love letter” from Heaven.
2. God does not have a pattern for His church, for the plan of salvation—or for anything else.
3. Faithful children of God may be found scattered throughout all of the denominations.
4. We can have fellowship and unity with those who are in doctrinal error.
5. We must adopt a new hermeneutic for this modern era.
6. The role of women in the church, our worship practices, and other matters should reflect the cultural influences of our times, just as the New Testament record of such things reflects the cultural influence of the first century church. These and similar things are matters of option and adaptation.
7. We must make drastic changes in the church if we hope to appeal to people at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

8. God does not really mean what He has said in the New Testament about the necessity of obeying His Word and the consequence of wrathful judgment if we refuse to do so.
9. One may do almost whatever one wills to do, and God will be pleased as long as one is sincere and has a loving attitude.

Those liberal brethren who would still condescend to try to furnish Scriptural justification for such anti-Biblical emphases are especially drawn to Romans 6:14–15 (cf. John 1:17). In these verses they aver that Paul is declaring that grace and law are mutually exclusive and that since we are under grace, we are therefore not under law—any law—in the Christian Age; there are few, if any, restrictions upon us, especially in matters of religion. Admittedly, at first glance, and removed from the context, this may appear to be what Paul was saying, but let us examine the passage more closely.

We may begin by noticing that whatever Paul is teaching here about law and grace, he cannot be saying we are not obligated to law or a system of law of any sort in the Christian Age (*law* in this passage should not be limited to the Law of Moses, but inclusive of it). Paul had just warned these brethren not to yield to sin (vv. 1–2, 12–13), but, as I emphasized in earlier comments, this warning is nonsense if they were under no law, simply because sin cannot occur in the absence of law: “But where there is no law, neither is there transgression” (Rom. 4:15; cf. 3:19). Further, such would constitute a glaring contradiction with what Paul wrote elsewhere, and with other New Testament writers, as well. For example, in the immediate context of Romans 6:14–15 Paul emphasized (1) the necessity of obedience and (2) commended the Romans because they had yielded themselves to become bond-servants of righteousness (right living) (3) by sincerely obeying a “form [“pattern,” ASV footnote] of teaching” (vv. 16–18). All of these elements imply a norm, a standard, a **law** to which they were accountable.

In Romans 3:27 Paul argued that we who are Christians were justified by “a law of faith.” In Romans 8:2 Paul wrote of “the law of the Spirit of life” and said it was the means by which they had been made free from “the law of sin and death.” This statement is equivalent to his declaration in 1:16: “The gospel...is the power of God unto salvation.” It is also parallel to Jesus’ announcement in John 8:32: “The truth shall make you free.” We thus have *the Law, the Gospel, and the Truth* used interchangeably. If, therefore, one is subject to the Gospel or the Truth under Christ, he is subject to law, because *law* in reference to the New Testament is but another term for *Gospel* and *Truth*.

Ah, but someone may say, “These words described them **before** they came under grace and said obedience was necessary to bring them under that grace. **After** coming under grace, they were no longer under law.” This will not work, either. This same Paul wrote of

himself (one who surely was under God's saving grace) that, **as a Christian**, he was "under law to Christ" (2 Cor. 9:21). Further, he urged the Galatian **saints** to "fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). James wrote of "the perfect law, the law of liberty" in which **Christians** must continue (1:25) and of "a law of liberty" that will judge us—**saints** (2:12). In summary, Christ has a law, Christians are obligated to keep it, and we will be judged by it. Again, his meaning in Romans 6:14–15 cannot be that Christians are not under spiritual law in any and every sense.

What, then, is the meaning of Romans 6:14–15? In Romans 1 and 2 Paul showed that Gentile and Jew alike had miserably failed to perfectly obey their respective God-given law-systems. He concluded in chapter 3 that both Jew and Gentile were under the condemnation of God because they had sinned and could not be justified by any system of mere law. In that same chapter he began elaborating on the great principle of justification by faith, as opposed to justification merely by law, which he had set forth as the theme of his letter in chapter 1 (vv. 5, 16–17). He continued to build upon this great theme through chapters 4 and 5.

Since Paul had so strongly taught that law was insufficient for justification, he feared that some might jump to the conclusion that law was worthless, which he answered in 3:31 (see earlier exposition of this passage). In 6:14–15 he states that we are not under law, but "God forbid" (the strongest negative possible in the Grk.) that this be taken as an encouragement to sin. In what sense are we not "under law"? In the sense introduced in chapter 3—for **justification** we are not under law. In other words, we cannot be justified from sin by relying on a system of law alone; we must (and do) have a system of grace to "make up the difference" between the requirements of law and our lack of conformity to it.

However, this gives no one an excuse for violating nor an encouragement to violate God's law—that is, to sin. Since Paul says that we (as Christians) can sin, it must follow that we are under law in some sense, for, as already seen, where there is no law there is no sin (4:15). Macknight gives the following paraphrase of Romans 6:14, which at least expresses a Biblical Truth, but fails to fully express Paul's point: "Besides sin shall not lord it over you, for this reason, that ye are not under a dispensation of law, which gives no assistance against sin; but under grace, which affords all the aids necessary for subduing sin."<sup>11</sup>

Whiteside provides the clue to Paul's meaning here in the following statement:

This verse [14] does not mean that we are free from all law. Grace predominates. Where law condemns, grace makes pardon possible. If we were under no law, we would be guilty of no sin, and there would be no need of grace to forgive our sin. This verse is a figure of speech in which the less is denied so as to emphasize the greater. We are not merely under law, but more especially under grace.<sup>12</sup>

The often-overlooked figure of speech to which Whiteside alludes is called an “enthymeme” (from Grk., *enthymema*—“in the mind”), in which only part of a statement is verbalized while the remainder is implied and must be understood. Enlarging on the Whiteside description, in an enthymeme, two elements are placed in contrast, with one element de-emphasized or negated so as to more greatly emphasize the other. However, **the negation is not to be understood as absolute or universal**—only mitigated. The *in-absentia* words, *only* and *also* are implied in *enthymeme* statements, and when supplied mentally in their reading, the reader is able to complete the writer’s thought and application. Apparent paradoxes and/or contradictions of Scriptural statements evaporate with recognition of the employment of this figure of speech. Consider the following illustrations:

1. “[T]hey have not [only] rejected thee, but they have [also] rejected me...” (1 Sam. 8:7b).
2. “I came not [only] to send peace, but [also] a sword” (Mat. 10:34b).
3. “He that believeth on me, believeth not [only] on me, but [also] on him that sent me” (John 12:44).
4. “Thou hast not [only] lied unto men, but [also] unto God” (Acts 5:4b).
5. “Be no longer a drinker [only] of water, but use [also] a little wine for thy stomach’s sake...” (1 Tim. 5:23).
6. “Let us not love [only] in word, neither [only] with the tongue; but [also] in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18).

Failure to recognize and/or to accept the application of this figure may also lead to doctrinal error—as it indeed has done regarding Paul’s meaning in Romans 6:14–15. Now note this passage with the *in-absentia* words supplied:

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not [only] under law, but [also] under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not [only] under law, but [also] under grace? God forbid (Rom. 6:14–15).

The apostle never taught—here or elsewhere—that in the Christian Age men are no longer under a system of law. Nor did he ever teach—here or elsewhere—that law and grace are mutually exclusive and contradictory. This doctrine is fatal and damnable error.

#### **“He Shall...Give Life...to Your Mortal Bodies Through His Spirit”**

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you (Rom. 8:11).

The difficulty in this passage revolves around the sense in which saints are resurrected by God through the Holy Spirit. Is the resurrection in this passage literal or is it a figurative resurrection of some sort? Many able expositors take a literal approach to the passage and thus

make it a reference to the resurrection of all mankind upon the coming of the Lord (John 5:28–29; 1 Cor. 15:22–23). I agree with Roy Deaver’s observation: “So very often this passage has been used in reference to the general resurrection. Such an application is a misuse of the passage.”<sup>13</sup> Two major reasons require this conclusion: (1) The resurrection to which Paul refers in this passage is conditional upon the Spirit’s dwelling in us (“But if the Spirit...dwelleth in you” [emph. DM]). However, **all** of the dead, good and evil alike, are going to be raised at the one great resurrection (John 5:28–29). If that resurrection is conditioned upon the dwelling of the Spirit within us, and since the Spirit does not dwell in the unrighteous (Rom. 8:9), how then will the unrighteous be raised? (2) To inject the final resurrection here would have been to depart from the subject under consideration.

Paul has been writing about spiritual life and death from the beginning of the chapter. He contrasts the spiritual death of those who walk after the flesh with the spiritual life of those who live according to the Spirit. The mind that is governed by the Spirit (i.e., “the mind of the Spirit”) is life and peace (v. 6). The mind that is governed by the flesh (i.e., “the mind of the flesh”) is opposed to God and rejects the law of God (refuses to be governed by the Spirit) (v. 7), thus the state of such a one is one of spiritual death. If the Spirit dwells in us, we do not live in the flesh (we are not spiritually dead), but rather the fleshly behavior of the body is dead due to our righteous behavior (vv. 9–10). From this background Paul then discussed a “resurrection” God will accomplish in His people through His Spirit. *Resurrection* implies the antecedent of death. The body that tends to sin through its fleshly lusts died in relation to sin when Christ entered and began controlling it (6:1–5). Though our bodies have ceased from sin, they should not remain inactive (“dead”). Rather, through the Holy Spirit’s influence through—His Word (Acts 20:32; Eph. 6:11–17; et al.), our bodies are brought to life—“resurrected”—to live a life of righteousness. I therefore couple this “resurrection” with Paul’s description of the process of becoming a Christian:

We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection (Rom. 6:4–5).

That Paul used a future tense (“shall give life”) does not indicate that this life had not yet been given nor that it would not be given until some future time. In verse 13 we have a future tense form in the phrase, *ye shall live*, yet Paul was obviously speaking to those who were already “living” spiritually. Likewise, in verse 11, he used *shall give life* to describe those who

had already been given life. Roy Deaver has a fuller discussion of this “progressive” use of the Greek future tense.<sup>14</sup>

To these thoughts I add the following note from Whiteside: “So if the Spirit of God dwells in us, not only are our spirits alive to righteousness, but our bodies will also be made alive to the service of God.”<sup>15</sup>

### **“Led by the Spirit of God”**

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God (Rom. 8:14).

One is not a son of God—a Christian—unless he is led by the Spirit. How does God lead His children through the Holy Spirit? Many of those who are professed believers are under the delusion that there is some sort of direct guidance of the Spirit in their lives. Some feel that this occurs by their giving free reign to their impulses, playing their hunches, or acting on their “gut feeling.” Others believe they hear a voice speaking directly to them. Still others believe the Spirit is leading them by showing them special “signs” which direct them in their decisions. Some believe they receive visions directly from God. The question is not **whether** the Spirit provides leadership—Paul plainly stated that He does. But does the Holy Spirit provide **direct** leadership/guidance in the life of the Christian, in addition to that which He provides through His Word?—this is the question! Does He specifically tell us where to go, what to do, when to do it, and so forth? Please bear in mind that, however the leading of the Spirit is done, it is not for a few or for many, but **for every son [child] of God**.

In the first century, the Holy Spirit imparted miraculous power to the apostles, and they were able to impart it to others for the purpose of revealing and confirming the Gospel (Acts 6:1–6; 8:14–18; 19:1–7; Heb. 2:3–4). All such miraculous powers became superfluous and ceased to exist when the New Testament was completed (1 Cor. 13:8–13). However, the New Testament neither states nor implies that every Christian was given miraculous powers, even in the time when such powers were available. On some occasions in the first century, the Spirit told someone to go to a certain place and do a certain thing (Acts 8:29; 10:19–20; et al.). On some occasions some were told directly (apparently) not to do a certain thing (Acts 16:6–7). However, it is readily observable that such direct messages, even in the days of miracles, were not the ordinary, but the extraordinary occurrence. Since these miraculous incidents of the Spirit’s leadership were exceptional and confined to only a few individuals, it is manifest that such miraculous leadership was not in his mind when Paul wrote Romans 8:14. I emphasize

again that the kind of Spirit leadership of which He writes is that which the Spirit gives to **every** Christian, and the implication is that it is not occasional, but constant.

If the Holy Spirit does not lead children of God directly and miraculously, how does He lead them? One is led by the Spirit when He obeys the Word of the Spirit: “Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). To “walk by the Spirit” is what one does when he is being “led by the Spirit.” Immediately after the passage above, the Holy Spirit through Paul told us what the works of the flesh are and what the fruit of the Spirit is (19–26). There is only one way in which all of God’s children are led by the Spirit: by obeying the Word of the Spirit. Any other claimed leading diminishes at best—and nullifies at worst—the written Word of the Spirit by which He leads us! Only as we obey the Word of God does the Spirit lead us.

### **“The Creation...the Whole Creation Groaneth...We Ourselves Groan”**

For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity...in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into...the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth...and not only so, but ourselves also, ...waiting for ... the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:19–23).

This context has long been problematical to expositors. It is not difficult to see that the subject of the paragraph that spans verses 17–25 is hope of eternal glory and the encouragement of steadfastness in the face of suffering in order to attain it. The difficulties for the most part revolve around identification of the who or what the “creation” (*ktisis*) is,<sup>16</sup> and this identity must be determined from the immediate context. Suggested meanings are all living things (both animal and vegetable), the earth, or even the entire universe. Others limit the term to mankind alone and some only to a portion of mankind.

Let us first note some things in the context about this “creation”:

1. It entertains an “earnest expectation” (hope) (v. 19a).
2. It waits, in this hope, for the “revealing of the sons of God” in this hope (v. 19b).
3. It was subjected to “vanity” (futility, frailty) (v. 20a).
4. It has the power to will, to decide (v. 20b).
5. It will be delivered from corruption and will receive the glory to be given to God’s children (v. 21).

Now let us use these facts to eliminate some possibilities. Neither animals, vegetables, the earth, nor the entire universe are capable of entertaining hope, or of having any interest in who the sons of God are. While the lower forms of life and the material world may be said to have been “subjected to vanity,” none of these has any ability to “will” nor will they be delivered

from corruption to receive glory. If “the creation” refers to all of the universe and all that is in it, as some aver, to what then could “the whole creation” possibly refer (v. 22)?

Some suggest that “the creation” must include all mankind. This admittedly fits with some of the characteristics listed above (i.e., all men are capable of entertaining hope, all men have been subjected to vanity, all men are creatures of free will). However, not all men have a hope concerning the “revealing of the sons of God,” nor will all men be delivered from corruption to receive the glory of God’s children. We have now narrowed “the creation” only to those who will escape corruption and who thereby have hope of eternal glory. Children of God are the only ones who fit this description.

Can the saints of God in any sense be called a “creation”? Actually, this is not an unusual term at all for Christians:

1. “For we are his workmanship, created [verb form of *ktisis*] in Christ Jesus for good works...” (Eph. 2:10).
2. “Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature [*ktisis*] [‘a new creation,’ ASV footnote]” (2 Cor. 5:17).
3. “And put on the new man, that after God hath been created [verb form of *ktisis*] in righteousness and holiness of truth” (Eph. 4:24).

Paul not only referred to individual saints as God’s “creation,” but also to the church as a whole: “That he might create [verb form of *ktisis*] in himself of the two one new man, so making peace” (Eph. 2:15). My judgment, therefore, is that the **only** creation of God that matches the characteristics of the context is Christians, who, in the aggregate, compose the church of Christ.

Now we must deal with another occurrence of *creation*. In verse 22 Paul mentioned “the whole creation” and obviously distinguished it from simply “the creation” of verses 19–21. Whatever it is, it is capable of experiencing pain and suffering. If *the creation* in the context describes only a segment of mankind (Christians), then it seems evident that “the whole creation” describes all the rest of mankind, the unregenerate world. This I opine to be the case.

To the two classes thus far identified (i.e., the saints, plus the rest of mankind—non-saints), Paul added a third class—“ourselves.” Literally, of course, there are only two classes of all men—the saved and the lost. However, he makes a subdivision within the class of those who are saved, a third class he called “ourselves.” Who are these? Whoever they are they have “the first-fruits of the Spirit” and have inner groanings with the rest of humanity while living in this world. Paul is referring to himself and his fellow-apostles in verse 22. The “first-fruits of the Spirit” likely means the miraculous powers the Spirit gave them. They were “first-fruits” both in

the sense that they received the gifts **before** any others did and that they each possessed **all** of the gifts.

Now, having identified these key terms, what was Paul's message in this context? The paragraph begins on the note of suffering that must be endured by those who will receive the glorious inheritance as joint-heirs with Christ (vv. 17–18). From this thought Paul passed to the hope that Christians have for the time when those who compose all of the family of God through all of the ages will finally be revealed. God's Children live in a circumstance where they must deal with frailty and futility and experience suffering, but one in which they have hope of gaining freedom from the enslavement of corruption so that they might finally enjoy the glory of Heaven as God's children. The saints are not the only ones who suffer. All the rest of mankind suffers the common pains and sorrows of this life. Even the apostles themselves are not exempt. Rather, they await—with groaning—the final redemption that will bring an end to their bodily suffering. Hope saves us in that it “keeps us going” toward our eternal goal.

### Conclusion

The study of these inspired statements is by no means exhaustive; much more could be said about each one. Also, there are many additional passages in Romans worthy of such special studies. The selection of these passages is not intended to imply that these are necessarily the most difficult passages to be found in the Romans letter (a subjective judgment at best). I chose these simply on the basis of the order of their appearance and I was unable to treat others and still conform to space limitations. May this brief study encourage the reader to examine and investigate not only these contexts in Romans more thoroughly, but also to dig more deeply to find the meaning of other statements of this letter and of other portions of Holy Writ.

### Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. Isaiah Boone Grubbs, *Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Cincinnati, OH: F.L. Rowe, 1913), p. 38.
3. Moses E. Lard, *Commentary on Paul's Letter to Romans* (Des Moines, IA: Eugene S. Smith, reprint), p. 45.
4. Roy C. Deaver, *Romans: God's Plan for Man's Righteousness* (Austin, TX: Biblical Notes Publications, 1992), p. 36.
5. Bales and Billingsly thus make the same error on this phrase as Calvinists do regarding Paul's use of it in Ephesians 2:3: “Among whom we also all once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were **by nature** children of wrath, even as the rest” (emph. DM). In both cases *by nature* is assumed to mean that which is an innate part of man's being. Calvinists assume that *by nature* (per Eph. 2:3) means an inborn, inherited guilt of and propensity to sin—“total depravity.” The erring brethren cited assume that *by nature* (per Rom. 2:14) means an inborn, inherited sense of right and wrong apart from a written law.

6. Lard, p. 86.
7. Robertson L. Whiteside, *A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome* (Clifton, TX: Mrs. C.R. Nichol, 1948 ed.), p. 58.
8. Lard, p. 89.
9. Alfred F. Smith, ed., *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1934), p. 21.
10. Whiteside, p. 83.
11. James Macknight, *Apostolical Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1949 reprint), p. 87.
12. Whiteside, p. 137.
13. Deaver, p. 265.
14. Deaver, p. 265.
15. Whiteside, p. 176.
16. W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966 reprint), pp. 254–55.

**[Note:** I wrote this MS for and presented a digest of it orally at the First Annual Gulf Coast Lectures, hosted by the Portland Church of Christ, Portland, TX, May 21–24, 1994. It was published in the book of the lectures, *New Testament Difficulties and Alleged Contradictions*, ed. Jerry Moffitt (Portland, TX: Portland Church of Christ, 1994.)

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