1:1. “servant.” The Greek is doulos (#1401 δοῦλος), and it means “servant” or “slave.” Doulos is a word that has been misunderstood by Christians. Many Christians compare doulos to the “bondservant” of the Old Testament (cp. Exod. 21:5 and 6), but the two are totally different. The Old Testament commanded that slaves who were fellow Israelites be released every seven years (Deut. 15:12). If a slave did not want to be freed, he became a bondslave, a slave serving willingly. This was unique to Israel, and the rest of the world treated slaves differently. In all countries but Israel, a slave was a slave for life unless freed by the master.

In the Greek language, doulos was the standard word for “slave,” but it was also used of servants, whereas technically, the position of “servant” was also described by some other Greek words. When it comes to slaves, many of them suffered miserably and had no recourse for humane treatment. However, many slaves were loved by their owners and treated so well they were more like servants than what we think of as slaves. Also there were many slaves, particularly in the realm of public works, that had authority over non-slaves. For example, it is estimated that an emperor of Rome might have some 20,000 slaves (Jerome Carcopino, Daily Life in Ancient Rome, p. 70), and his slaves oversaw much of the daily running of the empire, especially public works projects such as buildings and sewers. These slaves bossed around the workers, many of whom would have been free citizens—some even of rank in the Empire (who complained about it bitterly).

When it comes to the “servants,” the Roman Empire was full of servants, who, while technically “freemen,” were in debt and treated like slaves, blurring the distinction between “servant” and “slave.” Given the social situation in the Greco-Roman empire, it is easy to see how the word doulos was used to refer to both slaves and servants, but this makes it very hard to translate the New Testament. Each use of doulos has to be examined individually to see if “slave” or “servant” is a better fit, and sometimes there is not enough context to make a good decision. Whether a person was a servant or slave is very important to us today, because in our culture there is a huge difference between the two positions. However, that was not a big problem when the Greek NT was written, because as was stated above, when the word doulos was used, the people had a more instinctive grip on the situation of the one being called a doulos and the technicalities of the position were not nearly as important.

“called.” The Greek is klētos (#2822 κλητός), an adjective, not a verb. In the Gospels, “called” referred to an invitation; such as in the man called people to a banquet. In the Epistles, the word klētos has a different meaning. In the Epistles, “called,” or “the called,” refers to those who have accepted the invitation. This makes it awkward to translate accurately for the beginning student. Translating it just “called” leaves a steep learning curve for the beginning reader, while translating it “one who has accepted the call” seems far too lengthy and awkward. Romans 1:1 is saying that Paul is “one who accepted God’s call and is an apostle.”
In that light, Romans 1:7 does not mean, “To all who are loved by God in Rome, invited to be holy ones,” it means, “To all who are loved by God in Rome who have accepted God’s call and are now holy ones.” Similarly, Romans 8:28 does not mean, “Now we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, even to those who are invited, in accordance with his purpose.” It means, “Now we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, even to those who have accepted God’s call, in accordance with his purpose.

Every human is “called,” invited, to salvation (as the word is used in the Gospels), but not every person accepts the call. In the Epistles, everyone who is “called” has accepted the call and is saved. Every Christian has accepted the call, and every Christian has a ministry, a service, in the Body of Christ. God sets the members in the Body as it pleases Him (1 Cor. 12:18), and each member has a different job to do (Rom. 12:4-6).

Paul accepted God’s call and was placed in the Body as an apostle, thus he is “a called apostle.”

Although some translations say, “called to be an apostle,” that is not quite correct. It is not as if God called Paul “to be” an apostle. God called Paul to be saved, but the way “called” is used in the Epistles, the word klētos is saying that Paul accepted God’s call and was appointed as an apostle. Similarly, saying Paul was “called as an apostle” is not quite correct either; that could mean he was an apostle when he was called. Although Paul certainly had the potential to be an apostle when he was invited to be saved, he did not have the ministry of an apostle until the Lord had sent him. [For more on “called,” see commentary on Romans 8:28].

“appointed.” This is from the Greek word aphorizo (#873 ἀφορίζω), which has two basic meanings, (1) “to remove one party from other parties so as to discourage or eliminate contact, separate, take away” and (2) “to select one person out of a group for a purpose, set apart, appoint” (BDAG). The meaning in this context is (2); definition (1) obviously does not apply—Paul was certainly not separated away from other parties and discouraged to make contact when he was set apart for the Gospel. For this reason we have avoided the translation “separated” (cp. KJV; ASV), and chosen “appointed” to communicate the meaning of the Greek word. Paul was appointed; he was selected for a purpose, namely, to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations (v. 5).

“Good News.” The Greek word euaggelion (#2098 εὐαγγέλιον; pronounced eu-an-gé-lee-on, the double g is pronounced as an “ng”), from the prefix “eu,” which means “good” (and is used in such words as “euphemism: good speech; eulogy: “a good word;” and euthanasia: “a good death”), and from aggelos (pronounced “an-ge-loss”), which means “message,” and from which we get “angel,” or messenger. It is the good message, or more colloquially, the Good News.

Many versions have “the Gospel of God.” The phrase “Gospel (or Good News) of God” occurs 8 times in the NT. As “the Good News of God,” care must be taken to read the context to determine what the “Good News” is, which Good News is being referred to in the context. In Mark 1:14, it is clear “the Gospel of the Kingdom,” is the “Good News” being referred to. The other 7 uses of the phrase “Good News of God” appear in the writings to the Christian Church. In this case in Romans, the Good News is a general statement about Jesus Christ. There is no definite article in the Greek text, so it is not “THE good news of God” but rather “a good message from God,” which He promised before through His prophets...concerning His Son Jesus Christ. This does not refer to the
Good News of the Grace of God, because that was not promised beforehand, but was a secret hidden in God (Eph. 3:2-10). There are cases, such as in 1 Thessalonians 2:2,8, and 9, where the Good News of God that Paul is referring to is the message he taught and preached, which was the Good News about the Grace of God (“the Good News of the Grace of God,” Acts 20:24).

1:3. “in respect to the flesh.” In the sense that it is used here, the flesh declared, if you will, or revealed, that Jesus was the Son of David. Both his mother, Mary, and his adopted father, Joseph, were from the line of David (Matt. 1 and Luke 3, respectively). There is a parallel between verse 3 and verse 4 in that the flesh revealed that he was the Son of David, and God revealed that he was the Messiah, something He declared when He raised him from among the dead.

1:4. “the Son of God in power” Jesus was declared to be “the Son of God with power” by the resurrection. He had been the Son of God since his conception, and even demonstrated some power in his life on earth. However, his resurrection showed beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was indeed, “the Son of God with power.” The phrase “with power” could be conflated to add clarity to “the Son of God invested with power.”

“in respect to the spirit of holiness.” The “Spirit of Holiness” is God. Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power when he was raised, and this was “according to” God. God had placed in His Word some references to the death and resurrection of His Son (Ps. 16:10, Acts 2:31; Ps. 2:7, Acts 13:33; Isa. 53:10, 11, 12). We have to remember that through all ages there have been false Messiahs. How are we to know who is the real Messiah? God had said in his Word that He would raise the Messiah from the dead. So when Jesus got up from the dead, he was, by that fact, declared to be the Son of God, and this was according to God (the Spirit of Holiness), i.e., according to what God had said. We use the same general expression today when we say, “According to so and so,...” when we mean, according to what the person had said. There are commentators who believe that the spirit of holiness is Christ’s new spiritual body or spiritual nature. Lenski does a good job of discussing that and showing that it really does not fit in this instance. For one thing, the phrase “the Spirit of Holiness” would not be something that most people would assume would be Jesus’ new body, while on the other hand, the unusual word for “holiness” here, hagiosune (#42 ἁγιωσύνη), occurs 4 times in the Septuagint, all of them referring to an attribute of God. By referring to God as the Spirit of Holiness there is an emphasis on His unique holiness, which is then juxtaposed with the unique power he has invested in His Son.

1:5. “through whom.” The translation “through whom” is the proper way to translate the Greek preposition dia (#1223 διά; pronounced dee-ah'). This emphasizes the role of Jesus as the mediator between God and mankind. We have to remember how natural it was for people in Paul’s time to see Jesus as the mediator between God and mankind, and that to get to God, a person had to go through Jesus. In the biblical world it was customary that people did not get to see an important person without going through some kind of mediator. So, for example, when some Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they went to Phillip, one of the apostles (John 12:21). The centurion who wanted his servant healed sent a delegation of Jews to Jesus, rather than come himself (Luke 7:3-5). R. C. H. Lenski (The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans) writes:

"Back of these acts concerning Jesus was God, and so God is equally back of this our reception of grace and apostleship ‘through’ Jesus Christ, our
Lord. *Dia* is exactly right, for by making Jesus the medium it leaves the connection with God as the ultimate agent.

“we.” This is a literary plural, also known as the plural of majesty. Paul means only himself (cp. Kistemaker; John Murray, “Epistle to the Romans,” *New International Commentary on the New Testament*). This is the same use of the plural in Genesis 1:26: “let us make man in our image.” For another example of the literary plural, see Ezra 4:18.

“obedience of trust.” This is the genitive of production: Paul is speaking of the obedience produced by faith. Lenski, who calls this a subjective genitive, explains the phrase, “faith renders obedience.” He also provides a good list of other possibilities that he rules out: Attributive genitive: obedience marked by faith; objective genitive: obedience to the faith; appositional genitive: obedience which is faith. [For more on the genitive of production, see Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 104ff].

“all for the sake of his name.” Lenski has shown that this phrase refers to the whole verse, including the receiving of the grace of apostleship and the great commission. By adding the word “all,” we see that the phrase refers to more than the bringing of obedience that is done for his name’s sake.

1:6. “Jesus Christ’s called ones.” The Greek has “Jesus Christ” in the genitive case, the called ones “of Jesus Christ,” but the genitive is possessive, so “Jesus Christ’s called ones” makes the sentence read easy. For more on “called,” see commentary on Romans 1:1.

1:7. “called ones, holy ones.” This phrase has been understood many different ways, which can be seen by reading different versions. This is in part due to the fact that there are three adjectives in a short phrase, and in Greek an adjective can be used in many ways, including a predicate nominative when a verb is not actually present but supplied, which is where we get the common reading, “called to be saints.” In this verse “beloved,” “called,” and “holy” are all dative masculine plural adjectives modifying the same subject: “All” [who are in Rome]. The rendering “called to be saints” (NIV, KJV, ESV) takes the Greek adjective “called” (kletos, #2822 κλητός) as if it were a verb, and then takes the Greek adjective hagios (#40 ἅγιος) and translates it as a predicate nominative modifying “called.” However, this seems incorrect. The straightforward reading of the Greek seems to treat all the adjectives in the verse attributively. (See: Dana and Mantey p. 118). Lenski agrees that “called to be saints” is not correct (as does Meyer). However, he says that “called” is used as an adjective modifying “holy,” which is using “holy” as a noun (holy ones), not an adjective, so he notes the phrase is saying “saints because called.”

The NASB reads, “called as holy,” which seems better than “called to be holy,” but the problem is that it still makes “called” a verb in the sentence, which seems incorrect. One of the problems we have in English is that “called” seems automatically to be a verb, which it is not in the Greek. The book of Romans emphasizes salvation by faith and who we are in Christ as God’s saved Church. Thus it seems appropriate that God would open the epistle by stating and thus emphasizing what each Christian is: “beloved,” “called ones,” and “holy ones,” and the Greek can easily and naturally be read that way.
When it comes to the word “called” (klētos), in the Gospels it referred to an invitation, but in the Epistles it refers to those who have accepted the invitation and are saved [For more on “called,” see commentary on Romans 1:1 and Romans 8:28].

Although the scope of Scripture shows us the dominant meaning of this verse is that we are “called ones” (those who have accepted God’s call), and “holy ones” (those who are holy in God’s sight), it is an undertone in the verse that we have been “called to be holy.” There is no question that God has called us to live a holy life, and Christians are commanded to “be holy” (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16). Thus there are undertones of the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre) in this verse, with God both telling us what we are and also how we should live. Fittingly, God can say that we are holy, and we are to be holy, in one phrase. However, for the translation, it seems the dominant meaning in Romans (and 1 Cor. 1:2) is that God has made us holy.

1:9. “in my spirit.” This phrase has been interpreted many different ways. In the Bible, the word “spirit” can refer to a large number of different things. These include, God (the “Spirit” in John 3:8); Jesus, who is referred to as “the Spirit” after his resurrection (2 Cor. 3:17); the gift of God known as holy spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:15; 10:44; 19:2); angels, who are “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14); demons (Matt. 8:16; Luke 9:39); “breath” or “life,” as when the girl’s pneuma, breath or life, returned when Jesus raised her from the dead (Luke 8:55); wind (John 3:8); and attitude or thoughts, as when Christ said, “The spirit [attitude] is willing, but the body is weak” (Matt. 26:41b).

In this case, the fact that Paul refers to this as “my spirit” makes it clear that this verse is referring to the gift of God that he received when he was born again [For an understanding of “the gift of holy spirit” in contrast to “the Holy Spirit,” see, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to Be Like Christ, by Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit]. Many commentators think that the use of “in my spirit” is roughly equivalent to “with my whole heart.” However that is because Trinitarian commentators are not used to thinking in terms of “spirit” as a reference to the gift of holy spirit that a person receives when he is born again. They are used to thinking that “spirit” refers to “the Holy Spirit,” the third person of the Trinity. However that cannot be the case in this verse because Paul speaks of “my spirit,” in the sense of his personal ownership. While personal ownership certainly does not apply to God in any way, it is true of the gift of holy spirit that God gives when a Christian gets born again. The gift of holy spirit that a Christian receives when he is born again is very much “his” spirit. Paul does more than just serve God with his whole heart, something he makes clear through the entire Epistle, he serves God “in” his spirit, i.e., in connection with, and in relation to, his spirit (cp. note on “in,” Eph. 1:3). To really serve God, the Christian must not only serve God with his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, in the flesh, but he must walk by the spirit of God and thus by revelation and divine guidance. That is what Paul is emphasizing here.

1:10. “succeed.” The Greek verb is euodoō (#2137 εὐοδῶ), which is a compound word from the noun hodos, “road,” and the prefix eu, “good.” Often translated “to prosper,” this word literally means to “have a good road,” i.e., have an easy, successful path ahead of you. Although it can apply to financial prosperity (1 Cor. 16:2), it is not restricted to such; the term is much broader than that. It is used in Romans 1:10 in the context of things working out well, so the Apostle Paul could visit the Romans. See commentary on “go well with you” in 3 John 1:2.
1:12. “in other words.” The Greek pronoun touto, like most pronouns, has a wide range of meanings, depending on the context. As the BDAG lexicon points out, in this case it naturally means, “that is,” or “that means.” It seems very unclear to translate touto as “that is,” because it makes what Paul is saying in this verse equal to what he said in verse 11. Paul is explaining and expanding in verse 12 what he had said in the previous verses, which the phrase “in other words,” captures very well. Other versions that use the phrase “in other words” include The New Testament in the Language of the People by Charles Williams and God’s New Covenant by Heinz Cassirer.

1:14. “non-Greeks.” The Greek word is barbaros (#915 βάρβαρος). To the Greeks, any foreigner who did not speak Greek sounded as though all he could say was “bar, bar, bar,” so a non-Greek was referred to as a barbaros. From this word we get the English “barbarian,” which most translations employ in this verse. But the English word barbarian is perhaps too harsh; for it carries either the connotation of evil, harsh people or that of warriors wearing animal skins and bearing large swords. Neither is intended by the Apostle Paul. Rather the sense of the word as he uses it refers simply to people the Romans considered foreigners, both in the language aspect (non-Greek speakers) and culture aspect (non-Hellenists). By using the phrase “Greeks and non-Greeks” the Apostle means, essentially, everyone. “In Rom. 1:14-15 Paul is describing the universality of his apostolic commitment (cf. 1:5) he is to preach to barbarians as well as Hellenes… [he] describes the whole non-Jewish world by the formula” (TDNT).


1:18. “is being revealed.” The Greek verb is apokaluptō (#601 ἀποκαλύπτω) and it means to be revealed, disclosed, or brought to light. The noun form of the word, apokalupsis (#602 ἀποκάλυψις), is translated “revelation,” and is the name of the last book of the Bible, Revelation, which reveals the end times and Jesus Christ. Romans 1:17 and 18 use the same word, apokaluptō, in the same form: present tense and active voice. Thus it means, “is being revealed,” i.e., it is being revealed at this present time, and the phrase “is being revealed” is clearer in English than just “is revealed.” Verse 17 refers to God’s righteousness that is currently being revealed, and verse 18 refers to God’s wrath that is being revealed.

Although it is certainly true that God’s wrath will be revealed in a very clear and powerful way in the future, and completely so on the Day of Judgment, His wrath is also being revealed now, in different ways. For example, He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). There are people who openly defy God, and God does stand against those people in certain ways to protect and bless His people. A good example of this is Acts 13:10 when Elymas the sorcerer was stricken with blindness. However, there are much more subtle ways God’s wrath is revealed, from simply not helping people and giving them over to the often terrible consequences of their evil acts (cp. Rom. 1:24), to not, or not being able to, intervene to protect them from direct attacks of the Adversary. That is one reason that evil people get worse and worse in their behavior (cp. 2 Tim. 2:16; 3:13). What makes all this hard for us to fully understand is that although some evil people obviously seem to have terrible things happen to them, other evil people seem to do quite well. We do not see all the invisible workings of God, and so often what we do see seems confusing.

“hinder.” The Greek word is katecho (# 2722 κατέχω), and it means to hold back, hinder, prevent, restrain, suppress. In the war between truth and error, the Devil is
constantly working to suppress, hinder, or stop if possible, the work of God. He often succeeds. Sadly, sometimes it is because of too little effort on the part of God’s people.

For example, we are told to pray without ceasing, and one of the things we are to pray for is that “the word of the Lord may continue to run swiftly and be glorified” (2 Thess. 3:1). If Christians do not pray for the spread of the Gospel, it will not spread as efficaciously as it could have. In many cases, however, the Devil marshals his demons and those people who oppose God, and directly hinders God’s purposes. For example, Paul wanted to go to Thessalonica and support the believers there, “but Satan prevented us” (1 Thess. 2:18). This verse is very solid evidence that not everything that happens is the will of God, for surely it is not ever God’s will that truth be hindered. Scholars who think that “God is in control” or that everything that happens is God’s will take the word “hinder” in a conative sense, the sense of “trying to prevent.” In general, they argue that God’s truth always prevails, so all man can do is “try” to suppress it. While it is true that God’s truth cannot ever be completely stopped because God Himself is behind it, it is also true that Satan’s forces and evil people can indeed actually hinder, and sometimes, in some situations for a period of time, stop God’s truth.

It is often the case that the people who hinder God’s truth are in positions of authority in government. They pass laws forbidding prayer in public schools, or demanding evolution be taught in school while forbidding the teaching of creation, or forbidding evangelism. Such things are good reasons for godly people to seek positions of earthly authority. God wants righteousness to prevail on earth (1 Tim. 2:2), and He is in favor of supporting earthly governments (Rom. 13; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13, 14), but it does not seem logical that He would expect righteous laws to be enacted and enforced by unbelievers. The things of God are foolishness to those who are unsaved (1 Cor. 2:14). One of the ministries God calls people to is leadership and administration (Rom. 12:8), and not all of the people with those ministries are called to serve in the Church. Some should lead in the government. Then they will be in a good position to enact and enforce laws that support truth and do not hinder it.

One thing that Romans 1:18 makes clear is that God is not “in control” of everything that happens and that His will is not always done. If everything that happens is God’s will, then by definition there is no such thing as hindering the truth. Anything we would think of as hindering would actually be part of God’s plan. However, there is no reason to think this verse is not clear and literal. There are people who “hinder” the truth, and that is precisely because not everything that happens is God’s will. It is the responsibility of people who believe God to stop people who do not. Although there is a measure of God’s wrath that is coming from heaven now, as this verse says, it is not enough to stop evil. If evil people are going to be stopped from hindering the truth, it is the godly people who must stop them and control society such that the truth can be freely proclaimed.

In the spiritual battle for the minds and lives of people, lies and confusion are some of the Devil’s main weapons. Anyone who has studied history or theology knows there are at least two sides to every story and two interpretations to every verse. In part this comes from ignorance—often we do not know the truth, and although we are honestly trying to attain it, we have differences of opinion. However, when it comes to the confusion that exists in Christianity, we dare not dismiss the fact that life is a spiritual battle and the Devil uses his people to introduce confusion into theology and Christianity.
in general. In the Old Testament, the false prophets confused people about the truth that the true prophets were speaking. A good example is Jeremiah versus the false prophet Hananiah (Jer. 28). Jeremiah was saying the Judeans would be captive to Babylon for 70 years (Jer. 25:11). Hananiah said two years (Jer. 28:3). Another example of evil people causing confusion and suppressing the truth occurred just after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The soldiers told the truth about the resurrection of Jesus to the religious leaders, but they were so blinded by their hate for Jesus and their love of power and position that they denied it and perverted it for their own goals. They bribed the guards to say the disciples came and stole the body of Christ (Matt. 28:11-15). There is not much argument about what happened to Jesus’ body today, but there was in the early years of the Church, and many Jews denied the resurrection because they believed what they had heard about Jesus’ body. Matthew 28:15 says that many Jews still believed the invented story at the time Matthew was written, which was likely written in the 50’s to early 60’s AD, 20 to 30 years after Jesus died. Today there are many things that confuse people about Christianity, and it is the responsibility of each one of us to study the written Word of God and find the truth God is revealing through it. Modern “orthodox” Christianity is a blend of many things. There is some truth, such as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, there are some beliefs that are the result of pagan practices that have survived in Christianity. One example of this is the supposed date of Christ's birth on December 25. Another example is the belief that when a person dies, his “soul” lives on after the body dies (cp. Is There Death After Life by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International). Some of the Jews believed that during the time of Christ, but had gotten it from the Greeks after Alexander the Great conquered Israel (332 BC), and later, when many Greeks were being converted to Christianity, they too brought the belief of life after death into Christianity.

There are some beliefs in some denominations of Christianity that came much later than the early Christians. For example, the belief of some denominations that Christian ministers should not marry was inculcated into the Christian Faith in the fourth century AD, but the motivation behind the celibacy was a pagan dualism that separated flesh from spirit in a non-biblical way. We must also keep in mind that denominations differ about the truth of something based on their own perspective. For example, a group that does not allow women in ministry might say that the Cult of Isis that was prevalent in the Roman Empire introduced women to ministry but the Church Fathers caught the error and dismissed them. In contrast to that, we would say that the early Church obeyed the revelation of God and brought women into ministry, but the Church Fathers stifled the work of God, a stifling that is still in large part occurring today.

Truth is still being suppressed in many ways today, and each Christian has the personal responsibility to discover the truth and then live it. Doing nothing for the Lord because “No one can seem to agree about it” is falling right into the Devil’s trap and why he caused the confusion in the first place, while saying, “I believe this because my pastor does” is not valid now any more than it would have been to say, “I do not believe that Jesus is the Christ because my synagogue leaders say he is not.”

1:19. “plain to them.” The phrase occurs twice in the verse. The Greek uses the preposition en (#1722 èv), “in,” which can be treated as a dative “to,” or it can mean “plain within them” (cp. NASB), or “plain among them” (HCSB). The clearest English is “plain to them,” but the en can also refer pluralistically to the group of those who reject
God and suppress the truth, because through the collective knowledge of mankind much of what can be known about God is very evident. The knowledge of God is plain to them and plain among them.

1:20. “his invisible attributes...are clearly seen.” At first glance this is an oxymoron, and it is designed to grab our attention, but it is explained by the fact that his invisible attributes are seen by looking at what He has made.

“divine nature.” The Greek word is theiotes (#2305 θειότης pronounced thay-ah'-tais), and it means “the quality or characteristic(s) pert. to deity, divinity, divine nature, divineness” (BDAG lexicon). It only occurs here in the Greek NT, and is a rare word. Our only secular documentation occurs after the 4th century. As BDAG says, it pertains to the quality or characteristics pertaining to God, so when we see what God has made, we learn about His character. Of course, this is to be taken in the scope of the whole Bible, because there are certainly things about creation that are due to the Devil and the Fall, not to God.

The KJV translates the word theiotes as “Godhead,” but no modern version does. It must be remembered that in 1611 the Greek manuscripts that allow us to properly understand the word had not been discovered. “Godhead” is an inaccurate translation.

Besides the fact that God is not a Trinity, there is nothing in nature that points to any such thing. Nothing in nature is three separate things and one thing at the same time, especially nothing that could have been known as such thousands of years before Christ. “through the things he has made.” This includes all the things God has made. Psalm 19:1 tells us the heavens declare the glory (which in the Greek also connotes power) of God. Nature and the world around us declare the power and “divine nature” of God. Since the power and divine nature of God could easily be seen “from the creation of the world,” no one needed a microscope or telescope to see it. Even looking at mankind itself shows God’s power. Humans are definitely “remarkably and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14 HCSB). Despite the fact that God’s power and divine nature can be seen with the naked eye in the world around us, in the last couple decades our advanced science is revealing quite conclusively that the complex nature of life could not have originated by chance and via a purely “mechanistic” model (cp. *Signature in the Cell* by Stephen Meyer). Thus, at every level God’s power and handiwork is being demonstrated.

“so that they are without excuse.” One of the mental faculties of mankind is the basic ability to discern good from bad and truth from error. God made this clear in Genesis 3:22, when God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” When we combine that with God’s promise that if we seek we will find, we realize that God will lead anyone who really wants to know the truth into a basic knowledge of it. The great scientists of the past, including Copernicus, Kepler, Fay, Linnaeus, Curvier, Agassiz, Boyle, Newton, Kelvin, Faraday, Rutherford, etc., all recognized that the design they saw in the world around them was the work of a Higher Power, and Johannes Kepler said that scientists have the job of “thinking God’s thoughts after Him.” Despite their best efforts, scientists cannot explain how life came from non-life, and how “chance” and mutations produced the life in the world around us.

1:26. “females.” The Greek word is not “women” (γυνὲ; #1135 pronounced goo-nay) but “female” (θηλυς; #2338 θῆλυς), which in this context is more degrading. See commentary on 1:27, “males... females... males with males.”
1:27. “males… females… males with males.” In this context of unnatural sexual behavior, Paul does not use the usual terms “man” and “woman,” but rather “male” and “female.” This serves two purposes. First, because the subject at hand is the proper correspondence between the sexes, using the words for “male,” arren (#730 ἀρρην), and “female,” therus (#2338 θῆλυς), draws appropriate attention to the issue of biology and what is natural. Second, as Lenski has pointed out, in this context such language is somewhat degrading, portraying the people as “nothing but creatures of sex.”

“burned with intense desire” The Greek phrase is ekkaiomai en te orexi (ἐκκαίοµαι ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει), and the lexicon by Louw-Nida points out that this phrase is “an idiom, literally ‘to burn with intense desire’; ‘to have a strong, intense desire for something’; ‘to be inflamed with passion, to have a strong lust for, to be inflamed with lust.’ In some languages the equivalent idiom is ‘to boil with desire,’ ‘to feel hot in the genitals,’….”

Both the word “burn” and the word “desire” are used only here in the New Testament.

1:28. “they did not approve.” This is very difficult to translate. The verb here is dokimazo (#1381 δοκιµάζω), which is used of the testing of metals or coins, which were tested then approved (or disapproved) based on the results of the test. See Commentary on Romans 12:2, “test and approve” the will of God. In this case, these immoral people “tested, then disapproved (or saw no value in) holding God in a way that fully recognized Him” (see commentary on 2:18, which also uses dokimazo.)

“fully acknowledging.” The Greek is epignosis (#1922 ἐπίγνωσις), a full and accurate knowledge or acknowledgment. This is really important, but not well represented in most translations. Cp. the following translations:

ESV: “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God,…”
KJV: “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,…”
NIV: “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God,…”

In contrast to those above versions, Williams gets the sense correctly: “…as they did not approve of fully recognizing God…” The phrase, “fully recognizing” cannot be underestimated. Many people who do not obey God recognize Him to some degree, and obey Him to some degree. God wants people to fully obey Him, not just to believe and act on the things about God that they want to.

1:29. “mean-spiritedness.” This comes from the Greek word kakoetheia (#2550 κακοθεία). BDAG’s definition is very insightful: a basic defect in character that leads one to be hurtful to others, thus, mean-spiritedness, malice, malignity, craftiness. The translation “malignity” (e.g., KJV) does not express the sense of the word as well as “mean-spiritedness.

1:31. “family affection.” See commentary on Romans 12:10 and John 21:15. The Greek word is astorgos (#794 ἀστοργός), which is made up of the prefix –a, “not, no,” and storgē, which is familial love. The term however can be used in extension beyond just familial love, to be applied to others in a general sense. Louw-Nida explains the word as “pertaining to a lack of love or affection for close associates or family—‘without normal human affection, without love for others.’”
2:1. “Therefore.” The Greek conjunction dio (♯1352 διό) means “therefore, wherefore, on account of.” At first seems confusing, because a surface reading seems to be saying that because of the vices of the evil people who have been given over to shameful acts and evil behavior, “therefore,” everyone else is without excuse if they judge anyone. Hendrickson writes: “Many are puzzled by the word ‘Therefore.’ It must be admitted that the meaning is not immediately clear.” Lenski is correct when he states that the “Therefore” connects, not just the closing verses with chapter 2, but the entire previous section, 1:18-32. Also, Paul is not writing a blanket condemnation of judging. We must judge others, and judge on a daily basis, in order to obey the commands of God. Jesus said, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:24). Paul warned us to “…watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them” (Rom. 16:17), and we cannot keep that command unless we make judgments about people. Paul also wrote many instructions to Timothy, including who to avoid and who to select for leadership based on behavior and qualifications, which is impossible to do without making a judgment about people. To fully understand the “therefore,” we must realize it refers back to the whole previous section of Romans, and points forward to those who judge but “practice the same things” (2:1).

“In those things in which.” The point is not, in that you judge, which would simply deride the act of judging. The Greek is more specific. Paul speaks of in that which you judge—in other words, the very act that you judge, this act you are doing. Paul is not deriding being judgmental in this case, but hypocrisy.

2:4. “kindness.” The Greek word is chrestotēs (Strong’s #5544 χρηστότης), and most modern English versions read “kindness.” Kindness is a fruit of the spirit and an essential ingredient to being godly. The Devil is continuing in what has been a very successful campaign to elevate the importance of people “being authentic” and “expressing how I really feel,” and downplaying kindness. Thankfully, God is kind and tolerant toward people, and it is His kindness that finally works in them and opens their eyes to the truth and leads them to repentance. If we are going to be like God, we have to learn to be kind to others even when we do not feel like being kind. (See commentary on Galatians 5:22, “kindness”).

“Forbearance.” The Greek word is anochē (a noun: Strong’s #463 ἀνοχή), and most Greek lexicons define it as forbearance, tolerance, clemency, and patience. It refers to enduring, being patient, and holding oneself back. Richard Trench writes that it “signifies, for the most part, a truce or suspension of arms” (Trench’s Synonyms of the New Testament). The noun anochē is related to the verb anechō, “to endure, put up with, bear with.” Jesus said, “You unbelieving generation! …How long must I put up with [anechō] you?” (Mark 9:19 HCSB).

Studying the English words “tolerate” and “forbear” shows us why the English translations differ as to how they translate anochē. To “tolerate” usually refers to what you allow; what you do not forbid. In contrast, “forbear” usually places the emphasis on self-restraint and what you hold yourself back from. The Greek word anochē contains both meanings, but in Christian circles “tolerate” usually has a bad connotation, so most versions avoid it. Sadly, most of the time we use the word “tolerate,” we use it as something we do even though we are “really bothered” by the situation and are actually
just waiting for the chance to do something about it. That is the world’s way of tolerating, but it is not God’s way.

God’s way of forbearing or tolerating is the way He tolerates us: He knows He has given us free will, and so even when we are ignorant or in sin, He loves us, is kind to us, and “declares a truce” with us until we wake up to our error. If God and Christ can do that with us and others, and allow us all to live our own lives in spite of our error or sin, then we can do that too. We do not have to “tolerate” people while seething in anger, pouting, or “just waiting for the chance to straighten them out.” If we want to bring people to repentance the way God does, we have to learn to be forbearing and tolerant in a kind and loving way. It is unfortunate that the word “tolerate” has gotten such a bad reputation in Christian circles, because godly tolerance is a very important part of winning people to Christ.

Tolerance is the neutral zone between grace and truth. We are forbearing or tolerant in those times when we are with people who do not want to change their disobedient ways. Most of the time we are with such people we do not teach, reprove, or correct them with truth, nor do we act like what they are doing is fine with God. Forbearance or tolerance is not “grace.” Grace is “undeserved,” but everyone deserves kindness and tolerance. Grace is that special undeserved favor that helps people walk with God, while tolerance is the “truce” that we have with people who have not yet decided to walk with God. If we confuse tolerance for grace, then we never have genuine grace.

“longsuffering.” The Greek word is makrothumia (Strong’s #3115 μακροθυμία), and it refers to being longsuffering with people. It is a compound word from makros, long, and thumos, wrath or anger, and it refers to putting up with people for a long time before taking any action. Thayer’s Greek-English lexicon says it is “slowness in avenging wrongs.” Generally the older versions of the English Bible such as the King James, Young’s Literal Translation, Darby, and Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, use the word “longsuffering,” while most modern versions avoid it because it is not a common English word and is considered archaic, and use “patience” instead. That actually creates a problem because “patience” is the best way to translate the word hupomonē (#5281 ἕπομονῇ) which refers to the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. Although today we speak of being patient with things and with people, the fact that the Greek has a word that specifically refers to holding back one’s response to other people is important, and it seems clear that “longsuffering” communicates a concept that should remain clearly distinguished in Christian vocabulary and in the Bible. [For more on longsuffering, see commentary on Galatians 5:22, “longsuffering”].

“is intended to lead you to repentance.” Williams’ translation has the note: “implied in the genitive present.” What is implied is the idea that this grace is meant to lead you to repentance, which is how many versions read (e.g., ESV; NRSV; HCSB).

2:5. “But corresponding to your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart…” The teaching of this verse and verse 6 is that God’s judgment is just, and that a sinner’s punishment is in proportion to the crime committed. The amount of wrath a person stores up for himself corresponds to the amount he hardens his heart. This is similar to the truth taught in Matthew 7:2, “With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (ESV); and Matthew 6:14-15, “For if
you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

**corresponding to your stubbornness.** The word “corresponding” comes from *kata* (#2596 κατά), which in this context serves as a “marker of norm of similarity or homogeneity, according to, in accordance with, in conformity with, according to” (BDAG, def. 5). This is the same meaning as in Romans 2:2: God’s judgment is “according to truth,” i.e., God’s judgment corresponds to what is truly deserved. The translation “because,” (as many English versions have), does not capture the sense of the Greek at all. This misses the symmetry being promised by the word *kata*; it makes the hardening simply the cause for future wrath without noting how the cause proportionally affects the amount of wrath being stored up. The verse is not asking, “Why will the person receive wrath?” This question would be answered with “because of the hardness of his heart.” The question being asked in the verse is “How much wrath will a person receive?” The answer is, as much as he deserves. In other words, the wrath that any person receives is “in accordance with” (in proportion to) his own hardness, and the unrepentance of his own heart. This is hard to understand by some orthodox Christians who think that all the unsaved burn forever (thus equal punishment) and all the saved are in the presence of Christ forever (thus equal reward).

The truth is that the unsaved are thrown into Gehenna and are burned up, but the time they spend being punished before they are consumed is different from person to person. This can be seen in examples such as when Jesus spoke of the people of Capernaum, where he had set up his ministry after leaving Nazareth. Jesus said that on the Day of Judgment it would be “more tolerable” for Sodom than for Capernaum. Yet the people of Sodom were not righteous in the sight of God, and the destruction of Sodom is a picture of the future destruction of the wicked in the fire (2 Pet. 2:6). Therefore, Jesus’ statement that it would be “more tolerable” for Sodom than Capernaum is a very strong reproach indeed (Matt. 11:20), and reflects that the people of Capernaum will be punished more severely than even the people of Sodom before they are annihilated.

The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but we must be careful not to take that one verse out from the context of the whole Bible. Romans 6:23 never says that the wages of sin is immediate death. Before people die in Gehenna, the lake of fire, they are punished in proportion to their sin. The Bible says in many different places that people will be repaid for what they have done on earth (cp. Job 34:11; Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8). This is one reason the Bible says that for the wicked there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

As encouragement for Christians, just as punishments differ for the wicked, so the rewards Christians will receive in the future kingdom are different from person to person and are based on the works each one has done. (Cp. John Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*).

**hardness.** The Greek is *sklerotes* (#4643 σκληρότης), and it is a noun, meaning “hardness, stubbornness.” It is from *skleros*, which means “dried,” “stiff,” “rough,” or “hard.” It is the picture of a branch that has dried out and is hardened and stiff. It is a noun, standing on its own, not an adjective describing heart. Too many people are “hard” in their lives, being stiff, rough, unchanging, unyielding, and unrepentant towards God.
“unrepentant.” The Greek is ametanoetos (#279 ἀμετανόητος), and refers to not being repentant (the Greek verb “repent” is metanoeo.) Thus it is unrepentant, not turning to God, refusing to turn to God. Louw-Nida’s lexicon states, “In a number of languages it is difficult to speak of ‘a hard and unrepentant heart.’ A more satisfactory equivalent of this expression in Romans 2:5 may be ‘but you are stubborn and refuse to repent’ or ‘refuse to turn to God.’” Some versions read “impenitent” instead of “unrepentant,” but that does not seem as accurate here because impenitent means, “not penitent, without shame, regret, or remorse.” While it is true that those who do not repent usually have no shame, regret, or remorse, the primary meaning here is that the people have hearts that refuse to repent, i.e., they will not change their ways and turn to God.

“treasuring up.” The Greek verb is thesaurizo (#2343 θησαυρίζω), and it means to gather and store up, to heap up, to treasure up (Liddell and Scott), to accumulate riches. The noun form of the verb is thesaurus (#2344 θησαυρός) and is a treasury or storehouse, or the treasure that is put there (Cp. Matt. 6:19, 20 “treasure”). This phrase makes the verse contain the figure of speech irony, for who would store, as a treasure for themselves, wrath? Yet this is the picture being presented them. As a greedy man stores up wealth for himself, these hard and unrepentant people store up more and more wrath for themselves, which they will receive at the Day of Judgment.

“Day of Wrath, when…righteous judgment.” The day of wrath and the righteous judgment are not two separate events. The day of wrath is the day “when” the righteous judgment of God is revealed. The Greek kai (usually “and”) can be understood as a “when” occasionally when it connects an expression of time with something that occurs in that time (BDAG; cp. Matt. 26:45; Mark 15:25). In this verse, the wrath of God and the “righteous” judgment of God are intertwined. The wrath of God is not unrighteous. It is not “a necessary evil.” Rather, it is part of the righteous nature of God to honor mankind’s freewill and give people the judgment that they have asked for via their words and behavior. The genitives (“of wrath;” “of the righteous judgment;” “of God”) without the definite articles emphasize the quality of the noun (Cp. Lenski; Meyer), but we put them in our version for clarity.


2:7. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

2:8. “selfishly ambitious.” The Greek is eritheia (#2052 ἔριθεία). Spicq (Theological Lexicon) says, “…eritheia is used seven times in NT, including twice in the sin lists (2 Cor. 12:20, Gal. 5:20), along with eris [strife], which indicates that the former does not have the same meaning as the latter and is not derived from it. …it was formed from eritheuomai, “work for hire.” The erithos is a day laborer; the term is used especially for weavers and spinners. As a result, the term eritheia (paid work) originally had a positive sense, but it came to mean that which is done solely for interested motives (“What’s in it for me?”). Hence the meaning: contrive to gain a position...not in order to serve the state, but to gain honor and wealth. From that developed two other meanings: 1) dispute or intrigue to gain advantages; or 2) personal ambition, the exclusive pursuit of one’s own interest. These connotations of intrigue, disputations, and chicanery appear in all the NT texts.” Aristotle used the word of those who seek political office by unfair means, and Philo wrote, “The only stable government is one in which there is no strife and no
intrigue [eritheia]” (Spicq, Vol. II, p. 70). “The idea is “base self-seeking,” the “baseness” that cannot shift its gaze to higher things” (TDNT). It is a complex word that takes on different meanings in different contexts, so attention to the context is important. Meanings include selfishness, selfish ambition, rivalry, base self-seeking, and the use of dishonest means to get personal gain (particularly in political circles).

2:9. “soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself while including his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “tribulation and anguish on every person” (cp. HCSB; ESV; NIT; NIV), the inclusion of the word “soul” points us to the fact that the thoughts, feelings, and emotions are important. The evil we do is certainly related to our thoughts and emotions, and we are responsible before God to control our thoughts and emotions (2 Cor. 10:5). [This use of “soul” is similar to the one in 2 Peter 2:14. For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’.”]

2:14. “are the law to themselves.” After the Day of Pentecost, there are only two categories of people: those who are born again of God’s gift of holy spirit, and those who are not. The New Birth comes through making Christ “Lord” (Rom. 10:9; Eph. 1:13, 14). People who are not born again did not believe in Jesus, so they either rejected him when they heard about him, or they never heard enough about him to believe. The Jews who heard about Jesus but rejected him are like those who persecuted Paul, they are “enemies” of God (Rom. 11:28).

As for people who did not hear enough about Jesus to believe, whether Jew or Gentile, they are judged on whether or not they did, by their nature, the works of the Law (Rom. 2:13-15). If there really was a Jew who tried to keep the Law but did not hear enough about Jesus to believe, then he or she could be judged righteous at the White Throne Judgment after the Second Resurrection (Rev. 20:11-15).

2:15. “also bearing witness.” The Greek is summartureō (συμμαρτυρέω), and means to bear joint witness. Their works demonstrate what is in their hearts, and their conscience bears a joint witness to that as well.

“reasonings.” The Greek is logismos (λογισμός) and is a “reasoning,” not just a “thought.”

“one another.” Most translations treat this as if it is the person’s thoughts that vary back and forth between accusing and excusing, and this could be the case, but the Greek is not clear. Meyer argues that it does not refer to that, but refers to the people excusing and accusing one another. Lenski admits that the Greek can be read either way. There seems to be more evidence in the context that the people act individually according to their heart and conscience, and that action then either excuses or accuses others. It is of course the case that people can be double minded, but that does not seem to be the emphasis here, although it can apply. It is best to translate the verse in a way that allows for both possibilities. A more literal reading of the Greek phrase would be, “and their reasonings accusing or else excusing between one another.”

2:16. “through Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ stands at the right hand of God and in true oriental fashion is the agent through whom God acts. Just as Pharaoh ruled Egypt through Joseph (“Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt’” Gen. 41:44) so God rules and judges through Jesus Christ.
Jesus knew this was going to be the case even before his death and resurrection, so he said, “. . . the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22).

“will judge.” The Greek verb, though translated as future (“will”), is actually in the present tense. This is known as the futuristic present (cp. Wallace, Exegetical Syntax, pp. 535-37), which is the figure of speech heterosis, a switching of tenses for effect. Most versions, as we do, simply translate the verb according to its future tense meaning rather than its present tense form.

“what people have kept secret.” The Greek is more literally, “the secret things of people” since “secret” is an adjective. The genitive is a genitive of possession, i.e., the secret things held by people. It is prideful and futile to have secrets, a “secret life,” or to do things “behind closed doors.” God sees all and will judge all—this is promised. For the righteous, God’s exposure of evil is a great hope, because so much that happens in life must surely be the result of deliberate deception and threats and back room deals done by evil people. For the evil person, the idea that God will expose and punish evil should shake them to the core of their being, but they will not come to the light and be reformed. They await their punishment.

“just as my Good News declares.” The Greek is more literally translated “according to [or in accord with] my Good News.” However, that construction can be misunderstood to mean that Paul’s “Good News” is the standard by which God judges, which is not the case. Lenski notes the possible confusion and writes: “This is not saying that the gospel or “my gospel” will be the norm (κατά) of the final judgment; the norm is God’s own righteousness.” God judges by His righteous standard, which is what Paul’s Good News states and consists of. The NIV translation has picked up on the problem and made a translation that avoids it. “This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.” This verse is a good example of when the usual way of translating κατά into English, which is “according to” or “in accord with,” can cause confusion and an alternate translation that expresses the meaning of the Greek should be sought.

2:18 “determine the things that are best.” In the Greek, the word for determine is dokimazō (#1381 δοκιμάζω). It means to put something to the test with the hope of recognizing it as genuine, or worthy; to prove something in order to approve of it (Trench; Thayer). It was used by the Greeks in the context of metallurgy (Thayer). Here it is applied to ta diapheronta, literally, “the things that differ,” from diapherō (#1308 διαφέρω). The differing things are that which are good and evil, which carry (phero) in different directions. The sense of the Greek is that you examine the difference between good and evil, approving of the good things that pass the test. In English, “determine” shows that you examine and arrive at a judgment, while “things that are best” captures the sense of difference and approval (see dokimazō in Rom. 1:28).

2:20 “the unlearned.” The Greek is nēpios (#3516 νηπίος; pronounced nay’-pee-os), and it literally means an infant, a little child, but it was used metaphorically for those who were unlearned or immature. In the older versions, such as the King James, it was traditionally rendered “babes,” but today “babes” is used figuratively of beautiful women and we refer to infants as “babies.” In this verse it refers to people who are unlearned or immature.

“formulation.” Cp. NAB translation. The Greek word is morphosis (#3446 μόρφωσις), used only here and in 2 Timothy 3:5. This word refers to “the state of being
formally structured” (BDAG). Hence, the law was the formulation of knowledge and truth, structured and brought together in one work. In this sense, it could alternately be translated the “embodiment” of knowledge and truth (cp. ESV; NIV; NASB).

2:22. “do you rob temples?” What does this question mean in relation to abhoring idols? It is not simply a remark against stealing, for the apostle already addressed this in verse 21 with the question, “do you steal?” Rather, this phrase is meant to call out hypocrisy and compromise. Rome, along with the entire Roman Empire, was crowded with temples, which were filled with idolatrous images and artifacts. Such artifacts were often very costly, made of gold and silver. Also, some temples were used as banks, in which people’s money was kept. In fact, our English word “money” comes from “Moneta,” the name of a goddess who had a temple in Rome in which money was both minted and stored. Since ancient Temples did not have particularly good security, temple robbery was somewhat common in ancient times. Paul raises the question, “You say you hate idols, but do you get dishonest gain by robbing temples?” Paul thus brings up the commands of Deuteronomy 7:25: “The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God” (NIV). As Lenski writes, “It is the violation of the first principle of Judaism itself, its abhorrence of all idols. To snatch some jewel, gold, or silver, or other valuable from an idol temple, to buy it from another, to work it up into something else, to sell it yea, even to touch it and in any way to possess it, really destroyed a Jew’s Judaism.”

2:23. “You who boast in the law, you dishonor God by your transgression of the law.” This verse is a statement and not a question. Compare the ESV and NET translations. It is a verdict paralleling vs. 17, as Lenski says, “What, then, is the verdict? ‘Thou art dishonoring God!’” If this verse was meant as a question, it would hardly be worth asking, because of course one dishonors God by transgressing the law!

2:24. “For just as it is written.” The reference is taken from the Septuagint versions of Isaiah 52:5, which differs somewhat from the Hebrew text.

“defamed.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

2:25. “to be sure... but.” Cp. NAB. This is a common Greek construction where two sides of a matter are presented. It is often translated as “on the one... on the other hand.” The translation “to be sure” is from the Greek word men (#3303 μὲν), which here is “introducing a concessive clause... to be sure” (BDAG). This word works in conjunction with the word de (#1161 δὲ), which gives the other fuller side of the matter. The apostle Paul concedes that (“on the one hand”) circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law, but what he gives with one hand he takes away with the other, for he immediately adds that (“on the other hand”) if you break the law your circumcision is useless. This is important because the apostle will affirm in the next chapter that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), and so circumcision of the flesh is not profitable for justification, for no one can keep the whole law.

2:27. “in spite of.” The Greek dia refers to things passing through, which may be favorable or hostile. Here it is hostile, and has the sense of “in spite of.” (See Lenski).
from the new thought being introduced. Especially after a negation (“not” and “nor” in verse 28), “on the contrary” is a good and clear translation (Cp. Holman Christian Standard Bible; Lenski).

“inwardly.” The Greek is kruptos (#2927 κρυπτός), meaning “hidden” or “secret.” Paul says a true Jew is one who is a Jew in the secret, hidden parts of the soul. In this sense, the translation “inwardly” is good.

“in spirit.” The Greek is “in spirit,” en pneuma (#4151 πνεύμα). It refers to being “in spirit” or perhaps more understandably, “in union with the spirit of God,” which means in relation to God via the spirit of God which a Christian receives when he is born again. The Greek en is always in the dative case, and can be instrumental, so many Trinitarian translators understand this phrase to mean, “by the Spirit,” meaning that it is the Person of the Holy Spirit who circumcises a person’s heart at the time he believes, but that is not what this verse is referring to. Neither does this use of the word “spirit” refer to our “attitude.” If that were the case, the verse would read something such as: “true circumcision is of the heart, in the attitude, not by the written code….” Although there are verses where “spirit” does refer to an activity of the mind and can mean “attitude,” that is not its meaning here. Even if a person was a Jew who had a wonderful attitude about obeying God’s laws, he could not be righteous in God’s sight except through Christ. The Christian, whether Jew or Greek in background, was part of the “true circumcision” only by virtue of being born again of the spirit of God. Thus, true circumcision is always “in union with,” or “in connection with,” the spirit [For more on “in” as “in connection with,” see commentary on Eph. 1:3].

Chapter 3

3:2. “First of all…” This short verse reveals the feelings of the Jews (and rightfully so) toward the Law. Christians have been influenced by the writings to the Christian Church (Acts-Jude) to see the Law as a yoke of bondage, a burden, and weak through the flesh. Thus it seems that all we can say about it is that we are glad we did not live under the Law. The Jew, on the other hand, considered the Law one of God’s greatest gifts to them as a nation. The Law (meaning the Tanakh, the entire Old Testament), was God’s guidance that showed them how to live, how to run a just society, and how to be holy before God. Indeed, Jewish life would not be Jewish life were it not for the Law.

It also helps us to see the wonderful attitude the Jews had toward the Law when we recognize that other nations did not have anything like it. It is truly a gift of God’s grace that He gave the Law and in doing so revealed Himself, His love, His righteousness, what He expected from mankind, and how to live prosperous and blessed lives. The gods of other nations gave no such gift. There is no “Word of God” in the pagan religions. Poets and authors such as Homer wrote about the gods, but what did they reveal? First, the stories themselves were contradictory in many ways. And the gods they revealed were often worse than any good human would be. They were jealous, vengeful, capricious, and often delighted in causing trouble. Furthermore, unlike the Law of Moses, which told people exactly what God wanted, pagans never quite knew how to please their gods, or if they were angry (something the people assessed by bad fortune such as sickness, losing a war, a famine, pestilence, etc.), they did not know exactly how to
appease them. No wonder the Jews loved the Law and considered it a gift. Compared to our freedom in Christ, it was very restrictive, but how many of the commands of God to the Church are in the Law in one form or another? Many! Romans 7:12 will tell us that the Law is holy, just, and good. The Law, and the Christ, and the New Testament, are a true and unique witness of the love that our true God has for mankind. He not only wants a relationship with us, He wants to make sure that we know how to live such that life is a blessing and joy.

“words.” The Greek word is logos (#3051 λόγιον; pronounced log'-ee-on), and it is the diminutive of logos, “word” or “message.” Literally, it is “little words.” See commentary on Acts 7:38.

3:3. “some were without trust.” This is the figure of speech, tapeinosis, or understatement. “Some?!” Oh if that were only the case, that “some” did not believe, but “most” did. Sadly, for most of Israel’s history, only “some” believed, while the majority lived in unbelief. Yet those who believed had such a huge impact that it could surely seem like only some did not trust God.


3:5. “when he is inflicting.” The Greek verb is epipherō (#2018 ἐπιφέρω), and it means to bring upon, inflict, impose. In this verse the verb is in the present tense, indicating that God’s wrath can be a present thing, not only reserved for the future. Thus this verse confirms 1:18, that the wrath of God “is being revealed from heaven” against people for their sin. It is sometimes taught that God will only act in wrath against humans in the Tribulation period, when the seven seals are broken, the seven trumpets blow, etc., and there are mighty plagues on the earth. In fact, God has often acted in wrath, especially to protect His people. Examples include: the Flood of Noah; the Tower of Babel; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the plagues on Egypt; the death of Korah and his fellow rebels (Num. 16:1-33); and the hailstones on the Canaanites (Josh. 10:11). An example of God’s wrath in the New Testament is the blindness of Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:11).

“wrath.” The Greek word for “wrath” is orgē (#3709 ὀργή pronounced, or-gay'), and it refers to wrath or anger. In this verse it is “the wrath,” referring to “the” wrath that is promised when people disobey God or rebel against Him. However, since in Christian jargon, “the wrath” generally refers to the wrath of God that will be poured out in the Book of Revelation, we thought it best to just say “wrath” here, rather than give the wrong impression.

“I am speaking from a human standpoint.” The verse starts out by saying that “our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God,” and if that is the case, then by some twisted human logic our unrighteousness should be a good thing, because it more clearly shows the righteousness of God. So why would God inflict us with his wrath if what we are doing is a good thing? That is the “human standpoint,” and the failure of human logic. God does not need us to be unrighteous to show off His righteousness, even though our unrighteousness makes His righteousness very clear. Furthermore, He does not inflict people with wrath to show off His righteousness. It does that, of course, but it does so many other things as well: it serves as an example and warning to others so they will not take God lightly and live in sin; in serving as a warning to sinners, it helps assure that society will be godly and peaceful for mankind; it proves that God will keep His
promises to punish evil; and it righteously recompenses people for what they have done in life, and thus repays them for their thoughts and deeds.

3:8. **“slanderously.”** The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. This is a good example of the word blasphēmeō being used of a person, not God or a god. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

**“righteous judgment.”** The Greek word is the adjective endikos (#1738 ἐνδικος), meaning “according to right, according to what is right, righteous,” from dike (right). The people who says, “Let us do evil so that good may come” will receive a righteous judgment—they will be condemned.


3:19. **“the law.”** This use of “law” is the general use of the word that refers to the whole Old Testament, not just the Torah, or Mosaic Law (Genesis-Deuteronomy). We know this because not one of the quotations in the earlier verses is from the Torah, they are all from the Psalms, writings, and prophetic books.

**“the whole world.”** It is fair to ask how, since “the law” was given to Israel, the “whole world” becomes guilty because of what “the law” says. Although the law was spoken in general to Israel, and there are certainly things in it that refer only to Israel, there is much of the “Old Testament” that applies to, or even was written to, the Gentiles. Considering that “the law” in the verse refers to the entire Old Testament, and not just the Torah, we can see that what is said in the verses quoted is true of both Jews and Gentiles.

3:20. **“declared righteous.”** R. C. H. Lenski (St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans) correctly notes:

“The word [dikaioo, #1344 δικαιοω] is not ethical (middle in force):
‘becomes righteous,’ but everywhere forensic (a straight passive):
‘declared righteous.’

The difference between, “becomes righteous” (or “is made righteous”) and “is declared righteous” is subtle but important. The Christian is declared righteous by God based upon the cleansing sacrifice of Christ. God declares that we are righteous while we are still in our flesh and still sinners and sinning. It is not as if we are “made righteous,” as if we were now no longer sinners. Romans 7:14-25 shows that is not the case. In a judicial decision, God declares us righteous due to the effect of the work of Christ in spite of the sin that lives in us. If a thief is arrested and goes to court, but makes such an impassioned plea to the judge that he will live an honest life from then on, the judge may decide to “declare him righteous.” He is still a thief, but in the eyes of the law he is “righteous,” and without guilt. Similarly, we are sinners, but in the eyes of the law of God, because we accepted Christ’s payment for our sin, we are “declared righteous,” and no longer will suffer God’s penalty of death.

We have an obligation to try to live sinless lives, but as Paul discovered, no amount of human effort will attain that goal. We are wretched sinners, but thank God that He simply declared us to be righteous (see commentary on 3:22, “righteous”).

**“comes only the full knowledge of sin.”** The context says that no flesh will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the Law. Then it says why: “for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” The context implies that making people know sin is all the Law does, it cannot make one righteous in God’s sight. Thus adding
the implied word “only” clarifies the argument. A number of versions translate the concept into the verse: “all that the Law does is to tell us what is sinful” (NJB); “The law simply shows us how sinful we are” (NLT); “For all the law can do is to make men conscious of sin” (Williams).

“full knowledge.” The Greek is επιγνώσις (ἐπίγνωσις) and does not just refer to “knowledge,” but rather a full or complete knowledge or realization. When the Law came, “sin increased” (Rom. 5:20). People did not just know about sin, they fully knew sin because they experienced it, and its dreadful consequences, for themselves.

3:21. “righteousness from God.” This is the genitive of origin (cp. NIV). “Although the law and the prophets are bearing witness to it” is similar to RSV and ESV. “Witness” is a present participle. Even now they bear witness to the principle (law) of faith.


3:22. “righteousness.” Righteousness is such a vital topic in Romans (indeed, in the New Testament!) that we must take some time to try to understand it. The book of Romans clearly establishes that a Christian becomes righteous, or “in right standing,” before God by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22, 26, 28; 4:5, 13; 5:1; 9:30; 10:6).

Complicating our understanding of “righteousness,” however, is that almost every English version of the New Testament uses both “righteousness” (“righteous,” etc.), and “justification” (“justify,” etc.). Understandably, most people think these two different English words are translated from two different Greek words, but that is not the case. The same Greek root word underlies both the translation “righteousness” and the translation “justification.” That is the major reason why, when we compare different English versions of the New Testament, they do not agree as to when to use “righteousness” and when to use “justification.”

The reason both “righteousness” and “justification” are used even though the Greek is the same is that, in general, scholars have agreed to translate the attributes of God as “righteous,” while translating what God has done for men as “justification.” D. W. Diehl writes:

“Even though there is no distinction between righteousness and justice in the biblical vocabulary [the Greek words], theologians often use the former to refer to the attribute of God in himself and the latter to refer to the actions of God with respect to his creation.” (Walter Elwell, editor, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, p. 953, “Righteousness.”)

We believe that translating the same Greek words both as “righteousness” and “justification” causes more problems than it solves. First and most obvious, the English words “righteousness” and “justification,” while related in meaning, do not mean the same thing. In English, “righteousness” means “to act in accord with divine or moral law,” while “justification” relates to a judicial pronouncement that the person has been found innocent or absolved from guilt, ostensibly on the basis of the facts of the case. That scholars cannot decide on exactly when the Greek words have those separate meanings is clear from the fact that, as we have said above, different English versions differ as to when they use “righteous,” and when they use “just.”

A second major problem with translating the same Greek words both as “righteousness” and “justification” is that the internal consistency of the Church Epistles, especially in Romans and Galatians, is lost. If “righteous,” “righteousness,” etc., appear all the way through the New Testament, then the reader can see the consistent message
that God is giving us in His Word. However, if in versions such as the NIV and ESV, we see “righteousness...through faith” in Romans 3:22, but “justified by faith” in Romans 5:1, although we may get the general meaning of the verses, we lose the consistency of what God is saying.

A third problem with translating the same Greek words both as “righteousness” and “justification,” is that the flow of the pattern of salvation is not clearly maintained from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The idea of salvation, which is quite often communicated by the word “saved” (Greek: σώζω) in the New Testament, was generally communicated by the word “righteousness” in the Old Testament. (In spite of that, it would be wrong to say that in the Old Testament, “righteous” equaled “saved.” It would be better to understand the Old Testament concept that a person was righteous by his faith and fidelity to the covenant, and that God honored that and gave everlasting life to those faith-full individuals). If we read in the Old Testament that the “righteous” will live forever, and then we read in the New Testament that we have “righteousness” with God because of our faith, we can easily make the connection. But if we read, “righteousness” in the Old Testament and “justified” in the New Testament, we can easily miss the connection.

We can clearly see that in the Old Testament, “righteous,” “righteousness,” etc., often had the connotation of salvation by reading the verses that use those words and substituting “saved” or “salvation.” The list of verses relating righteousness to being acceptable to God and having everlasting life is far too large and too varied to include here, but here is a small sampling. The Israelites would be “righteous” if they were careful to obey the Law (Deut. 6:25). The righteous will stand (i.e., do well) in the Day of Judgment, but the wicked will not (Ps. 1:3-6). The righteous are the ones who will dwell on the earth forever (Ps. 37:29). The righteous will not be moved (i.e., taken from the earth; Ps. 55:22; 112:6), and Proverbs 10:30 and 12:3 expand that to say although the righteous will not be moved, the wicked will not dwell in the land. The righteous have a reward, referring to an everlasting reward (Ps. 58:11). The righteous are enrolled in the book of life (Ps. 69:28). The righteous flourish and are planted in the house of Yahweh (Ps. 92:12, 13). Righteousness delivers from death, meaning everlasting death (Prov. 10:2). The righteous person who does not sin will live forever (Ezek. 3:21). At the Day of Judgment people will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, and the wicked will be burned up while the righteous will be healed (Malachi 3:17-4:2).

Righteousness has always been by faith. This was clear at the time of Abraham, continued during the administration of the Law, and is still true today, in the Church Age. However, when the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God made a change. On the Day of Pentecost God started the Administration of Grace (Eph. 3:2; see commentary there). Up until Pentecost in Acts 2, people were saved by faith, which was exhibited in their righteous acts, and their faith had to be maintained. That is why Ezekiel 33:12-20 is very clear that if a “righteous” person becomes unrighteous he will “die” (i.e., “die” on the Day of Judgment), while if a wicked person repents and becomes righteous he will “live,” (i.e., live forever). It is why Habakkuk says that righteous will live by their faithfulness (Hab. 2:4).

In the Administration of Grace, people are saved by their faith in Christ quite apart from their faith being demonstrated by the works of the Law, or their “righteous” actions. The thing that singularly made the difference between salvation in the Old
Testament, which involved continued faith, and salvation in the New Testament, which is based on one-time faith, is that in the Administration of Grace (Eph. 3:2), salvation involves “birth.” From the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) onward, a saved person is one who is “born again,” and his or her salvation is guaranteed. Thus, unlike the Old Testament when a righteous person could start being wicked and then be told he would “die,” i.e., die forever, in the Administration of Grace, when a person is born again, his or her salvation is assured and the person will absolutely have everlasting life (see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:23). The New Birth, like any birth, is permanent, which is why words such as “guarantee” or “nothing can separate us” are used in the Church Epistles. Christian salvation is not attained by good works, and it cannot be lost by not doing good works or by doing evil works.

The Greek words in the New Testament that relate to righteousness, and are all from the root dikē, “right,” are: dikaios (adjective); dikaiosunē (substantive: adjective used as a noun); dikaiō (verb); dikaiōs (adverb); and dikaiōma (noun). We will now take the time to define these, but to do that we have to combine concepts found in Greek lexicons, such as BDAG and Thayer’s Greek-English lexicons, with Hebrew concepts of righteousness. It is absolutely vital that we remember that the New Testament concept of righteousness is anchored in the Old Testament concept of righteousness. We must keep in mind that in the Gospels when Jesus spoke of righteousness (cp. Matt. 5:6, 20), he was speaking in Hebrew and Aramaic, the language of the Old Testament. By using those languages, he brought the Hebrew meaning of “righteousness” into what he said. This important fact is obscured by the fact that the four Gospels are written in Greek as if Jesus spoke Greek words with purely Greek meanings. He did not.

What Jesus said and did was intimately connected with the Old Testament, and he used the language and concepts of the Old Testament when he taught. This would be much easier to see if the page in the Bible that is traditionally placed between Malachi and Matthew, and says in huge letters, “The New Testament,” was placed between the Gospel of John and the book of Acts. When we think about it, “the New Covenant” (“New Testament”) was inaugurated in Christ’s blood, with his death (Matt. 26:28), which is at the end of the Gospels, not at the beginning. Until the time of Jesus’ death, people were still living under the Old Covenant, and in the Gospels Jesus spoke the language of the Old Covenant, which were Hebrew and Aramaic. If the page that says, “The New Testament” was placed between the Gospel of John and the book of Acts, we would be able to better understand two things: first, that Jesus spoke and taught as an Old Testament prophet, fulfilling the Law, and second, that the New Covenant was inaugurated at the end of his life. Historically, the reason the page “The New Testament” is placed between Malachi and Matthew has nothing to do with the subject matter of the Bible at all. It was placed where it is because the books before it were in Hebrew, and the books after it were in Greek. That, however, is a terrible, and very misleading, reason to put the page where it is, because the average Christian just assumes that “the New Covenant” somehow started with the Gospels, when it did not.

Paul and the other apostles continued using “righteousness” in a way that certainly had overtones of the Hebrew meaning. The righteousness that Jesus spoke about, and the righteousness that Paul and the other apostles spoke about, did not change just because it was talked about in different languages. Perhaps this illustration will be clear: the righteousness that Paul spoke about when he used his native language and
spoke to Jews, and the righteousness he spoke about when he spoke in Greek in cities like Thessalonica or Corinth, was the same righteousness. In fact, it is specifically because the concept of righteousness in the Epistles is the same as it is in the Old Testament that the Church Epistles can legitimately spend so much time referring to people such as Abraham and David, and that they were righteous by faith.

In summary, the overtones of “righteousness” that are part of the Old Testament and clearly part of the meaning of the Hebrew word, are also brought into the Greek words used in the writings of Paul, and we must be aware of those overtones if we are going to understand the Epistles and the message of the New Testament. We would expect this anyway, because Paul is not inventing a new Gospel, or a new salvation, or a new way of right-standing in the sight of God.

The meaning of the Hebrew adjective tsaddiq, “righteous” (#6662 צַדִּיק), the noun tsedeq, “righteousness” (#6664 צֶדֶק), and the related Hebrew words for aspects of righteousness all relate to the same basic concepts. Of course “righteousness” in Hebrew and Greek has a range of definitions, just as it has in English, but a central meaning is “conformity to a norm.” When we are speaking of God’s righteousness, then, we are speaking of God’s keeping the norms that He Himself has established; for example, His covenant and His promises. We can see this in verses such as 2 Chronicles 12:6, where the people said, “Yahweh is righteous.” In that context, God had just told the people through a prophet that they had abandoned Him, so He was going to abandon them. They responded “Yahweh is righteous,” because they understood that God’s actions were in conformity with His norm, after all, God had said in the Law that if they forsook Him, He would forsake them. It is common that we use “righteous” as being conformity to a norm, and when we speak of people being “righteous,” or performing “righteous acts,” we are generally thinking in terms of those people’s actions being “right” in accordance with some external standard. In other words, one aspect of “righteousness” is integrally related to our actions in relation to a norm.

There is another, quite different meaning to “righteous,” however. Integrally part of the meaning of the Hebrew words for “righteous” is the concept of being vindicated in a court of law. It is vitally important to understand this part of “righteousness,” because being “declared righteous” in a court of law is very different from being “made righteous,” or “acting in a righteous manner.”

N. T. Wright expresses this well when he says, “‘Righteousness’ within the lawcourt setting…denotes the status that someone has when the court has found in their favor” (Justification, p. 90, special emphasis added). “Righteousness” in the law court does not mean that the person is actually morally upright and “right” in God’s eyes by virtue of his wonderful moral behavior. Nor does it mean the person acts in a righteous way. It means the person’s status as far as the court is concerned is “righteous.” Because Jesus died for us, we can be “declared righteous” in the heavenly court even though we are not upstanding Christian citizens. Thank God for that! We also need to know that, in declaring us to be righteous in His eyes, God does not “make us righteous.” Because we are declared righteous, we get to have everlasting life. However, there is a “but” we need to be aware of.

Our salvation, or everlasting life, is by grace, and since we are declared righteous, we get to live forever. But there is the matter of rewards. Rewards are not by grace, they are by works [For more on rewards, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10]. The Christian is
declared righteous,” not “made righteous.” Augustine (and his followers) missed this point. This is no doubt in part because he did not understand what happens when we die, the way the future will unfold with the Messianic Kingdom coming to earth and rewards in that kingdom, and it is also due to his not believing in genuine free will. Augustine believed that the Christian was actually “made righteous,” that God imputed righteousness to the person. That theology is in part responsible for the translations “justify” and “justified” in so many versions, as if the person was actually made “just.” We are not, we are only judicially declared to be righteous; just because we have faith in Christ, we are not actually morally righteous. It is our status in the eyes of God that is changed when we become a Christian, not our character.

To be clear then, there are times when “righteous” refers to our actions, and there are times when it refers to the status we have in the sight of God in spite of our actions. Matthew 6:1 is a good example of “righteousness” referring to our actions and doing what is right: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.” Another example is in 2 Timothy 3:16, where Scripture is profitable for “training in righteousness,” meaning, training in what righteous things to do. An example of “righteous” referring to Christians’ righteous status in the sight of God, apart from our actions or how we live, is Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God.” Another example is Romans 3:21, “But now a righteousness from God apart from the law has been revealed.”

It has always been people’s duty to live righteously, that is, according to God’s standards. The Old Testament made it clear that for God it was more acceptable for a person to live righteously than to perform sacrifices (Prov. 21:3), and righteousness was the plumb line by which God measured a person’s actions (Isa. 28:17). However, no one could ever perfectly uphold the righteousness demanded by the Law. Therefore it was people’s faithfulness to try to keep the Law or do what was righteous, and their trust that God would reward them for it, that God counted to them as righteousness, and saw their status as “righteous” in His sight. The New English Bible does an excellent job of translating Habakkuk 2:4, “…the righteous man will live by being faithful.” In this verse, like many others in the Old Testament, the word “live” referred to living forever. Thus, we could expand Habakkuk to read, “…the righteous man will live [forever] by being faithful.” In many contexts, the concept of living righteously often included being faithful year after year.

1. Dikaios (Adjective. Strong’s #1342, δίκαιος). “Observant of what is right (dikē).” “Righteous, observing divine and human laws; one who is such as he ought to be.” (The neuter denotes that which is obligatory in view of certain requirements of justice, right, fair, equitable). In a broad sense, “upright, righteous, virtuous.” Keeping the commands of God; used of Old Testament people noted for piety. In a narrower sense, rendering to each his due; and that in a judicial sense, passing just judgment on others, whether expressed in words or shown by the manner of dealing with them. In a context that has a negative idea predominating, “innocent, faultless, guiltless.” When dikaios describes a believer’s status in the sight of God, it is harkening back to God’s courtroom declaration that the person is “right,” in His eyes. In that case, the person can be a “righteous” person but not act righteously in his life.
2. *Dikaiosunē* (Substantive: an adjective used as a noun. Strong’s #1343, δίκαιοςυνη). The virtue or quality or state of one who is *dikaios* (righteous). In the broad sense, the state or status of the one who is “righteous” in the eyes of God. The condition of being acceptable to God. Thus, in the writings of Paul, *dikaiosunē* has a peculiar meaning, opposed to the views of the Jews and Jewish Christians who were still zealous for the Law, that *dikaiosunē* denotes the state and status of being acceptable to God which becomes a sinner’s possession through faith in Jesus Christ. *Dikaiosunē* is also used in the narrower sense of justice, or the virtue which gives each one his due; thus, the quality, state, or practice of judicial responsibility with focus on fairness, justice, equitableness.

3. *Dikaioō* (Verb. Strong’s #1417, δικαιόω). To declare or pronounce someone to be righteous, just, or such as he ought to be. To declare and treat someone as righteous. To be better understood, *dikaioō* should be compared to *hosioō* and *axioō*, which do not mean “to make holy” or “to make worthy,” but rather to “declare, judge, or treat” as holy or worthy. The emphasis of the verb is not that God “makes” us righteous, but rather that God “declares” us righteous, and thus that is how we are in His sight in spite of our sins and shortcomings. The glory goes to God, who declared sinners to be righteous. *Dikaioō* is especially used as “declare to be righteous,” in the technical phraseology of Paul, respecting God who judges and declares such men as put faith in Christ to be righteous and acceptable to Him. In contexts where the negative idea is predominant, it means “to declare guiltless.” The passive voice is used reflexively, “to show oneself to be righteous.”

4. *Dikaiōma* (Noun. Strong’s #1345, δικαίωμα). Universally, of an appointment of God having the force of law; a regulation relating to just or right action, what has been established and ordained by law: thus, a regulation, requirement, commandment or ordinance. A judicial decision or sentence, either the favorable judgment which acquits, or the unfavorable one that is a sentence of condemnation; even sometimes extending to mean a punishment. Also, *dikaiōma* is used of a righteous act or deed.

5. *Dikaiōs* (Adverb. Strong’s # 1346 δικαιως). “Righteously” (EDNT), justly, properly, uprightly. As is right, agreeable with what is right.

6. *Dikaiōsis* (Noun. Strong’s #1347 δικαίωσις). “Righteousness, justification, vindication, acquittal.” It is both the process and state of being. It is the act of God's declaring men free from guilt and acceptable to him; adjudging them to be righteous; it is also the righteousness we have as a result of that action. (Rom. 4:25).

“**trust in Jesus Christ.**” This verse is a genitive phrase in Greek; literally, “trust of Jesus Christ.” As is typical of genitive phrases, this one can be translated many different ways, and people disagree about what it means and how it should be translated. As always, therefore, the context of the verse and the scope of Scripture are necessary for arriving at the proper translation of the phrase and the meaning God intended the phrase to communicate.

The whole book of Romans is about the change that God instituted due to the sacrifice of Christ. Salvation is no longer a matter of doing the works of the Law, but rather of having trust [or “faith”] in Jesus Christ. God says in many verses in the NT,
which are worded many different ways, that today a person is saved through trust in Jesus Christ. Because of that, we can see that this verse is an objective genitive, where Jesus Christ is the object of our trust. Thus, “trust in Christ” is the correct translation in this context. This verse contrasts the revelation of the Church Epistles, which say salvation comes through trust in Jesus Christ, with the revelation of Old Testament, which says the works of the Law are also necessary (Deut. 6:25). This verse and many others like it in Romans, Galatians, etc., make it clear that our righteousness in the sight of God comes by having trust in Jesus Christ. There is, however, a possible sub-current in the verse that we should pay attention to.

It is also grammatically possible to translate the Greek phrase as a subjective genitive, in which case it would mean, “Jesus Christ’s faithfulness.” There is a huge debate among theologians today as to whether the Greek phrase means, “trust in Christ” or “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” We do not feel “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ” is the primary meaning in this verse. For one thing, if our righteousness came by Jesus Christ’s faithfulness then everyone would be righteous. There has to be something we do, some part we play in being righteous, or everyone would be righteous, and that part is to have trust. Also, and importantly, the next chapter, Romans 4, expands on the teaching of righteousness by trust. Chapter 4 says Abraham “found” the principle of being declared righteous by trust when he trusted God. It is clear that chapter 4 is saying that Abraham was declared righteous by God when he trusted God. So for chapter 4 to be an expansion and clarification of chapter 3, then chapter 3 has to be saying that we are declared righteous when we have trust. If chapter 3 was saying we are righteous by Christ’s faithfulness, then chapter 4 would have to be saying that Abraham was righteous because of God’s faithfulness, but that is clearly not what it is saying. Chapters 3 and 4 reinforce a single point: that righteousness can come through our trust—Abraham trusted God and we have trust in Christ.

The debate rages because the Greek phrase can have two different meanings, and it is also clear that God could have had the text worded in such a way that there was only one clear meaning. Because of that, it seems that in wording the phrase the way He did, God is setting forth a primary meaning, and then another meaning as well, a secondary meaning. In that case the secondary meaning is that righteousness is only available because of the faithfulness of Christ. Had Christ not been faithful, everlasting life would not be available, but it is only procured by a believer by his or her faith in Christ.

“to all those who believe.” This phrase is not “redundant” as some people believe, but what scholars call “repetitive emphasis” (Most people who say it is “redundant” are trying to prove that the phrase we translate as “faith in Christ” should be “faithfulness of Christ”).

Given the animosity that existed between Jews and Gentiles, and the belief by many Jews that Gentiles could not be saved without becoming proselytes and keeping the Law, there was a need to state that salvation came by faith in Christ and then specifically emphasize that that was true for ALL who believed, not just the Jews. The stubbornness of the Jews when it came to rejecting Gentiles and hanging on to their Law is well documented, and shows up graphically in the book of Acts. The books of Romans and Galatians are especially clear about salvation by faith, that Christ was the fulfillment of the Law, and that there is no difference between Jews and Greeks. But even years after those books were written, Acts 21:20-25 shows us that James, the leader of the Christians
in Jerusalem, was still teaching that there was a difference between Jews and Greeks, and he never said a word about salvation by faith. History teaches us that many of the Jewish Christians never did accept the writings of Paul on many points, and one of them was that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ.

“between Jews and Greeks.” This supplied prepositional phrase is carried forward from verse 9 only for the sake of clarity. The people to whom Paul was writing were very sensitive to the differences between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews), and the claims that being Jewish entitled one to everlasting life. Thus, in that culture when Paul wrote, “there is no distinction,” everyone knew precisely that Paul was saying that there was no difference between Jew and Gentile, and that all of them had sinned. Today, however, especially since the subject of Jews and Gentile was as far back as verse 9, that meaning can become lost.

3:23. “have sinned” is aorist, because we have sinned in the past. But “fall” is present. We have not just “fallen” (past) short of the glory of God, we “fall” (present) short of it on a regular basis. There was a temptation to translate this verse, “…all have sinned, and even now fall short of the glory of God.”

3:24. “accomplished in Christ Jesus.” The Greek phrase uses the word *en*, which can mean “by,” or “in” with the idea of “in connection with” (cp. note on Eph. 1:3; Lenski; Hendrickson). Some scholars would expand that to mean the redemption that is embodied by Christ. Scholars who support the translation, “in connection with” correctly note that God is the author of the plan of redemption and is referred to as the Redeemer throughout the Old Testament. It is God who set forth Christ as the atoning sacrifice in the context (3:25), thus our redemption is “in connection with” Jesus Christ. However, we must note that the concept of “by” is clearly in the Greek word “*en.*” The NIV, uses “by,” and scholars such as Boice (cp. Romans: Justification by Faith by James Boice) prefer “by” for several reasons. First, it is a legitimate translation of the Greek. Second, it is clear to English readers and fits with the scope of Scripture. Our redemption was paid for by Jesus Christ, as many Scriptures attest. It was Christ who gave himself for us (Titus 2:14), and redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13). Third, it fits with the Old Testament concept of the “kinsman-redeemer,” the close family member who could redeem a person or piece of property. The best example of the kinsman-redeemer in the Old Testament is Boaz, who appears in the book of Ruth. To be a kinsman-redeemer a person had to be a close relative, be willing to take the responsibility upon himself, and be able to pay the price. Jesus Christ is the ultimate kinsman-redeemer. He was a close relative, a member of mankind. He was willing to die for our sins even when we did not deserve to have our sins forgiven, and he, and he alone of all mankind, was able to pay the price for the sins of mankind since he alone was sinless.

In spite of all that, “by” offers a somewhat limited view of the meaning of the verse, which seems to be saying more than just that our redemption came by Jesus Christ. The fullness of our redemption was not just “by” him, in a very real sense it was “in” him (in connection with him) because it “was” him. He was the fulfillment of the promise of a seed of a woman, a lamb from the flock, a lion from the tribe of Judah, a sinless sacrifice, a perfect offering with no bones broken, and so much more. But how do we get both the “by” and “in” into the same verse in English, when it is so easy in Greek? Cranfield has a translation that comes very close “the redemption accomplished in Christ Jesus” (C. E. B. Cranfield, Romans). God is the great Redeemer, and Jesus Christ was His way of
redeeming mankind, nay, much more than that, the fallen world itself, which Jesus Christ participated in by offering himself, and thus being the de facto redeemer.

3:25. “put him forth.” The Greek is protithemai (#4388 προτίθημι) and it has two important meanings that are relevant to this verse. 1) to set forth, put forward publicly, present, offer; 2) literally, to set before oneself; hence to plan, purpose, or intend. Historically, scholars and commentators have been divided as to which meaning fits in Romans 3:25. In favor of “planned” or “purposed” is the fact that protithemai only occurs three times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:13; 3:25; and Eph. 1:9), and the other two times it refers to “plan” or “purpose.” Also, there is no doubt that God “planned” for Jesus Christ to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind. On the other hand, “set forth” is the overwhelming meaning of protithemai in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and thus the believers in Rome would have been accustomed to hearing about the sacrifices and offerings that were “set forth” by God (Exod. 40:4, 23; Lev. 24:8; Ps. 101:3). And Romans 3:25 is in the context of Jesus being an atoning sacrifice. From a larger perspective, however, there is no doubt that in the context of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, both “planned” and “set forth” apply well, and this could be an example of the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre), where one thing is said but two things are meant. God both planned, and set forth, Jesus, as an atoning sacrifice.

“atoning sacrifice.” The Greek is hilastērion (#2435 ἱλαστήριον). It has two distinct meanings, both of which are significant in this verse. The first meaning is: A sin offering; a sacrifice to atone; an appeasement necessitated by sin. In this first definition there is a “focus on the means by which sins are forgiven; having atoning power, bringing about reconciliation” (Friberg). The second meaning of hilastērion is: The place where the expiation occurred. The majority of translators and commentators believe that the idea of an offering or payment for sin is the primary emphasis in this verse, and thus translate hilastērion as “sacrifice of atonement” (NIV; NRSV), “sacrifice for reconciliation” (NJB; cp. Williams); “expiation” (RSV; Cassirer), and “propitiation” (ESV; HCSB; KJV; NASB). Although “propitiation” is used by a lot of translators, we agree with Louw & Nida that it misses the point. They write:

Though some traditional translations render ἱλαστήριον [hilastērion] as ‘propitiation,’ this involves a wrong interpretation of the term in question. Propitiation is essentially a process by which one does a favor to a person in order to make him or her favorably disposed, but in the NT God is never the object of propitiation since he is already on the side of people. ήλασμος [hilasmos] and ἱλαστήριον [hilastērion] denote the means of forgiveness and not propitiation.

Although one of the results of Christ’s sacrifice was the withholding of the wrath of God, a wrath we deserved, we believe it is wrong to translate this verse in such a way as it presents Christ’s death as “appeasing” God. The sacrifice of Jesus did not placate God, but rather was a provision that our loving God made for mankind so that we would be acceptable to Him even though we had sinned against Him. This is a case where we really do have to pay attention to the theme of the Bible, and not just look at the way the Greek word was used in Greek culture.

The Greek gods were angry, jealous gods who did not have any particular love for mankind. They often acted immorally, and were sometimes offended by things, such as
being spurned at love, that they should not have been offended at. Much of the ritual and sacrifice in the pagan world was to appease these gods, and hilastérion is accurately translated “propitiation,” a sacrifice that appeases the wrath of the gods, in the context of these pagan deities. However, when it comes to our God, He has always loved people, and His wrath is a function of His justice and righteousness, not any immoral nature or actions. Before mankind had ever sinned, in the Garden of Eden, God warned that sin would result in death (Gen. 2:17) and since that time people have continually sinned against God. Sacrifices, including the death of Christ, were not made to “appease” God, as if He were angry because people were breaking His laws. Instead, the sacrifices pay the legitimate debt we incur when we sin, and thus they allow God to withhold any judgment and wrath and yet still be righteous in His judgments. Thus, translations such as “sacrifice of atonement,” “sacrifice for reconciliation,” or “expiation,” are much better than “propitiation.”

Now we turn to the second definition of hilastérion, which, in biblical contexts, refers to the “mercy seat.” Hilastérion is the word the Septuagint used for the “mercy seat,” the solid gold lid on the Ark of the Covenant that was sprinkled with the blood of the sin-offering on the Day of Atonement (Ex 25:17; Lev. 16:14-16). Although some commentaries and translations have “mercy seat” in Romans 3:25, we do not see that as the primary meaning here. The mercy seat received the blood of the sacrifice, but it did not itself bleed or die. There had to be a shedding of blood in order for there to be remission of sin (Heb. 9:22). God had decreed that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and there had to be the death of a sinless sacrifice if people’s sin was to be atoned for. Jesus Christ died in our place, and it is his atoning sacrifice that we appropriate to ourselves by having faith in his blood. Did the children of Israel have faith in the blood on the mercy seat? Yes, but it was in connection with the entire ceremony on the Day of Atonement. They would not have had faith in blood being on the mercy seat if that blood was not from an animal that had only been cut and wounded, but had not died. There had to be the death of a sacrifice of atonement for God to forgive people and declare them righteous, and that is the point Romans 3:25 and 26 are making.

There is merit, however, in recognizing the subtle double meaning in hilasterion in this verse. The verse says that God showed His righteousness by passing over “the sins previously committed,” i.e., the sins of those people who lived before Christ. The idea being communicated is that God passed over the sins of the people who lived before Christ died, but when Christ died his sacrifice atoned for the sins of those Old Testament people too. Thus, in a way Christ is like the Mercy Seat, which one day each year is sprinkled with blood to atone for the sins Israel has committed. When the people of Israel sinned, their sin was not immediately atoned for, but awaited the Day of Atonement. On that day, the tenth day of Tishri (the seventh month), the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies and atoned for all the sin of the people. Thus individuals often waited many months for atonement for their sin. In the same way, God passed over the sin of the people before Christ, and did not judge them for it. Then, many years later when Christ died, his death atoned for their sin. “What actually took away the sins of the Old Testament saints was Christ’s blood” (Lenski: Romans). “The merits of the cross reach backward as well as forward” (Hendrickson: Romans).
People often wonder why God required animal sacrifices in the Old Testament and the sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament as an atonement for sins. However, God had some very good reasons for doing this.

First, the sacrifices that God commanded showed His love for us. People do not usually think of sacrifice as a demonstration of love, but it is. People are sinners and “the wages of sin is death.” However, God so loved people that He set things up such that a substitute could die in the place of the sinner, thus sparing the sinner of deserved death. The sacrifice of animals, and then Jesus, demonstrated that our God is a God of love and mercy by not requiring people to receive the full consequence for their sin. Thus, sacrifices show us God’s love, and the Bible is very clear when it says “But God shows his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place” (Rom. 5:8, REV, and see commentary on that verse).

Second, the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They did this by establishing from earliest times that God allowed a substitute to pay the price for someone’s sin. Although making the effort to do an animal sacrifice demonstrated the sincerity of the sinner, he or she was also supposed to see that the sacrifice was not a final payment for sin, but pointed forward to the sacrifice of “the lamb of God,” which alone could completely atone for the sins of mankind (see commentary on Rom. 3:26, “with a view to show”).

Third, animal sacrifice showed the costly nature of sin. Sacrifices always cost somebody something: animals were valuable property to their owners, and it goes without saying that Jesus Christ was beyond value to God.

Fourth, animal sacrifice graphically showed the terrible and final result of sin, which is death, and “death” is the absolute and terminal end of a person’s life. (Rom. 6:23; and see commentary note). Sin is horrible and the pain and death sin produces is horrible. Animal sacrifice and the death of Jesus were costly and horrible too, so horrible that they are only understandable and acceptable in the context of what God was accomplishing through them, including reconciling the sinner to God. God knows that sacrifice is repulsive, but in being repulsive we are powerfully reminded of the repulsive nature of sin and its consequence and thus motivated to do whatever we can to keep from sinning. If we truly understand the lessons God was trying to teach us via the sacrifices He commanded, we will do our best not to sin instead of excusing ourselves when we sin or entirely ignoring our sin. Only because God provides sacrifice as an offering for sin can we embrace this action of atonement.

Historically, the Devil has blurred the lessons that God has tried to teach through sacrifice, and he has done this by inspiring ungodly people to sacrifice things apart from God’s redemptive system. Many cultures perform sacrifices, even human sacrifice. These are not commanded by God, are not redemptive, and do not cover for sin. Furthermore, the way these sacrifices are conducted can be indescribably cruel. The uninformed people do not see a difference between the sacrifices God commands and the sacrifices done in pagan cultures, and thus they often say God is “bloody,” or “unrighteous.” We need to remember that God did not have to be “bloody” and require sacrifice. He could have allowed each person to pay for his or her own sin by dying. That would have pleased the Devil greatly, who would be delighted if all God’s potential family died in the flames of Gehenna. Thankfully, God loved us enough to allow people to accept a substitutionary sacrifice for their sin, in spite of the fact that this has caused Him to be misunderstood by
people who have not made the effort to get to know how lovingly and righteously He set up the provision of sacrifices set forth in the Bible.

“to show.” See commentary on “with a view to show” in verse 26.

“passed over.” The Greek is paresis (πάρεσις), and this is the only use of this word in the New Testament. It means a passing over, letting pass, neglecting, disregarding. This is a very exact recounting of what happened with God’s justice and judgment before the death of Christ. Israel offered sacrifices to God, but in actual fact, the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb. 10:1-4). God knew that, so He withheld His final Judgment of people until Christ could come and atone for sin. It is a very good thing that God waited for Christ to be the sacrifice for sin before He judged the world. Before Christ died there was no actual effectual atonement, no effective payment for sin, and thus there was no actual forgiveness for sin available. Thus, if God had judged people when they died, instead of waiting until Christ had come to judge, the people before Christ would all be doomed, because not one person would be righteous in God’s sight. Job would have been quite right: “How then can a man be righteous before God?” (Job 25:4). However because God’s Judgment is future, and well after the death of Christ, atonement resulting in everlasting life is available for everyone—those who lived both before Christ and after him.

Romans 3:25 is very good evidence that people do not live on after they die, as most Christians believe. If people’s souls or spirits lived on after they died, then that soul would have been judged right after the person died. But if the person died before Christ, nothing he could have done would have made him righteous in God’s sight, and so he would have been doomed. However, because all the resurrections occur in the future, after the death of Christ, salvation is available.

3:26. “with a view to show.” The commentator R. C. H. Lenski is quite right that many versions and commentators miss the sense of what God is saying in verses 25 and 26 by breaking them into two sentences that start the same way, thus making them into independent thoughts in which the second sentence elucidates the first. For example, the ESV has, “This was to show…it was to show…,” the NIV has “He did this to demonstrate…He did it to demonstrate…,” and the KJV has “to declare…To declare….” If we are to understand this verse, it is important to see how these phrases are connected and why. The Greek phrase in verse 25 starts, eis endeixis, while verse 26 opens with pros ho endeixis. The noun endeixis is a “pointing out,” and hence a demonstration or showing forth. Being a “verbal noun,” a noun that inherently connotes action, it is not off the mark to translate it as a verb in English, which most versions do. Thus endeixis is translated “show” (ESV, REV; RSV; NRSV); “declare” (KJV); “demonstrate” (NASB; NIV), “prove” (NAB), etc.

Verse 26 start with pros ho endeixis, which is not like eis endeixis, which means “to show” (more literally, “for a showing”), but instead means, “with a view to showing” (Lenski; Wuest’s Word Studies; Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible). Most translators see no essential difference in the two phrases, and that is why they have them start two different sentences. However, if the translators make the verse into two sentences, as we saw with the KJV, NIV, and ESV above, then the subject of both sentences is God’s making Christ an atoning sacrifice, and then God gives two different reasons for doing that, the first being the last half of verse 25 and the second being verse 26. Essentially, translated the way the KJV, ESV, NIV, and many others have it, the verses mean: “God set forth Christ
as an atoning sacrifice to show His righteousness in connection with passing over the sins previously committed.” And also, “God set forth Christ as an atoning sacrifice to show His righteousness at this present time.” We do not believe that is what these verses mean. Verse 26 is not an explanation of why God set forth Christ as an atoning sacrifice; it is an explanation of why God passed over the sins “previously committed,” that is, committed before the death and resurrection of Christ.

God passed over, disregarded, ignored, the sins committed before Christ. He had to, because if He had judged mankind before the death of Christ, everyone would have been guilty of sin and then sentenced to everlasting death. Even those people who sacrificed animals under the Law were only symbolically covered from their sin. Hebrews is clear: the Law was only a “shadow” of the things to come (i.e., Christ), and “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:1, 4). God’s condemnation would have been “just” because the people would have truly deserved everlasting death because of their sin, but that would not have accomplished God’s purposes for mankind, which was to have a family that would live forever with Him. Furthermore, since no one can really be righteous before God on his own merits, condemning mankind without giving them a fair chance to be righteous before Him would not have even really been righteous. So God passed over the sins committed before Christ—why?—“with a view to show his righteousness at this present time.” God set forth Jesus to be an atoning sacrifice to show His righteousness, and He also overlooked people’s sins before Christ in order to show His righteousness now, because in light of Christ’s atonement, He would be seen to be truly righteous, and also One who declares people righteous who have faith in His Messiah no matter when they lived. Thus the atoning work of the cross not only points from the death of Christ forward, atoning those who make Christ Lord, but it atoned backward, allowing God to judge those who lived before Christ through the lens of the shed blood of Jesus.

“trust in Jesus.” This translation takes the genitive as an objective genitive, where Jesus is the object of our faith. See also Romans 3:22.

3:27. “By what kind of law?” The Greek phrase is dia poios nomos, and the Greek word poios can mean “what” or “what kind of, what sort of.” In this verse the word nomos is not referring to the Mosaic Law, but just “law,” or “principle,” “norm,” or “basis,” so it is better to render the phrase by “what kind of law,” opening the door for multiple possible answers (cp. ESV, NASB; Lenski).

3:30. “declare…righteous.” See commentary note on Romans 3:22. In this verse, the Jews are declared righteous ek pisteōs (“out from faith”), while the Gentiles are declared righteous dia tēs pisteōs (through the [that] faith”). It is important to note that the second “faith” has the definite article, which in this context means more “that” than “the.” For the Jews, faith had always been the essence of what gave them righteousness, as Abraham (Rom. 4) and David (Rom. 4) discovered. Thus, for the Jews, faith was the source from which (ek), or the basis of (ek), their salvation. This verse is pointing out that the righteousness of the Gentiles also comes “through” (dia) that same thing—faith. We added the word “same” in italics for clarity.

3:31. “uphold.” The Greek word is histemi (#2476 ἵστημι; pronounced hiss'-tay-me), and in this context it means “uphold, establish, confirm, validate” (cp. BDAG Greek-English lexicon). Some scholars (cp. F. F. Bruce) believe that Paul would have been thinking
about the Rabbinic language that faith “fulfilled” the law, but that is impossible to prove, and it seems that he could have worded the Greek better if that is what he meant.

“law.” This is not “the Law” of the Old Testament, but “law” in general, which includes “the Law” of the Old Testament. The “law” or “principle” (the Greek word nomos can mean both) of faith is in the law, as we will see from Abraham in Romans 4.

There are a number of ways that faith upholds law. For one thing, the presence of law shows the need for faith, because law is uncompromising in its convicting and condemning law breakers (sinners), and thus it prepares the heart to be accepted by God by faith. Second, faith is upheld by law (including the Law) because the law testifies to faith. Abraham is a great example. A third way that faith upholds law is that law still is the authoritative will of God; people of faith do not abandon law, they follow law as best they can. Thus, faith upholds law.

Chapter 4

4:4. “gift.” The word is the usual word for grace, charis (#5485 γάρις), but here it is not used with its theological trappings. The word also has a cultural meaning of “a gift of favor.”
4:7. Quoted from Psalm 32:1.

“Blessed.” The word for “blessed” is makarios (#3107 μακάριος), which also means “happy.” Not only are we blessed, but we should feel happy that our sins have been covered and not counted against us.

“were forgiven… were covered.” Most versions translate these verbs in the present tense, “are forgiven… are covered.” The verbs are in the aorist (past) tense, however, so we rendered it “were covered.”
4:8. Quoted from Psalm 32:2.

“man.” The Greek is aner (#435 ἀνήρ), a man, a male. It is quoting more literally from the Hebrew text, which reads adam, man.

“not.” The Greek is stronger than the English “not.” It is the phrase ou me, literally, “not not,” using two different Greek words for “no” together.
4:11. “seal.” The Greek word sphragis (#4973 σφραγίς) referred to a seal, as books were sealed.

“The purpose was to make him.” The phrase is a purpose idiom (cp. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament; cp. ESV, RSV, NRSV.) It is hard to communicate the purpose with just “that.” This shows that God had a plan to clearly reveal that He would justify people by faith—which He did in the OT and will do in the Millennium. However, today, in the Administration of the Sacred Secret, we see the ultimate justification by faith, because what we have is permanent.

“but are not circumcised.” This is the general idea of the statement. The Greek, “the ones believing through uncircumcision” would not be clear. It means those who believe and are in the condition of uncircumcision. (Cp. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament.) The phrase in Greek means without being in a state of circumcision.
4:12. “merely.” This is the essence of “only” here (cp. ESV; RSV). The difficulty with “only” is that the reader may think that it refers to a class of people, i.e., not only the
circumcision, but the uncircumcision. However, it refers to another aspect of the circumcision. Being circumcised is not the “only” aspect of following (“falling in line”) with Abraham.

4:13. “seed” Greek is sperma, “seed.” By metonymy “seed” becomes “descendants, offspring,” etc., but we felt that the reader could make that jump as well as the translator. “that comes by” is the genitive of origin. The literal “a righteousness of faith” is much less clear. Although almost all versions read “the righteousness…,” there is no warrant for it in the Greek.

4:14. “nullified.” The Greek word, katargeo, means, in this context, to cause something to lose its power or effectiveness, invalidate, make powerless, make ineffective, nullify, make the Law invalid (BDAG).

4:15. “For the law produces wrath, but where there is not a law, neither is there a violation.” The believer’s great freedom! We should read this verse and shout for joy. God has delivered Christians from the Law. Galatians tells us to “Stand fast in the freedom with which Christ has set us free.” We are not under Law, therefore we cannot transgress it and be guilty. Step up to faith and receive its benefits! “For the law produces wrath.” A simple statement of fact. No one could keep the Law, therefore it produced wrath from God.

“violation.” The Greek, parabasis, literally means an overstepping, hence, a violation or transgression.

4:16. “The promise.” We felt that as long as the subject was ellipsed (Figure of Speech, Ellipsis), we might as well add it in italics for clarity. Most versions simply have “it.”

4:17. Quoted from Genesis 17:5.

“in the presence of.” Greek is katenanti (#2713 κατέναντι). There are two ways to understand how the phrase “in the presence of” fits with the parenthesis: (1) He is the father of us all (as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) in the sight of God. This has the meaning represented in the HCSB: “He is the father of us all in God’s sight” (HCSB). Or (2) “to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”)—in the presence of God” (NRSV), meaning, the promise is secure to those who share the faith of Abraham in God’s sight.

We take the parenthesis in the second sense; it is to be set off as it appears in the REV (cp. NRSV and Kistemaker’s translation). The flow of thought regards those who in God’s sight are of the faith of Abraham; the entire clause about Abraham being the Father of all who believe and the supporting Old Testament quote is parenthetical.

“God…who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” (This is the translation many versions have.) The context is Abraham. Sarah’s womb was “dead” (v. 19), and yet God spoke to Abraham in the past tense (idiom: Prophetic Perfect; see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6).

4:18. Quoted from Genesis 15:5.

“beyond hope, believed in hope.” The word for “beyond” is the preposition para (#3844 παρά). Thayer is insightful with regard to its usage here: “beside, beyond, i.e. metaphorically, equivalent to contrary to… literally, beyond hope, i.e. where the laws and course of nature left no room for hope, hence, equivalent to without (A. V. against) hope.” The point is that considering Abraham and Sarah’s bodies, naturally speaking, they were without any hope of having a child. They were beyond hope. Although
Abraham and Sarah were “beyond hope” they believed in hope because God had told them they would have a child.

This is the figure of speech antanaclasis, “the use of the same word in the same sentence in two different senses” (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*). Here “hope” is repeated, but used in different senses. The first occurrence refers to natural, worldly hope—in that sense, Abraham is beyond hope. The second occurrence of hope, however, is put for metonymy for the promise in which Abraham believed—he believed in hope, that is, he believed in the promise of God who said he would have an heir.

4:19. “already having become dead.” The passive perfect participle. Abraham’s body was “dead” when it came to having children without a miraculous intervention by God, and Sarah was in the same situation. To us, translating the Greek as “as good as dead” blurs the clear meaning of the text. What is a body “as good as dead?” Could he, or could he not have children? The Greek is clear as a bell—he was dead!


“by unbelief.” There is no word for “by” or “in.” “Unbelief” is in the dative case, and here it is the instrumental dative (Robertson), thus “unbelief” is what causes people to be divided, or waver, or stagger. They doubt, and move in and out of a state of faith. Not Abraham. He did not allow himself to be divided by unbelief. To say “he did not waver in unbelief” is to say he was always in unbelief without varying from it, which of course is not the case. Wuest uses “vacillate” instead of “divided.” Abraham did not vacillate because of unbelief.

“giving glory to God, being fully convinced.” Two things that occurred in concert with Abraham being strong in his trust of God were that he gave glory to God [i.e., praised God], and that he was fully convinced. The Greek would allow for the things to feed on each other, so, for example, his praising God could, and likely did, contribute to him being strong in his trust of God.


4:24. “out from among the dead.” Almost every version we checked reads “from the dead.” When the average English speaker reads that Christ was “raised from the dead,” he thinks that “dead” refers to the state of death, as if the verse were saying that “Christ was raised from the state of death,” or that “Christ was raised from being dead.” This is not at all the meaning.

There are problems with the translation, “from the dead.” First, there is no word “the” in the Greek text, so “from the dead” is technically just “from dead.” Second, the word “dead” in the English phrase “from the dead,” is a noun, but in the Greek text “dead” is an adjective. More than that, it is a plural adjective. The Greek text reads, ek nekros, and means “out from among dead ones” [or “dead people”], (Cp. Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible; Wuest, *Word Studies*). The Greek word ek means “out from,” and the word nekros, as we said, is a plural adjective. An adjective modifies a noun, and thus the adjective “dead” must modify a noun, and thus answer the question “Dead what?” The scope of Scripture shows us that the answer to that question is “dead people.” Since Adam, people have died and been buried. Thus Christ rose out from among the dead people, who, not raised by God, stayed in the ground. This explains why the word “dead”
is plural; it refers to the many dead who are still in the ground. What the Bible is saying, and what we need to support with a proper English translation, is that when God raised Jesus, He raised him up and out from among all the myriads of dead people who are buried in the ground. Everyone who has died is in the ground, but God raised Jesus out from among those dead people, and gave him life. Furthermore, there will be other times people will be raised out from among the rest of the dead people. At the Rapture, Christians will be raised out from among the rest of the dead, and then at the first resurrection the righteous will be raised out from among the other dead people, the unrighteous being left in the ground until the Resurrection of the Righteous (Luke 14:14 KJV; Rev. 20:6). There are 44 usages of ek nekros in the New Testament, and not one of them refers to the resurrection of the unjust (Acts 24:15). That makes sense because at the resurrection of the unjust, which occurs at the end of Christ’s 1,000-year reign, no one is left in the ground. [For more on the Rapture and the two resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15].

Although ek nekros could be considered an ellipsis, with the emphasis on “dead” and the word “ones,” or “people” being supplied by the scope of Scripture, the phrase is more an idiom than a true ellipsis. This verse is not saying that Christ was raised from “death or “being dead” (a nominative use of death). It is saying that Christ was raised from among those who are dead. The rest of all the humans who had died are still dead and in the ground, and Christ was raised out from among them.

**Chapter 5**


5:4. “character.” The Greek is dokimē (#1382 δοκιμή), a noun that can mean a test or ordeal, or the experience of going through a test, with emphasis on the result; thus, standing a test, being proven by test, proof, or “character.” The verb dokimazō mean “to prove by test” and was used of testing precious metals to see whether or not they were genuine. We believe “character” is a good translation of dokimē in this context because “character” is both developed, and shines forth, in difficult circumstances. Character is the sum total of our moral and ethical qualities, and it can be good or bad. It is based in the heart, but shines forth in the choices we make and what we say and do. The character of Christ is in part described by the fruit of the spirit, which is what the new nature produces in a Christian if the Christian strives for it: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23). On their website, the organization “Character First” organizes good character in the categories of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

5:5. “disappoint us.” The Greek is kataischuno (#2617 καταίσχυνω), which means to dishonor or disgrace; put to shame or humiliate; or disappoint (BDAG). The point is that our hope, which is real, will not disappoint us or put us to shame, while false hopes will disappoint and put to shame those who believe in them.

“through the holy spirit.” The Greek text does not have a definite article before “holy spirit.” In Greek, if a preposition (in this case, διά) precedes a noun, the noun can be definite without specifically adding the definite article; the subject and context are the
final arbiter. Daniel Wallace writes in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (p. 247): “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.” A. T. Robertson writes in *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, pp. 790-792: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” In this case, the holy spirit is the gift of God’s nature with which we were born again and which is sealed in us. Robertson then cites some examples that use *ek*.

When a person is born again, what is “born” (actually “created” 2 Cor. 5:17) inside the person is the nature of God, which becomes part of them, indeed, become a new nature in them (2 Pet. 1:4). Because this new nature is now part of person and thus cannot be removed, it is said to be “sealed” in the person (Eph. 1:13), and is a “guarantee” of everlasting life (2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:14). God works through the spirit that is now inside each believer in order to help them be like Christ. And He and Jesus Christ communicate through the spirit with each believer, so they are working in each one “to want to do, and to do,” their good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). In this verse, they work to show us their love and help us be loving to others. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

5:6-8. “in place of the ungodly...for... in our place.” All of these are translations from the Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ). *Huper* can have the sense of *in place of,* instead of, in the name of (BDAG; TDNT; Robertson, *Grammar*, pp. 630-32 and *The Minister and His Greek New Testament*, pp. 35-42.) [See also Appendix 11: “Greek Preposition”]. In such cases the meaning of *substitution* is indicated, as can be clearly seen in Romans 5:7: “For scarcely for [huper] a righteous person will one die; though perhaps for [huper] a good person someone would even dare to die...” The meaning is clear. The verse is speaking of dying *in place of* someone else, or dying in one’s stead. This becomes important for understanding the nature of Christ’s atonement for our sins—it was a substitutionary atonement. Christ literally died instead of us, thus taking our place in death: “Christ died in place of [huper] the ungodly... while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place [huper] (Rom. 5:6, 8).

5:6. “weak.” Figure of speech, *tapeinosis,* or understatement. “Weak?” We were more than weak—we were *dead!* We were dead in sins, totally unable to help ourselves, and God, in his grace and mercy, sent Christ, who died for us so that we would be strong in him.

5:11. “continue to boast.” The present participle of “boast,” *kauchaomai* (#2744 καυχάομαι), calls for the translation “continue to boast” (cp. Lenski). This is known as the continuous present.

5:12. “through one man sin entered the world.” [For information on the original sin and its effects, see commentary on Romans 7:17].

5:16. “judgment came from one transgression.” [For information on the original sin and its effects, see commentary on Romans 7:17].

5:18. “one transgression resulted in condemnation.” The English translation only implicitly refers to the conduit for which the results of condemnation and justification come. In the Greek, however, this verse strongly communicates both the *results* and the *means through which* the condemnation and justification come. It indicates result with the preposition *eis* (#1519 εἰς), meaning “resulting in,” and it shows the means through
which the result comes with the word dia (#1223 διά), meaning “through.” Literally the Greek reads: “through (dia) one trespass unto all men results in (eis) condemnation, so also through (dia) one righteous act unto all men results in (eis) justification of life.” The one trespass was the conduit through which the result of condemnation came, and the one righteous act was the conduit through which the result of justification to life came. [For more information on the original sin and its effects, see commentary on Romans 7:17].

“righteousness that brings life.” According to Robertson, this is an objective genitive (Grammar, p. 500-501), meaning that life functions as the object of the verbal noun “righteousness;” i.e., the life that is brought by the action of righteousness (cp. Wallace, Exegetical Syntax, p. 116-117). This is justification that results in life.


5:20. “with the result.” God did not give the Law “so that” trespass would increase, but rather “with the result” that it did. The Greek is hina, which can be used to indicate a result. So it is here (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament; Lenski). In this case it is particularly used with the subjunctive (pleonazo) to indicate a result that was not intended—that is, God did not introduce the law with the intent of making trespasses increase, this was merely the result of the introduction (see also commentary entry on Rom. 7:10). Cp. Wallace: “This use of hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood expresses the result of the action of the main verb. It indicates a consequence of the verbal action that is not intended. The hina is normally translated so that, with the result that” (Exegetical Syntax, emphasis in original). See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.”

This should not be translated as a purpose clause, as though the Law was introduced for the purpose of making transgression increase. God never intends for transgression to increase. Rather, this was merely the result of the introduction of the Law. This topic is taken up in Romans 7:7-13, specifically refuting the idea that the Law is culpable for bringing evil. The Law was holy and just (7:12), yet when the command came, sin came alive and produced death (7:7-11). Paul writes that “by no means” did the Law become death for us (7:13), for it is sin, not the Law, that produces death. If the purpose of the Law was to increase transgression, then the law would indeed have become death for us and Paul’s entire argument in Romans 7 would be fall apart. The purpose of the Law was not to increase sin, but to silence everyone who was under its standard, to make us aware of the extent of our transgression, and be our “guardian” until Christ came [For “guardian,” see Gal. 3:24]. A guardian is meant to protect. So if the Law brought us closer to sin, and the wages of sin is death, then how can the Law protect us when its purpose was to take us to death? (See also: entries on Rom. 7:13, “with the result that,” and Gal. 3:19, “because of transgressions”).

Scripture is telling us that it was not God’s intent that sin would increase by introducing the law. But if he knew that it would, how could this not be his intent? It is much like a doctor who performs a surgery which he knows will result in weeks of painful recovery for the patient. Yet he does not perform the surgery with the intent that pain ensues. The pain is simply a byproduct of the greater good being accomplished. And in the case of God putting forth the Law, it’s not even as though God brings the pain—adding the law didn’t force people to sin, they still chose to sin on their own.

“came in.” The Greek is the compound verb, pareiserchomai (#3922 παρεισέρχοµαι); built from the prefix para (beside, alongside) and eiserchomai (to come or to go).
Pareiserchomai has two meanings: 1) “to come in besides,” or “to come in alongside of” and 2) “to come in secretly or by stealth” (Gal. 2:4). In this context it means, “to come in alongside of.” Eight verses earlier, in verse 12, sin “entered” into the world. Now in verse 20, law “enters in alongside” the sin that is already here. Most versions simply say “came in” or “entered” because the scope and context make it clear that sin was already in the world, and writing “came in alongside of” can confuse the reader.


Death is the means that sin used to reign over people. It is not that sin reigned “in death,” as if it reigned over them when they were dead. We can see this because of the “in this way also” (houtos kai) construction of the sentence. Grace is said to reign “through” (dia) righteousness, expressing the means through which grace reigns; this is set in comparison (“in this way also”) with sin reignning by death. Just as righteousness reigned “through” death so sin reigns “by means of” death.

“grace reigns.” The Greek word basileuō (#936 βασιλεύω; pronounced bass-i-loo’-ō), translated “reigns,” is in the aorist tense, subjunctive mood. The aorist does not mean that its reign has ended, only that it was established as a one-time event. The subjunctive mood is caused by the conjunction hina at the beginning of the phrase and so the verb needs to be understood from the context, which is not that grace “might reign” or “may reign,” but that it is reigning now. Grace has encroached into sin’s reign, and now, even though sin still reigns by means of death, grace also reigns and gives people everlasting life.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

Chapter 6

6:1. “will increase.” The verb “increase,” pleonazō (#4121 πλεονάζω; pronounced pleh-on-ad’-zo), is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” increase, but the Greek conjunction hina (#2443 ἢνα) earlier in the sentence is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore in these cases we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, if grace covers our sin, if we sin, grace “will” increase.

6:3. “baptized...baptized.” This is not baptism in water, but baptism in the gift of holy spirit. We can tell that this refers to baptism in holy spirit because of the two baptisms, baptism in water and baptism in holy spirit, only baptism in holy spirit actually produces what this verse says, “baptized into union with Jesus Christ.”

There is a huge difference between being baptized in water and being baptized in holy spirit. Baptism in water is symbolic. It does not mean the person is saved. Many people go through the motions of being immersed in water and never have the true faith in Jesus that gets them saved. It is well known that many people who have been water baptized never gave their life to Christ or had faith in Christ to the point of salvation.
People such as those are baptized in water, but it does not result in “union with Jesus Christ.” Baptism in holy spirit is totally different. It is not a ceremony or ritual, and it is not done by people. Only Jesus can baptize a person in the holy spirit, and he only does so when that person has true faith in him. A person who is baptized in the gift of holy spirit does not just participate in a ceremony that represents going from death to life; the person actually passes from everlasting death unto everlasting life. A person baptized in holy spirit is truly baptized “into union with Jesus Christ.” When a person is baptized in holy spirit, he is no longer the same person. He is saved and has spiritual power. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that Christians are baptized in holy spirit, and it is that baptism, not water baptism, that brings us into union with Jesus Christ such that when he was crucified, we were crucified, when he died, we died, when he was buried, we were buried, and when he was raised from the dead we were guaranteed new resurrection life.

“into union with.” This phrase is translated from the Greek preposition *eis*, which can refer to relation as well as to motion. In this context, the word *eis* (#1519 εἰς; pronounced “ace”) is defining a relation, which is referred to as the static sense of *eis*. R. C. H. Lenski writes:

“It is the task of the grammars to tell the story as to how the Koine *eis* has expanded and invaded the territory of *en* [in] so that it reached even the static verbs, even those of being, letting us have the construction *einaí* and *ón eis*, this invasion being completed in modern Greek, *en* there being swallowed up entirely by *eis*. All the old grammars and all the old exegesis are superseded by the immense volume of new information now at hand in the papyri, etc. We now see how wrong it was in scores of instances in the New Testament to interpret *eis* as “into,” and how only sheer ignorance forced the idea of motion into the preposition. Here in verse 3, 4, where it is found three times, as in Matt. 28:19, *eis* denotes sphere (Robertson’s Grammar, p. 592) and not motion. The grammars now call it static *eis*.”

In the context of Romans 6, *eis* is denoting a relation (also in Acts 19:3; see commentary on that verse). Most English versions have the very literal translation “into Christ” in spite of the fact that that phrase usually only confuses the reader and in spite of the fact that the native Greek speakers of the first century would have understood what Paul meant. The Greek indicates that the Christian is baptized by holy spirit “into Christ,” i.e., into a relationship of union with him. Lenski translates it “as many as were baptized in connection with Christ Jesus were baptized in connection with his death.” While “in connection with” is good, we felt it was not as clear as it could be. When Christians are “in Christ,” there is more than just a connection; we have a spiritual union with Christ. The Christian was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8), was buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and was raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6). Also, it is due to our union with Christ that we are “circumcised,” not just the foreskin, but our entire flesh body (Col. 2:11). Thus, although we have a “connection” with Christ, the word “union” seems much more appropriated and clear. Several English versions besides the REV use the word “union” to express the relationship that *eis* is describing in this verse and context (The New English Bible; Goodspeed’s translation; Charles Williams’, The New Testament in the Language of the People; and Cassirer’s translation, God’s New Covenant).
Lenski noted that the meaning of the preposition *en* had been “swallowed up” by *eis*, but *en* is still used to describe a relation or association, and “in Christ” or “in the Lord” are important phrases. [For more information on the static use of *en*, see commentary on Ephesians 1:3.]

6:4. “*into union with.*” See commentary on 6:3.

“*glory.*” The Greek word translated “glory” is *doxa* (#1391 δόξα), and usually means “the condition of being bright or shining, brightness, splendor, radiance” (BDAG lexicon). However, it can also include the idea of power or might, and that is the case in this verse (BDAG), which is why the New Jerusalem Bible reads “glorious power” instead of just glory. Rather than add “power” to the REV, we thought it best to just educate the reader that the “glory” of God often includes His power.

“*his death.*” The Greek has the definite article: “the” death. It is referring specifically to the death of Christ, thus we translate it “his” death to indicate the particularity being expressed.

“*out from among the dead.*” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

6:5. “*united with.*” The Greek is *sumphutos* (#4854 σύμφωτος). This union or identification is an amplification of the union expressed in the phrase “into union with Christ” in verse three. *Sumphutos* literally means “planted together,” and is an example of how translating in a strictly literal manner, without taking into account how a word was used in the culture, can be more confusing than helpful. After all, what would it mean to be “planted together” with Christ? The word *sumphutos* was used when two things grew together and became intertwined. Thus English versions translate it as “united with him” (ESV; NASB; NIV) “joined with him” (HCSB); “identified with him” (Darby); “incorporate with him” (NEB); and “become one with him” (Cassirer). Kenneth Wuest describes the meaning of the *sumphutos*:

> It speaks of a living, vital union of two individuals growing up together. The word could be used of the Siamese twins whose bodies were connected at one point, and whose blood stream flowed through the two physical bodies as it does normally through one. (Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, Vol.1, p. 99)

Wuest’s example of the Siamese twins shows how closely the Bible portrays our lives being intertwined with Jesus’ life.

“*like his.*” This is translated from the Greek word *homoiooma* (#3667 ὁμοίωμα), which many versions translate as the word “likeness” or “like his.” Robert Thayer (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*), referencing this very verse, says, that *homoiooma*, “amounts almost to equality of identity.” This further confirms our identity with Christ. No wonder so much of what we have as Christians we have “in him” (“in union with him”), not alone or “on our own.” Due to our union with him we have “every spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3), “glorious grace” (Eph. 1:6), “redemption” (Eph. 1:7), our being sealed with holy spirit (Eph. 1:13), our being raised to life and our promise of being seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6), God’s kindness (Eph. 2:7), and we are part of the living temple of God (Eph. 2:21).

6:6. “*body of sin.*” This is not just the genitive of character for “sinful body,” but in the context seems to be a genitive of possession, “the body owned by sin,” or “the body used by sin.” Lenski would make it attributive, “the body marked by sin.” It is not the genitive
of apposition, “the body; namely sin,” or a genitive of content, “the body made of sin.” The context makes the genitive of possession very clear, because in verse 6, and in the following verses (6 twice, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14), “sin,” while retaining its literal meaning, also is the figure of speech personification. Sin is presented as a powerful lord. It uses our flesh body (v. 6); we must not be its slave (v. 6); the one who has died is free from it (v. 7), and we died to it (v. 10); now we must consider ourselves dead to it (v. 11), and not let it reign in our body (v. 12), and not offer any part of our body to sin (v. 13), for sin must not exercise lordship over us.

“powerless.” The Greek word is katargeō (#2673 καταργέω), and in this context it means to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative, powerless. “Destroyed” is too strong in this context. The body, our flesh body, which is being used by sin, is made powerless with the intent that it can no longer serve as a slave to sin.

“serve as slaves.” The Greek word is douleuō (#1398 δουλέω; pronounced “doo-lay-uh-oh”), related to doulos, a slave. The verb douleuō means to serve or to be a slave, so “serve as a slave” is a good English translation. “Be in bondage” is not wrong, but it fails to put enough emphasis on the service that sin is forcing the slave to do, instead placing the emphasis on the state of bondage that exist. While the flesh body is indeed in a state of bondage, the emphasis here it that it is forced to serve. Slavery was a part of Roman society, and a person could serve as a slave in a bad sense, be a wicked slave or serve an evil master, such as sin, or a person could be a valuable help and serve in a good sense if the master is good, such as God.

6:7. “has been freed.” The Greek word is dikaiοô (1344 δικαίοω). It is from the root dikē, “right,” and thus it is related to all the uses of “righteous,” “righteousness,” etc. here in Romans. However, although it would literally be “render righteous” or “pronounce to be righteous,” it was used idiomatically in the culture for a slave being set free. Therefore, “set free” is the clearest and best translation in this context, even though when it is translated that way, the reader does not see the verbal relationship between us being “righteous” and us being “set free.”

6:8. “since.” The Greek word ei (#1487 εἰ) usually means “if,” but in some contexts it can mean “since.” Friberg’s Lexicon states that in some cases, ei “express a condition of fact regarded as true or settled; since, because.” R.C. H. Lenski referred to it as the “if of reality” (cp. his note on Col. 3:1). E. W. Bullinger (Lexicon, “if”) wrote that it: “assumes the hypothesis as an actual fact, the condition being unfulfilled, but no doubt being thrown on the supposition.” Meyer writes: If the former, the ἀπεθάνοντος σὺν Χριστῷ [died with Christ] be true, we cannot doubt the latter.” We follow the Stern (Complete Jewish Bible) and Estes (The Better Version of the New Testament) in our translation, “since.” Weymouth, New Testament in Modern Speech, says, “seeing that we have died with Christ.” The Moffatt Bible has, “We believe that as we have died with Christ....” (Cp. commentary on Col. 2:20).

Whether to translate ei as “if” or “since” in some contexts has been debated by Greek grammarians. Grammarians such as Daniel Wallace (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics; “Conditional Sentences, pp. 680-711) points out that there is no single pattern of words that can be translated “since.” And this seems to be the problem from a grammatical standpoint. Grammarians would like to find a grammatical pattern in which ei would always best be translated as “since” (a pattern such as, ei combined with a word or words in the indicative mood having any tense). However, there is no such pattern.
That has caused some translators to always translate *ei* as “if.” But just because there is no grammatical pattern to when *ei* should be translated “since” does not mean that there are not times when “since” is clearly the meaning of the word *ei*. This is shifting the definition of *ei* from a grammatical pattern to a contextual judgment call, which occurs constantly in Greek. Most Greek words have multiple definitions, and the proper one for any context is determined by that context, so the reader or translator makes a “judgment call” about the meaning of the word in that context. It seems clear that *ei* works that way as well.

Thus, regarding certain cases involving the indicative mood, Wallace agrees that, “…the point of the argument [using *ei*] is based on the assumption of reality.” However, if there is an assumption of reality, then translating *ei* into English as “if” in those cases is suspect at best, and wrong at worst, because although in English we do sometimes use “if” when there is an assumption of reality, it is very rare. So rare, in fact, that a look through Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary did not turn up a single example of “if” being used as assuming the reality of something. The plain fact is that in English, the word “if” almost exclusively introduces doubt. So since the word “if” generally introduces doubt in English, but sometimes does not in Greek, then we should feel free to translate *ei* as “since” (or a similar way such as “seeing that”) in our English text if that is what it will take to make the meaning of the verse clear and keep doubt from being introduced when there is no doubt implied in the Greek.

“we have died with Christ.” The fact that we died with Christ, were buried with Christ, and were raised with Christ shows that the salvation of the Christian believer, which has spiritual substance in the New Birth, is never in doubt. A Christian is a child of God by birth and that cannot be undone. (See commentary on Rom. 6:3; 1 Pet. 1:23).

“believe.” The Greek verb is *pisteuō* (#4100 πιστεύω), and it means to believe, to have confidence in. The evidence is clear that Christ died, and the text says that when he died, we died with him, therefore we must believe that we will be raised from the dead. It only produces torment to doubt that. We must bring our thoughts captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).


“exercises Lordship.” The Greek verb is *kurieuō* (#2961 κυριεύω; pronounced kū-ree-yō), and it is related to *kurios*, “lord.” It means to rule, have dominion over, have power over, or, as we would say, “be lord over” or even “lord it over” someone. Wuest (Word Studies) translates it “exercises lordship,” which we feel catches the sense exactly. Before coming to Christ, people were lorded over by death, and had no escape from it. When Christ becomes the Lord in a person’s life, that person is guaranteed everlasting life, and death no longer exercises Lordship over the person. (Cp. note on Romans 6:14).

6:14. “exercises lordship.” The Greek verb is *kurieuō* (#2961 κυριεύω; pronounced kū-ree-yō), and it is related to *kurios*, “lord.” It means to rule, have dominion over, have power over, or, as we would say, be lord over or even “lord it over” someone. Wuest (Word Studies) translates it “exercises lordship,” which we feel catches the sense exactly. Before coming to Christ, the sinner’s lord was Lord Sin, who made a slave of the person and forced him to sin. When the sinner comes to Christ, he dies in Christ and gets both a
new Lord and his body is made powerless to Sin (6:6). Given the exchange of lordship, it needs to be expressed clearly that Sin no longer has lordship. (Cp. note on Romans 6:9).

6:16. “sin leading to death.” Disobeying and defying God only leads to more disobedience, and eventually death and everlasting death (cp. v. 19 and commentary on 2 Tim. 3:13).

6:17. “slaves of sin.” The Roman Cicero (Paradoxes of the Stoics) mentioned ways that a free citizen could still be a slave. “…anyone who is saddled with a greedy, violent, or simple-minded nature could be considered a slave. …a man who is under the thumb of a woman…People who devote inordinate amounts of time and effort to admiring and acquiring works of art could be considered slaves of the very things that they aspire to control through ownership…An excessive ambition…can turn a free man into a slave, if he is willing to sell out his honor to satisfy that ambition…”

“were handed over.” The Greek word paradidōmi (#3860 παραδίδωμι; pronounced par-a-did'-ō-mee) means to give over into the hands or power of someone else, to give something to keep to someone else, to deliver someone over into the custody of another. Lenski writes that it,

“always implies handing someone over to what he does not want. It has that force here, for what sinner wants to be handed over to the slavery of God, wants to ‘be enslaved to righteousness’?”

We were sinners and slaves to sin, but we were bought and paid for by Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:20), and so we were handed over to be slaves of righteousness. It was so true, and common, in the Roman world that slaves were bought and sold like cattle that this illustration of being a slave to sin but then bought and delivered over to being a slave for God. And just as true to the text, although we know we wanted the sale to occur, our flesh still often resists being a slave of God and we battle with obeying the lusts of our flesh and with acting as if “Sin” was still our owner and master.

6:18. “having been set free” is in the passive tense. It is something that happens to us, we do not accomplish this freedom for ourselves.

6:19. “resulting in more iniquity.” Disobeying and defying God only leads to more disobedience (cp. commentary on 2 Tim. 3:13).

6:20. “free from obligation to righteousness.” The word “righteousness” is in the dative case and is the indirect object. However, simply saying “freed to righteousness,” is not very clear. The dative is a dative of relation, but what is the relation? Many translations simply set forth the relationship by saying, “free in regard to righteousness,” which is good but perhaps not as clear as it could be. Other versions say things such as “free from the control of righteousness” (NIV), or “free from allegiance to righteousness” (HCSB). The context makes it clear that this verse is describing the “master-slave” relationship, and continuing the personification of sin, but adding “Righteousness” as another Master (see commentary, Romans 6:6). A slave only has one master to serve, and serving that master is an obligation of slavery. The Christian became a willing slave of Righteousness (6:18). However, when we were unsaved and still slaves of Sin, we had no obligation to righteousness. Not surprisingly, that is how many unsaved people feel and act. They live their lives doing whatever they want, with no obligation to Righteousness at all. The obligation that exists in the master-slave relationship is the reason we define the relationship in this verse as an “obligation.”
6:22. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”]

6:23. “For the wages of sin is death.” God uses the phrase “wages of sin” very accurately. God created us to fellowship with Him and each other, and when we disobey and defy God, we “earn” wages—and in this case, the wages we earn is our death. Why are the “wages of sin,” i.e., the consequences of sin, so harsh? Why death? The answer is that by making the wages of sin death, God designed a righteous way of ridding the world of evil. Evil people will not humble themselves and accept God and His ways, and so they die forever and will not be part of the next life.

Universalists, who believe that everyone who has ever lived will be saved, believe that in the next life things will be better because people will not be evil. After all, can’t God reform everyone? Or, if people really saw God for who He was, wouldn’t they repent of their evil and become kind and loving? Sadly, no. Most people who are evil and hurtful act the way they do out of the freedom of their will. Furthermore, the Devil and his demons prove to us that even created angels who know God and come directly into His presence can and do remain obstinate and disobedient (Job 1:6; Matt. 8:29; James 2:19). In summary, evil people do not submit to God and are blind to, or do not care about, the hurt and pain they cause others. The only way God could insure that each person in the next life would still have freedom of will, and yet would live in a wonderful place with other wonderful people, was to provide a righteous way to rid the world of evil people. He did that by setting up from the very beginning that the wages of sin is death.

God, in His love and grace, gave people freewill. Also, He commanded us to obey Him, and told us that if we sinned we would die (Rom. 6:23). In fact, God made it very clear even from the time of Adam that the consequences of sin is death (Gen. 2:17). God’s desire, however, is for people to choose life over death (Deut. 30:19; Ezek. 33:11). But evil people are selfish and will not submit to God or be obedient to Him, and regularly break His laws. They do not realize they are wrong and that they need to change, no matter how clearly and lovingly they are confronted. Like the Devil, they cannot be reformed unless they reform themselves, which they are generally unwilling to do. So of their own freewill, they sin, even though God has always stated that sin ends in death. Therefore, on the Day of Judgment, God honors their freewill choice to sin and He gives them the consequence of their sin that He warned them was coming—death. On the Day of Judgment, evil people will be consumed in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:13-15; see commentary on Rev. 20:10 on annihilation in the Lake of Fire).

The wages of sin is now, and has always been, death. Anyone can pay for his own sin by dying. Thankfully, God allows us to have someone else pay the price for our sin, but to make that payment the substitute must himself be sinless, and the only sinless person to ever live has been Jesus Christ, who thankfully did die on the cross for the sins of anyone else who cares to accept his dying in their place.

It seems clear that right from the very beginning and the very first sin, God graphically portrayed that a person’s sin could be atoned for by someone else. Although God told Adam if he sinned by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would die that day (“for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die” Gen. 2:17 NASB), Adam and Eve did not die that day. Instead, God killed animals that died in their place (most likely sheep) and from the skin of those animals He clothed Adam and Eve
(Gen. 3:21). Thus, Adam and Eve were temporarily forgiven their sin by the death of a substitute, just as the New Testament says the wages of sin is death, but then allows us to avoid that death by accepting Jesus’ sacrificial and substitutional death (as a “type” of Christ, animal sacrifice never totally forgave sin, but it covered it temporarily until the sacrifice of Christ occurred. See commentary on Romans 3:26).

Another reason we know that sacrifice for sin was established by God very early is that Cain, the first human ever born, and his brother Abel, knew about sacrifice and even that there was an acceptable and unacceptable way to offer the sacrifice (Gen. 4:2-5). God promoted sacrifice as both a way to atone for sin and as a portrayal of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, including institutionalizing it in the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) and Temple, up until the one-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ for everyone’s sin.

Yes, everyone sins (Rom. 3:23), so how do people who want to obey God but sin due to human weakness avoid their own death? As was stated briefly above, God has always provided a way for sinners to avoid death by accepting a substitute that will die in their place (Rom. 5:6-8). In the Old Testament, animal sacrifice was the example of how God would provide a substitute for sin (see commentary on Romans 3:25, “sacrifice”). Animal sacrifice graphically showed how horrible sin was because it resulted in death. It also showed that God, in His mercy, would accept a substitute to die in place of the sinner and receive the death the sinner deserved. In the Old Testament, the sinner became identified with the sacrifice by placing his hand on the head of the animal as it was being killed, and in this way it became a substitute for him and died in his place (Lev. 1:4). The animal sacrifice of the Old Testament pointed to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who was the ultimate atoning sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. Today, we become identified with Jesus Christ by confessing that Jesus is our Lord and believing that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). His sacrificial death atoned for our sins once and forever so that, in spite of our sins, we can have everlasting life.

When the Bible says the wages of sin is death, it is speaking of the ultimate end of sin, which is the death of the sinner. The Bible never says, nor implies, that death is the only consequence of sin. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but we must be careful not to take that one verse out from the context of the whole Bible. Romans 6:23 never says that the wages of sin is immediate death. Before people die in Gehenna, the lake of fire, they are punished in proportion to their sin. The Bible says in many different places that people will be repaid for what they have done on earth (cp. Job 34:11; Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8). This is one reason the Bible says that for the wicked there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). [For more on the punishment of the wicked, see commentary on Romans 2:5].

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

“in Christ Jesus.” The Christian’s life in the Age to come is due to, and in connection with, Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3.

Chapter 7
7:4. “became dead in regard to the law.” The Greek for “became dead” is thanatoo (θανατοῦ; pronounced than-a-tah'-ō), and it is the passive voice. It is literally, “put to death,” or more generally, “became dead” (The Source New Testament), or “rendered dead” (Lenski; Meyer). Thanatoo is a very strong word, and different from the word for “dead” in verses 2 and 3. It is not just that the believer “died,” but that we were put to death; we became dead to the law. How? “Through the Body of Christ.” This is a continuation of our identity with Christ, which was a huge subject in Romans 6, which states that because of our union with Christ, our identity with him, we were crucified with him and died with him. By virtue of our identity with Christ, we were “put to death” with him to the law, or otherwise stated: we became dead in regard to the law through our identify with the body of Christ.

One can see that the marriage analogy is not exactly correct, but gets us heading in the right direction. In the marriage analogy, the husband dies, which allows the woman to marry another. But in this analogy, it is not the law that dies, but it is the wife (the Christian); and it is by death then that we are freed to be married to Christ. This harkens back to Romans 6, which says that we died with Christ when he died, and thus any ties to this world are broken by our death.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

7:5. “to bear fruit to death.” The Greek can read as a purpose or result clause. The REV translates it as a purpose clause, with hopes that the reader would see that the sinful passions that work in us not only do so “to” bear fruit to death, but that they are successful in their mission and “result in” fruit to death.

7:6. “a new way.” The Greek is literally “in newness of spirit” and it is contrasted with the old way of the “letter,” or better here, the “written code.” The concept of “new way” comes from the Greek kainos, which is new in quality. The Greek language has an advantage over English because it has two completely different words for “new.” Kainos is new in quality, while neos is new in time. This verse uses kainos, so it is not a brand new spirit, but a new quality of the spiritual thing being referred to, thus a “new way.”

“of the spirit.” This genitive, “of the spirit,” has many possible meanings, all of them having some value. The most dominant meaning seems to be the genitive of character, where “spirit” defines the character of the relationship: that we have a new, “spiritual” way of living, not an old life based on the legal code. Also, however, the genitive of origin (the new way we do things originating from holy spirit) is true also, and the genitive of relation, the new way of life that involves our interrelation to the spirit, not just obeying the letter of the law.


7:8. “afforded by.” Cp. NIV. This is the preposition dia (διά) in the Greek. It is here used to indicate the means by which sin seized the opportunity to produce coveting [cp. Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. It was “through” the command that sin did this; the command was the means through which sin seized the opportunity, thus, the opportunity was “afforded by” the command.

7:10. “for life…resulted in death.” The Greek in this verse twice uses the preposition eis (εἰς), which can express both purpose and result [See Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”:]. The first instance conveys the purpose of the law (“was given for life”), the second instance conveys the result (“resulted in death”). See also commentary on Romans 5:20.
“actually.” Compare NIV translation. There is no Greek word in this verse explicitly meaning “actually,” but it is nevertheless implied. Bringing out this implicit “actually” accomplishes two things. First, there is an emphatic “this” (aute) in the Greek, literally, “the commandment for life, this resulted in death.” The translation “actually” serves to highlight the emphatic nature of the result. Second, it captures the sense of the two uses of eis, bringing into English how the purpose-result prepositions are playing off each other in Greek—intended for life but actually resulted in death.

7:11. “and through it killed me.” If we were to bring this verse into more vernacular English we might say, “For it was sin that, finding an opportunity through the commandment, completely deceived me, and used the commandment to kill me.”

7:12. “So then.” The opening question was, “Is the law sin?” Then followed the argument that made clear that it was the law that showed us right from wrong, but it was sin that used the law against us and by it, killed us. This, then, concludes the argument: “So then, the law is holy, righteous, and good; it is sin that is evil.” In fact, the reason that sin could use the commandment to kill us was that the commandment was so holy and righteous and good that we could not keep it, so we were always breaking it and bringing the penalty of “death” down upon ourselves.

“good.” See commentary on Romans 3:2.

7:13. “with the result that… with the result that.” This is the translation of hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood. We feel this should not be translated as a purpose clause, “in order that sin might be recognized…so that through the commandment.” The Greek conjunction hina can introduce a purpose clause or a result clause, and here it should be a result clause. Sin does not produce death with the purpose of being revealed for what it is. Sin does not want to be revealed, it prefers darkness and ignorance. See the commentary on Matthew 2:15, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” (Also see commentary on Rom. 5:20).

7:14. “as a slave to sin.” The Greek in this verse literally says we are “sold under sin,” but that was idiomatic for being sold as a slave to someone, whose power the slave was then under. That being said, there is no reason to introduce a literal reading that would not be understood by a modern reader, so we should translate the meaning of the idiom. The Greek word for “sold” is pipraskō (#4097 πιπράσκω), and it is used of the selling of slaves (cp. Matthew 18:25), many of whom were captured in a war, and that is the context of Romans 7:14. In 7:8, sin seized the opportunity, and in verse 11 it found an opportunity. Sin made a surprise attack on us and enslaved us. The phrase paints a picture of sin’s dominating power over us. Like slaves being sold to a master, we are under the power of sin. The root of the power of sin in our lives is the sin nature that lives in us (see commentary on Romans 7:17, “sin”).

7:15. “For I do not understand.” The Greek sentence starts with the word “for,” and introduces a reason or explanation. Many versions omit the “for,” because it is not immediately clear, especially to the modern reader, why it is there. To understand what it is communicating, we must understand that to most people it is not readily apparent that they are the slaves of “Mr. Sin.” They just think that wanting things and doing things that are bad for them is “just natural.” But it is not, it is due to our sin nature, i.e., the fact that we are slaves to Mr. Sin. If we were going to fully expand verses 14 and 15 and add the unstated thought, we might say: “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the
flesh, having been sold as a slave to sin. I know this because I do not understand my own actions, for I am not practicing what I want, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”

“understand.” (Cp. Wuest). Romans 7:15 is very hard to translate accurately because it contains three words that all more or less mean “do.” Thus the NIV translates them all as “do,” but then a lot of the meaning of the verse is lost. Here are the three words: “actions,” the Greek word katergazomai (#2716 κατεργάζοµαι), is to bring about a result by doing something. “Practice,” the Greek word prassō (#4238 πράσσω), is to behave in a certain way, do, accomplish, perform. In this context, it would refer to that which is done a certain way, or “practiced.” “Do,” the Greek word poieō (#4160 ποιέω), is the closest to our English word “do.” Because the three words are all used in the same context, they are juxtaposed with each other, bringing out the subtle differences.

7:17. “sin.” “Sin,” dwells, or lives, in us even when we are not in the act of “sinning.”

This is due to our “sin nature,” the nature we have as descendants of Adam. We have a sin nature, and it leads us to sin in our flesh. An unanswered and historically much-debated question is exactly how it came to be that everyone is under the power of sin. The term “original sin” does not occur in the Bible, but the doctrine of original sin and subsequent sin nature is clearly in the text. To summarize: the “original sin” was the sin that Adam committed that produced in him, and then all of his descendants (thus all humans) an inescapable sin nature that results in the verdict of “death” in the eyes of God. When Adam knowingly and willingly disobeyed God and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:6), his nature actually changed from being pure and blameless before God to being an impure, sinful nature. Worse, this sin nature was then somehow passed down to all his descendants; all mankind. But how did that happen? We do not know “how” the sin nature is passed from generation to generation, although there is much speculation about it. Perhaps it would be more honest just to say we are not sure. What we do know is that the Bible makes it clear that the nature of the Devil became the nature of Adam and Eve, and mankind has had a crafty nature ever since then.

In Genesis 2:25, Adam and Eve are portrayed as “naked” (Hebrew is arvm). In the next verse, Genesis 3:1, the serpent (which is the figure of speech hypocatastasis for the Devil; cp. commentary on Rev. 20:2, and Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible) is said to be more “crafty” (arvm) than any other creature. In the original Hebrew text, which had no vowel points, the root words are spelled the same: arvm (which with the vowel points can be pronounced “ah-room” or “ah-rome” depending on whether is it “crafty” or “naked”). Although many scholars say these two words are built from different trilateral roots, the spelling of the root words in Genesis are the same: ARVM; ayin, resh, vov, mem; as any good lexicon will show. Nevertheless, in Genesis 2:25 and 3:1, no one confuses them. No one thinks that in their primal state Adam and Eve were “crafty” and the serpent was “naked.” However, after Adam and Eve sinned, what meaning do we assign to arvm? In Genesis 3:7, immediately after they sinned, the Bible says their eyes were opened and they knew they were arvm. But is that naked, or crafty? Actually both. They dealt with their nakedness in verse 3:7 by covering themselves, and they displayed their craftiness in 3:8-13 by first hiding from God and then, when He confronted them, blame shifting. Adam openly blamed Eve, and although Eve told the truth when she said she had been deceived, she does not tell the “real truth,” which was
that she thought the tree would be good for her (for food and to make her wise) and so willingly ignored God and followed the serpent’s advice.

Thus, although the Bible does not say exactly “how” Adam and Eve took on the nature of the serpent, something happened when they sinned that was deeper than just “a sin.” A regular sin can be forgiven with a simple and heartfelt, “I am sorry, will you forgive me?” But what happened to Adam and Eve could not be forgiven that easily. Their sin eventually resulted in their death, and the subsequent sin and death of all of their descendants. Furthermore, their sin could not be atoned for by a confession, it could only be paid for by death. God temporarily covered people’s sin by animal sacrifice in Old Testament times, but eventually Adam’s sin had to be atoned for by the death of another perfect human being, the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

How do we know there is a “sin nature” that lives and works in all of us? Many ways. One of them is our inability to stop sinning. Countless thousands of good people have struggled with sin and tried desperately not to sin and to live blamelessly before God—all to no avail. One reason we sin, and cannot stop, is that it is our nature to sin. Paul wrote eloquently on man’s inability to do what he wanted and how we all end up doing things we do not want to do. He wrote: “I do not understand my own actions, for I am not practicing what I want, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15). Our sin and sin nature is why every human sins and needs a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we are 6000 years removed from Adam, and the reality of Adam’s life and sin in the Garden is only “head knowledge” that we learn from the Bible. However, those who lived much closer to the time of Adam were much more in touch with the cause and reality of their sin nature and inability to stop sinning. Noah and his immediate descendants knew only too well about Adam and his sin, and the subsequent sin that brought the wrath of God upon the earth in the form of the Flood. So it is not unusual that people who lived about that time would write about mankind’s inherent sinfulness. Thus an Akkadian text reads, “All humans who exist are sinful” (quoted in Anchor Bible Dictionary; “Sin: Origins and Universal Extent.” The city of Akkad was founded by Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah and grandson of Ham, and is mentioned in Genesis 10:10). Similarly, an early Sumerian wisdom text reads, “Never has a sinless child been born to its mother” (J. Prichard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts; p. 590, line 102; Sumer was a city-state that pre-dated Abraham). The inherent sinfulness of people was also mentioned by biblical characters who lived close to the time of the Flood. Eliphaz, a friend of Job, rightly said that man was “vile and corrupt” (Job 15:16), and Bildad, another friend of Job, said, “How can one born of woman be pure?” (Job 25:4). Later biblical writers also acknowledged the existence of a sin nature that made all people sinful. The Psalmist wrote that sin nature is passed on to the new human at conception (Ps. 51:5) and so the Psalmist says that the wicked, i.e., people who give in to that nature, go astray right from the womb and err from their birth (Ps. 58:3).

Another reason we know we have a sin nature and are inherently sinful before God is that if we did not have a sin nature, then a baby that died before it had a chance to sin would not need a savior to die for its sin, and so it could have everlasting life on its own merits. But the Bible makes it clear that babies must be saved too. For example, Romans 3:23 says that “all” have sinned. Not “all” except babies who have not sinned yet, but “all,” because babies are born with a sin nature and require a savior. Thankfully, the Bible says that God considers babies born to saved parents to be saved until they
reach the age they can believe in Christ on their own (1 Cor. 7:14). That is a huge argument for being saved!

Although the sin nature and its effect are mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments, it is most clearly explained in the Epistles of Paul. We have already seen that Paul wrote about the effect of the sin nature on us—that we don’t do what we want to do and end up doing things we hate to do. Romans also shows us that sin is not only seen as an act against God that people do, but is seen as an independent power that lives in people and corrupts them. Romans 6 and 7 personify “Sin” as if it is a slave-owner who exercises an inescapable influence over us (for the figure of speech “personification, see Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible). Romans 6:6 says we are slaves of Sin until we die (cp. 6:17, 20). In 6:12 and 14 we have to fight to keep from obeying Sin and being subject to its lordship. In 6:18 we were freed from Sin by virtue of being dead in Christ. In 7:5 and 8, the Law, which should have helped us live godly lives, instead simply aroused sinful and rebellious passions in us, which is due to our sin nature, which naturally tends to resist godly authority. Romans 7:11 says that Sin searched for an opportunity to kill us, and did so through the Law. Then Romans 7 covers again the reason why we seem to be so rebellious, and it turns out that it is not “I who acts this way, but sin living in me” (Rom. 7:17). So Romans clearly sets forth a doctrine that there is sin living in me and lording itself over me that is not part of “me” but yet definitely inside me and influencing me. That is the sin nature, and we all have one that we inherited from Adam. Romans tells us we will be freed from our sin nature when we die. I serve Sin in my flesh now (Rom. 7:25), and I will serve Sin until I die and get a new body (cp. 1 Cor. 15:42-57; Phil. 3:21).

Romans is also clear that sin came into the world through one person, Adam, and came to all mankind, resulting in death for everyone (Rom. 5:12). This “sin” has to refer to the sin nature, not just an act of sin, because Adam’s act of sin would not have made everyone else a sinner and doomed to death. Only a sin nature passed down from generation to generation to every human could do that. Romans continues to elucidate this truth, telling us that from one man who transgressed, sinning and condemnation to death came upon all people (Rom. 5:16-19). Why were all guilty, even those who like babies or those people born with no mental faculties? Because of the sin nature.

Galatians is another book that sets forth the difference between our sin nature and our godly nature. Galatians 5:16 and 17 shows the difference between the new godly nature a Christian gets when he is saved, called the “spirit,” and our ungodly sin nature bound up in our flesh.

The Bible does not answer many of the questions we have about original sin, such as how did Adam’s sin affect the whole human race, or, how is the sin nature passed from generation to generation? As with most subjects, there are many questions the Bible does not answer. However, that does not mean the Bible is not clear on the existence of original sin and its effect, which is everlasting death unless we are rescued by the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:24, 25).

7:21. “while I am wanting to do good.” The word desiring is a present participle showing a continual fact of wanting, from θελῶ (#2309). Translations which read, “when I want to do good” make it sound as though the wanting is a particular singular instance, a one-time wanting to do a good thing; however, this is not the case. The “law of sin” (vv. 23, 25) that Paul is discussing is the continual desire to be doing what is right,
yet having evil within, and further, often giving in to it even though it is not what one truly desires. This is the culmination of the battle described in verses 14-20.

7:22. “in accordance with the inward man.” Verses 22 and 23 are very similar to Galatians 5:17, which portrays a battle between the flesh and the spirit. Most versions miss the point of this verse. Paul is not saying “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law” (NIV), as if it was Paul’s inner man that delighted in God’s law. Rather he is saying that “I,” Paul, delight in the law of God, “according to” the inner man. The inner man is the holy spirit, the divine nature that is created in man when he gets born again. That inner man fights against the flesh (Gal. 5:17) working to produce its own godly nature in the person. Paul is saying that he (in his mind, v. 23) delights in the law, according to the inner man, i.e., even as the inner man does.

7:23. “different law.” The “different” law that is in Paul’s “members,” i.e., body, is the law of the flesh, or the fleshly nature.

7:24. “this body of death.” Figure of speech antimereia (cp. Bullinger, Figures). For emphasis, instead of “death” being an adjective, it is a noun. We might say, “angels of might” for emphasis, instead of “mighty angels.”

Chapter 8

8:1. Some older texts add the phrase “who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit,” at the end of the verse, but the early texts do not have that. The shorter reading “is strongly supported by early representatives of both the Alexandrian and the Western types of text” (Metzger, Textual Commentary).

“in union with.” See commentary on Romans 6:3.

8:2. “has set you free…” The texts vary as to whether, “I” “you” or “we” have been set free, but “Impressed by the weight of the combination of Alexandrian and Western witnesses, a majority of the Committee preferred σε [you] as the earliest attainable text” (Metzger, Textual Commentary).

8:3. “in that.” Not “because,” but “in that.” The phrase en ho (ἐν ὧν) sets the limits or defines the boundaries in which the Law is limited. The Law itself was not weak. But it was weak “in that” it was limited in us, by our flesh. If we say, “the Law could not do something because it was weakened by our flesh,” it makes it seem like the Law was weak. It was not. We were weak, so there were things that the Law could not do in regard to us humans.

“as an offering for sin.” Jesus was given as an offering for sin, the antitype of all the sacrifices for sin, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden, in which God clothed Adam and Eve with animal (probably sheep) skins.

8:4. “so that.” Purpose-result clause. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” God sent his son and condemned sin in the flesh both for the purpose of the law being fulfilled in us, and resulting in the law being fulfilled in us.

8:5. “For those who are living according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.” The Greek is very clear. Those who are of the flesh, who do not have spirit, set their minds on the things of the flesh. It is wrong to translate this verse as “Those who live…” or “Those who walk…” This verse is saying behavior follows nature.
8:6. “life.” Not everlasting life. Setting your mind on spiritual things does not keep you saved. This is the use of “life” that is life to the full, the enjoyment of life (cp. 1 Thess. 3:8). “The ‘life’ he offers speaks of full satisfaction and the exercise of one’s total abilities. Oh, to live life at its fullest and best! Many people think they are really living today, but it is a shoddy substitute for the life God wants to provide” (J. Vernon McGee, Through the Bible).

8:7. “because” (dioti) = “because” in this context. BDAG.

8:9. “if in fact the spirit of God dwells.” The eiper “does not question the fact expressed (as if some of the Romans were remiss) but emphasizes it….” (Lenski, on 8:17). The NRSV says “since,” (as does the interlinear by Brown and Comfort).

“of God.” This is a genitive of origin; it is the spirit from God.

“spirit of Christ.” This is not a different spirit than the gift of holy spirit from God in the first part of the verse. Rather it is a different name for holy spirit. The genitive “of Christ” places the emphasis in a couple different ways (Figure of Speech; amphibologia). First, since his ascension it has been Jesus Christ who has given the holy spirit, so it is a genitive of origin, “spirit from Christ.” Also, holy spirit allows us to relate to Christ: to better understand the aspects of the Christ and also to be like him. Thus “spirit of Christ” is also a genitive of relation. Second, very accurately, anyone without “spirit of Christ,” i.e., holy spirit, “this one is not his.” A Christian is one who has the seed of God born and sealed within him, and thus is a partaker of the divine nature. A person without holy spirit is not a Christian.

8:10. “life.” Not just “alive,” but “life.” The gift of holy spirit in each believer is our true life now, and our guarantee of everlasting life later.

8:11. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead,” “from among the dead.”

8:13. “continue to live.” The Greek is zaō (#2198 ζάω) which means “live,” but the verb is in the present tense, active voice, indicating an ongoing action. Just saying “live” usually communicates that someone makes a practice of living in the way described, but in this context it did not seem as clear as “continue to live” or perhaps “continually live,” or “keep on living.” While clearly expressing the present active form of the Greek does not make a dramatic difference in English in some places, often it makes a big difference. A very clear example of that occurs in the Sermon on the Mount. Although most English Bibles just say, “ask...seek...knock,” the present active form of the verb makes the following a much better translation and one that is open to much less confusion: “Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps asking receives, and he who keeps seeking finds, and to him who keeps knocking it will be opened” (Matt. 7:7, 8). Similarly, what Jesus was asking the disciples to do is much clearer in John 14:11 when the tense and voice of the verb are openly brought into English: “Keep on believing me....” In the Epistle of 1 John, the present tense, active voice can make the text much more emphatic: “If we say that we have fellowship with him but continue to walk in the darkness, we are lying, and are not living the truth. But if we continue to walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son continues to cleanse us from all sin” (1 John 1:6, 7). Here in Romans 8:13, those who continue to live in the flesh are about to die.
“about to die.” The Greek word *mellō* (§3195 μέλλω) means “to be about to; to intend to; to occur at a point in the future subsequent to another event and to be closely related to that event; to delay” (Thayer; Louw and Nida; Lenski’s translation). We decided to translate *mellō* as “about to” rather than “will” or “shall” because “about to” carries the implication of something taking place soon rather than later. “Will” and “shall” carry the implication of an event occurring at some point in time in the future whether it is sooner or later. Daniel Wallace translates the phrase, “If you live according to the flesh, you are about to die” (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*; p. 682).

This verse is not contrasting non-Christians and Christians, but Christians with other Christians. To fully grasp this, we need to look back at the context of Romans 7:14-8:18. In 7:14-25, Paul begins by informing us of his own inner struggles with his flesh. He says things such as “…I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin;” “…what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do;” “…what is good, but I cannot carry it out;” “…the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.” Paul continues by informing us that he fights against the law of sin that is still inside him, and God is the only means of victory over the law of sin.

In Romans 8:1-18, Paul continues the thought about the battle we face in the flesh, and informs the Romans that they will go through the same struggle with their sinful nature. He tells them of the two different ways in which a Christian can live, from the spirit or from the flesh, and what each choice brings. Paul informs the Romans that the only way to stand strong is through the spirit. Romans 8:13 is part of the overall context and is addressed to Christians. It is not suddenly contrasting Christians, who walk by the spirit, with non-Christians who do not and will eternally die.

Most of the commentators say that this verse refers to a Christian losing his salvation by not walking in the spirit, however, this belief conflicts with the salvation picture painted by the epistles (see the 3rd point in the commentary entry for Eph. 1:13); especially when 2 Corinthians 5:5 says that salvation is guaranteed for us. The verse does not say, “you will lose your salvation,” it simply says, “if you live according to the flesh, you are about to die.” The question is: what will die if you live in the flesh? The answer is that Christians will lose their “life,” their enthusiasm, joy, peace, and feeling of connection with God, if they live according to their fleshly desires. J. Vernon McGee writes about the “death” in this verse, stating that it relates to a person’s fellowship with God, not to his physical or eternal death: “Die to God. That is, you have no fellowship with Him. I am not talking about a theory. If you are a child of God, you know this from experience.” (McGee, *Thru the Bible*). In *Absolutely Free*, Hodges also hits upon this point by saying, “Pursue sin, warns Paul, and your existence will be an experience that accords with the deadness of your physical body.” In verse six, Paul contrasted death with “life and peace.” Throughout Romans, the phrase “life and peace” is used to mean abundant life, so it is logical that “death” must refer to the opposite of life and peace, which would be a loss of enthusiasm, peace, and the feeling of connection to God (see commentary on Rom. 8:6). Throughout the Bible, *apothnēskō* (§599 ἀποθνῄσκω), “die,” is used both metaphorically and literally. It is used to mean the death of a person (John 6:49), to represent eternal death (John 6:50), and the death of a principle (Rom. 6:2); however, it is also used to represent a mental death. In 1 Corinthians 15:31, Paul says that he dies every day; however, he is not literally dying every day. He was mentally stressed and beaten down by all the persecution he was going through. Another use of death being
in the category of the mind is Romans 7:9, which says, “Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.” Thayer’s lexicon points out that Paul is talking about being deprived of real life and sinking into spiritual torpor because of the Law. *Apothnēskō* is not the only word translated death; *thanatos* (#2288 θάνατος) is another Greek word meaning death, and it is also used in a metaphorical sense. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says that godly sorrow brings salvation, but worldly sorrow brings death. Worldly sorrow brings about depression, a lack of enthusiasm, and disconnectedness; thus, it makes your spiritual life “dead.” Thus, death is not always used to mean a literal or eternal death, and it is not used of everlasting death in this section of Romans.

**“by the spirit.”** This refers to the gift of holy spirit born inside each Christian. It has no article “the” in the Greek text. The gift of holy spirit is contrasted with the flesh. If a person lives according to (by the standards set by) the flesh, he will die, but if he lives by holy spirit he will live life to the full. This is the use of “live” that is “really live,” or “live life to the full.” (Cp. 1 Thess. 3:8.) “By spirit” is the dative; here it is an instrumental dative, there is no separate word for “by.” We can do our best to not live in the flesh by the power of our flesh, and we will fail. We would be no better off than the Israelites, who could not keep the Law. It takes our will-power, plus the power of holy spirit, to live by spirit.

**“live.”** The Greek word is *zaō* (#2198 ζάω), and it is used of literal physical life as well as mental, emotional, and spiritual life. 1 Thessalonians 3:8 says, “For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.” Paul is certainly not saying that if the believers in Thessalonica walk away from the Lord that they will become unsaved. He is using “live” for the fullness of life. Paul will be excited, happy, and energized. Proverbs 3:21-22 says that sound wisdom and discretion will be life for the soul. It is saying that wisdom and discretion will bring the fullness of life to the person, and the idea of everlasting life is included as well, but as an undertone, not a primary meaning. In Romans 8:6, “life” is connected with “peace,” so it means a life of joy and completeness.

**8:15. “adoption.”** See commentary Ephesians 1:5.

**“in connection with.”** The Greek word *en* often denotes a relationship, and that is the case here (see commentary on Rom. 3:24 for more on *en*). We are children of God. We were fathered by God when He placed in us His gift of holy spirit, and thus it is in connection with that holy spirit we can call Him “Abba,” the Aramaic for “father.” The Trinitarian theology of most theologians shapes their understanding of this verse, and thus many versions read something such as, “by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (ESV). However, the Christian does not cry “Father” by way of the Third Person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. It is unclear what that would even mean. We Christians cry “Father” out of our hearts, speaking directly to God, coming boldly before His throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). Furthermore, this verse is not using *en* in the instrumental sense, as if we called God “Father” by way of holy spirit (NASB). Christians can speak by the spirit of God, which is speaking in tongues and other spiritual utterances such as prophecy (1 Cor. 14:2-3). However, there is no reason to assume that Christians can only say “Father” by the spirit of God. We say “Father” from our hearts because God is our Father, and we became His children when we were “born” of God. That happened when we got His spiritual seed placed in us and were “born again” (1 Pet. 1:23), which happened when we confessed Jesus as our Lord and believed God raised him out from among the dead (Rom.
Thus, in connection with the gift of holy spirit we received as children of God, we can say, “Father.”

“Abba’ (Father).” The Hebrew is abba, its translation is “father,” in this context “Father” because it is referring to God. This is similar to Mark 5:41 and Galatians 4:6, where the Hebrew is given, then its translation, and the NIV and many other versions put the translation in a parenthesis. (See commentary on Galatians 4:6).

“Father.” On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God did something new: He gave spiritual birth to children for the first time. Christians are born into His family. That is why God calls Himself “Father” more than 70 times from Acts to Jude. It also explains why there is so much family terminology in the Epistles to the Christian Church. Individual Christians are God’s “children,” and “sons (a term inclusive of women)”. Christians are also “brothers” of Jesus; “heirs of God;” recipients of God’s “seed;” partakers of God’s divine “nature;” “born” and “adopted” into God’s family; able to call God “Abba” (“father”), and so forth.

It is common today to hear people say that God is the “Father” of everyone. However, that is not true in the New Testament sense, the way that “Father” is used in the Epistles to the Christian Church. Once the Church started on the Day of Pentecost, God is only the Father of those people He has fathered, those people who have been born again.

One reason that “Father” does not seem unique to the epistles to the Church (Acts-Jude) is that Jesus instructed his apostles to pray using “Father” in the Gospels, before the start of the Christian Church. That fits perfectly with one of the ways that “father” was used in the biblical culture. In the Eastern culture, “Father” was a term that was used in a variety of ways.

• In the literal and common way it is used today (Gen. 22:7).
• Of a grandfather (Gen. 28:13. The Hebrew language has no word “grandfather”).
• Of a male ancestor (Josh. 24:3).
• Of the originator of something. Thus Jabel was the “father” of tent dwellers (Gen. 4:20), Jubal was the “father” of those who play the harp and flute (Gen. 4:21), and Abraham was the “the father of all who believe” (Rom. 4:11).
• Of someone who provided protection and help (Job 29:16).
• Of someone who could counsel and give advice. Joseph was made a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8); Micah asked the wandering Levite to be a “father” to him, but the Danites wanted him to be a “father” to them (Judg. 17:10 and 18:19).
• Of someone worthy of honor and respect. Elisha called Elijah “father” (2 Kings 2:12), Naaman’s servants called him “father” (2 Kings 5:13); the king of Israel called Elisha “father” (2 Kings 6:21).

The point is that the term “father” in the Eastern culture did not have to refer to a birth father. In the Old Testament, people thought of God as a Lord to be feared and obeyed. Jesus changed people’s perception of God from that distant relationship to a more intimate relationship that allowed God to be referred to as “father.” However, Jesus never taught that one day God would be a Father in a literal sense.

On the Day of Pentecost when the Christian Church started, God “fathered” spiritual children in a literal way. Today God creates spiritual “seed,” His very nature, the gift of holy spirit, inside those people who believe, and they become “born again.”
New Birth is real, not just a nice description, and God uses three different words for it, all of which mean birth and all of which are only used of an individual being born of God during the Church Age. The three words are: 1) Anagennao (#313; ἀναγεννάω; from the Greek prefix ana, “again” or “up,” and gennaω, “to give birth.” It means to be given birth to again, or to be born again, and it occurs in 1 Peter 1:3 and 23). 2) Paliggenesia (#3824; παλιγγενεσία; from palin, “again” and genesis, “genesis” or “origin.” It means to have an origin again, a new genesis, and it occurs in Titus 3:5). 3) apokueω (#616; ἀποκυέω; from the Greek prefix apo, “away from,” and kueω, “to be pregnant.” It means “to give birth to,” and it occurs in James 1:18).

The family relationship we have with God today is totally different from the covenant relationship Israel had with God. In a covenant relationship, if a person breaks the covenant, the blessings of the covenant are forfeited, but in a family, no matter how horribly a child behaves, he or she is still a member of the family. That is why Romans 8:37-39 says that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God [see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”].

8:16. “The Spirit” refers to Jesus Christ (see commentary on Revelation 2:7 and the commentary on Romans 8:26).

“Bears witness together with.” Both Jesus Christ and the holy spirit within us bear witness that we are the children of God. Our holy spirit testifies conclusively by empowering us to speak in tongues and to operate other manifestations of the gift of holy spirit. Jesus bears witness in many ways, if we will walk with him daily and commit our lives to him and his Father. Thus, both our gift of holy spirit and “the Spirit,” Jesus bear witness that we are children of God. Lenski has, “testifies together with,” in his translation.

8:17. “share in his glory.” The verb for “will be glorified” in the phrase, “so that we will also share in his glory,” is part of a purpose-result clause in the subjunctive mood. Since the subjunctive mood frequently expresses uncertainty, the word “will” is often translated as “may.” However, the subjunctive mood, from which the “may” translation comes, does not always express uncertainty, particularly in result clauses. Here the subjunctive is due to the purpose-result clause, and hence does not necessarily express any doubt that we will be glorified with Christ. As Wallace writes, “Sometimes the subjunctive acts like a future indicative… When used in result clauses, for example, the subjunctive cannot be said to express “probability” (Grammar, p. 462). Seeing this is the case, we have rendered the verb with the future “will” to avoid mistakenly inferring doubt from the subjunctive, which grammatically is not intended here. For more on purpose-result clauses, see Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.”

8:18. “in us.” Not to us, even though the word is eis. The KJV has the sense. The glory will be revealed in us (touching us, we are participants). If it was revealed “to” us in the ordinary sense of the word, then pros, not eis, would be used. (Cp. Lenski). We are not simply onlookers, but participants in this glory, as verse 17 makes clear: “we will be glorified with him.”

8:19. “the eager anticipation of creation.” This is an attributed genitive (cp. Wallace, Exegetical Syntax). Tholuck argues that the attributive has the effect of the figure of speech personification. The coming revelation will be so great that even the expectation itself becomes a character who is expecting.
8:20. All but the last two words, “in hope” belong inside a parenthesis, and the words “in hope” go with verse 19. The creation was subjected to mataiotes, (futility) by the will of the one who subjected it. That “one” is the Devil. He is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). However, the creation is waiting in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed—in hope that the creation itself will be liberated.

8:22. “right up to this present time.” Cp. NIV. Most versions read, “until now,” but this translation can be confused to mean, “not anymore,” which is not the case. The creation is still groaning today and will continue to do so until the new creation.


8:24. “were saved.” The Greek word “saved” is sōzō (#4982 σώζω), which has a broad range of meaning but in this context means saved from death and thus given everlasting life. It is in the aorist tense, indicating the one time action in the past when our salvation was guaranteed (Lenski). “Hope” is in the dative case and has the definite article. It is not the dative of means, for we were not saved by hope, we were saved by faith. The entire context of the chapter is pointing to the future, when the world, which was “subjected to futility…because of the one [the Devil] who subjected it” (Rom. 8:20), is “freed from the bondage of corruption” (v. 21). Even Christians, “who have the first-fruits of the spirit…groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption—the redemption of our body” (v. 23). God saved us, not to live in this fallen world, but to live in Paradise. The key to understanding the verse is knowing that we are not “saved” yet. We have a promise of salvation, a guarantee of salvation, but we are not actually “saved” yet. However, we will be “in the Hope,” that is, in the future that is promised to us and therefore we hope for. Our new birth and guarantee of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14) is so strong that the Bible can say we are already saved “in the Hope.” God saved us “in the hope” of a glorious future, when “the whole creation [which] groans together and suffers the pains of childbirth together” (v. 22) will be liberated.

When it comes to salvation, the New Testament can be quite confusing for an average reader. That is due to the fact that some verses say we have already been saved (Eph. 2:8), some verses say we are being saved now (1 Cor. 1:18), and some say our salvation is future (Rom. 13:11). The word sōzō has a large range of meanings and it does not have to refer to the future salvation of the Christian. That range of meanings explains some of the variations in the use of “saved.” However, when it comes to sōzō meaning having everlasting life, we must understand the Bible has an idiomatic use of verbs in which a past tense verb is used to indicate the certainty of a future action. If something is absolutely going to happen in the future, the Bible often refers to that as if it had already occurred. One way scholars refer to this is the “prophetic perfect.” A good example of this is Jude 1:14, which in the Greek text says the Lord Jesus “came” with his holy ones. Of course, that has not happened yet, but the fact that it will happen is so certain that God can put it in the past tense (in that verse, the aorist tense). For more on the prophetic perfect, see the note on Ephesians 2:6

“what he sees.” This is a Greek idiom where “see” is put for “has.” We have a similar idiom in English and say, “Let me see it,” when we mean, “Let me have it.” Cp. NIV: “Who hopes for what he already has?”

8:26. “the Spirit” in this verse is Jesus, just as he is “the Spirit” who speaks in Revelation 2. When Jesus was resurrected, his body was still flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), but it was spiritually empowered. 1 Corinthians 15:44-46 says Jesus was raised “a
spiritual body.” When he first appeared to his disciples, they thought he was a spirit (pneuma), an incorporeal being (Luke 24:37). But Jesus told them he was not a spirit or spirit body, and had them touch his body to feel his flesh. However, because Jesus’ new body is spiritually empowered, the New Testament refers to Jesus as “the Spirit” in many different places. These include Acts 2:4; 10:19; Romans 8:16, 26, 27; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; and 22:17. (see the commentary on Revelation 2:7 and see the commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44. Also, the book, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenhheit).

Here in Romans 8, the word “Spirit” is not referring to the gift of holy spirit. The gift of holy spirit that is born inside Christians does not have a mind as this “Spirit” does (v. 27). Neither does our holy spirit intercede for us, as if it had a mind of its own. The one the New Testament says intercedes for us is Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:25). While it is true that we pray for others via our holy spirit, that is not what this verse says.

Those who say that the “Spirit” in this verse is the gift of holy spirit usually also say that the groans mentioned in the verse are speaking in tongues. However, it is the Christian who speaks in tongues, not the gift of holy spirit, but this verse clearly says that it is the “Spirit” that groans. The context makes it clear that the world is groaning (v. 22), we are groaning (v. 23) and Jesus, who loves us, is groaning. Even today Jesus is feeling the awful effects of the fallen world, and he groans because of the fallen and painful state of the world and of the pain and groaning of his Body, the Church.

“in the same way.” In the same way as what? This explains what the “groans” are. The creation groans (v. 22), we groan (v. 23) and in the same way, the Spirit, Jesus groans. Nothing in God’s creation is free from the horrific consequences of sin. As our fellow brother, and as one who loves God’s creation, Jesus groans too. This is a case where the orthodox belief in the Trinity and that God is unchanging and all-controlling causes the verse to be misunderstood. For example, Lenski wrongly writes, “…the Holy Spirit does not and cannot groan……” The truth is that God can groan, and has a myriad of other emotions as well. So does Jesus. Like Hebrews, which says that Jesus is touched with the feelings of our infirmity (Heb. 4:15), this verse tells us that Jesus, like the rest of creation, is groaning in distress about what is happening in God’s creation.

“joins in to help.” The word sunantilambanomai (συναντιλαμβάνομαι) means, to ‘take part with,’ generally, to come to the aid of, be of assistance to, help. (BDAG). The prefix “sun” means “together with.” The Spirit, Jesus, “helps” us, but he does not do it all. We also must pray if we are going to have God’s power fully manifested in our lives.

“intercedes for us.” The Greek verb is in the present tense, active voice, indicating Jesus’ ongoing prayer for us. Jesus prays for us to the Father now, just as he did when he was training his apostles on earth (Luke 22:32). Although the Greek uses the word huperentugchanō (#5241 ὑπερεντυγχάνω), which has the prefix huper, in this case it does not mean “super-intercedes, but rather is an intensifier” (cp. Lenski).

“along with groans” Jesus prays for us, and he also groans about the fallen state of the world (there is no separate word for “with” in the phrase, “with groans,” groans is in the dative case). This verse is not saying that Jesus prays “with groans,” i.e., that he prays by using groans. That misses the point and the context. The verse is saying that Jesus is praying and groaning at the same time. This often happens to any Christian that truly feels the pain of those he or she is praying for. The world groans, we groan, and Jesus groans, all of us groaning because of the fallen state of the world.
“groans.” We use “groans” rather than “groanings,” “sighs,” etc., because it can be understood as a noun, and makes the connection with v. 22 and 23 more easily.

“too deep for words.” Friberg’s Analytical Lexicon has a clear definition of the Greek word: “of something that arouses such strong emotions one cannot find words to speak of it” (cp. also BDAG). This definition is reflected in many modern translations. The groans over the ruined and enslaved state of creation are too deep to express in words.

The “groans too deep for words” are not speaking in tongues in this verse any more than the groans in verse 22 or 23 are speaking in tongues. Besides, if it were speaking in tongues, the verse would be saying that Jesus makes intercession for us by speaking in tongues, but there is no reason to think that is how Jesus prays to the Father.

8:27. “and He who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the holy ones according to the will of God.” It is important that we understand who this verse is speaking about, so we have clarified that in brackets in this commentary. “And he [God] who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit [Jesus], because he [Jesus] makes intercession for the holy ones [Christians] according to the will of God.”

“The Spirit.” The gift of holy spirit has no “mind,” so it is clear from this and from the context that “the Spirit” is Jesus (see commentary on Romans 8:26, and see commentary on Revelation 2:7).

The one who searches the hearts is God (cp. 1 Chron. 28:9, Ps. 129:33; Jer. 17:10). Although Jesus is also said to search the heart (cp. Rev. 2:23), historically, the great “Searcher of hearts” was God, which also fits in the flow of the verse. The “mind of the Spirit” does not refer to the “spiritual mind” of a Christian, but rather the mind of Jesus Christ, who is the one who makes intercession for us (Heb. 7:25).

“according to the will of God.” Jesus always does the will of God. He did while he was alive on earth, and he continues to do so.

8:28. “in all things God works for the good of those who love him.” This verse shows us that no matter how difficult a situation is, God is always trying to do His best for His people. However, historically, this verse has been used to teach that every situation, no matter how terrible, will turn out “good” if a person loves God. The reason for the different interpretations is that the way Romans 8:28 is translated and understood is due to the theology that the translator and interpreter bring to the verse from their scope of Scripture.

Grammatically, the Greek text can be translated in two different ways, with two completely different meanings. In the Greek, the phrase “all things” can be nominative (the subject) or accusative (the direct object, or used adverbially). If it is nominative, then the verse should be translated as it is in many versions, that “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God…” (KJV). This particular translation has a lot of defenders. However, it should be noted that since the time of Augustine (354-430 AD), the majority of the Christian theologians have been Augustinian/Roman Catholic/Calvinist/Reformed or of that theological persuasion. They believe that everything that happens, good or bad, is God’s will, and they translate the Greek in a way that supports that belief. R.C. H. Lenski provides a good example. When it comes to the “all things” of this verse, he comments: “all of them without exception operate together
to produce ‘good’ in the sense of what is beneficial for God’s lovers. This includes every kind of painful experience in Christian lives,…” (Lenski, Romans, p. 551).

The problem with this interpretation is that it seems very clear from life itself that everything does not work for good for those who love God. In fact, everything does not even work for good for God Himself. He wants everyone to be saved, but they will not all be; He wants people to come to a knowledge of the truth, but they all do not; He wants people to obey and love Him, but they do not. So if all things do not work together for God, how can all things work together for God’s people? All things do not work together for good just because a person loves God. Many evil things happen to those who love God. The earth is a war zone, with the forces of good fighting the forces of evil. Sometimes the Devil can hinder God’s purposes. This point is discussed at length in Don’t Blame God, by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit.

As we said above, instead of being in the nominative case, “all things” could be accusative. If that is so, it can either be the direct object (“he works all things”) or it could be understood as being adverbial (thus, “he works in everything”). Of those two choices, the adverbial use best fits the scope of Scripture that not everything that happens is God’s will, but in everything that happens God is working for the good of those who love Him. F. F. Bruce prefers the adverbial, (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans), as do a number of English translations (New English Bible, NIV, REV, and RSV; cp. Moffatt’s translation and Aramaic Peshitta New Testament Translation by Janet Magiera).

There is every reason to believe that God works for the good of His people in every situation. That is in accordance with His nature, and also with the fact that He is not in control of all things. God cannot make everything good, but in every situation He can work for the good of those who love Him. It needs to be stated that F. F. Bruce has pointed out a possible interpretation that, while long known about, does not get much attention in commentaries or versions (although the NEB is an exception). In this interpretation, the subject of “works together” (which is one word in the Greek) is “the Spirit” from the previous clause. Since the original text had no punctuation or breaks between sentences, the last phrase of verse 27 and the first part of verse 28 could be together, and the verse would read, “And he who searches the hearts [God] knows what is the mind of the Spirit [Jesus Christ], because he [Jesus] makes intercession for the holy ones according to the will of God. Now we know that in everything, he [the Spirit—Jesus Christ] cooperates for good with those who love God.…” This translation very accurately represents the meaning of the word sunergeō ( kukKσυνεργέω), which means “to engage in cooperative endeavor, work together with, assist, help” (BDAG).

There are some theologians who believe the translation “all things work together for good” is correct, yet realize how clear it is that, indeed, all things do not work together for good for those who love God. Thus, they suggest that the phrase “all things” is using “all” in its limited sense and refers to less than “all” things. However, as we will see, this weakens the statement so much it becomes almost pointless. Certainly there are times when “all” can mean “some.” This happens two ways. The first way is by seeing “all” as a synecdoche of the whole for the part (cp. Bullinger), and the second way is that the context of the verse limits the meaning of all to the “all” in the context, or “some” overall. The problem with “all things” being a synecdoche is that there is nothing in the context that demands it, and no apparent reason for the figure of speech. Usually when
“all” is used for the greater part (i.e., “most things”), the synecdoche is obvious, and the greater part can justify the use of “all.” That does not seem to be the case here. In the lives of many Christians, especially in the early years of the Church in the Roman Empire, it is likely that very many things did not work out for the good of the Christian. The same problem exists when we try to make “all” mean “some” by the context. It just does not seem to be reasonable here. The context of verse 28 is the fallen world, and that the entire world is subject to the bondage of corruption (v. 21). This bondage is so widespread the whole world is groaning in pain (v. 22), we groan in pain (v. 23) and even Jesus, the Spirit, groans in pain (v. 26). The groaning in this context is worldwide, and seems to cover the creation itself, so there is no reason to conclude that “all” is being limited here to “some” or even “most” in this section.

It seems clear that if the “all” in verse 28 actually means “some,” then the verse is saying that “some” things work together for good for those who love God, which is not really saying anything at all. After all, it is obvious that “some” things work together for good, but that is not helpful in the difficult situation in Romans 8. When people are groaning in pain (v. 23), it is not helpful to try to cheer them up by saying “Not everything is wrong, some things are good.” If a child is in pain with a stomachache, it does not really help to say that “some” things on the child’s body do not hurt. The truth is that the earth is a war zone, God is a warrior (Exod. 15:3), and the battle is raging. In this war, people are experiencing great evil and harm. The comfort of the Word is that no matter what we are going through, we can be sure of this: God is working for the good of those who love Him.

**the called ones.** The Greek word translated “called ones” is klētōs (#2822 κλητός; pronounced “clay-toss”), and it means “called.” In this sentence, “called” is an adjective used as a noun, which grammatically is referred to as a “substantive” [For more on substantives, see commentary on Matthew 6:13]. Furthermore, klētōs is referred to as a “verbal” because even though it is an adjective, it always implies an action; it is impossible to “call” or “be called” without an action having taken place.

Although most English versions translate klētōs as a verb, that is not accurate. In the New Testament Epistles, the substantive klētōs refers, not to those who have only been called, but to those who have accepted the call. Thus, it could actually be loosely translated, “the ones who have accepted the call.” R. C. H. Lenski writes:

> “[“called”]…it is a designation like agioi [holy ones], pistoi [faithful ones] (these two occur in that order in Eph. 1:1), agapētoi [beloved ones], eklektōi [chosen ones], etc. We have already noted that, while in Matt. 20:16; 22:14, klētōi is used with reference to those who simply hear God’s gospel call irrespective of whether they accept it or not, in the epistles the term is used in the pregnant sense and includes the acceptance; compare 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Pet. 2:9.”

Lenski uses the phrase “pregnant sense” to refer to the fact that the call is no longer just an invitation, it has “conceived” and been accepted: the person has accepted the call and become saved. Meyer concurs with Lenski, and writes: “Therefore, when Paul terms the Christians klētōi, it is self-evident that in their case the call has met with success (1 Cor. 1:24)…” [emphasis his]. Albert Barnes (Barnes’ Notes) writes:
“The word (klētos) is sometimes used to denote an external invitation, offer, or calling; Matt. 20:16; 22:14. But excepting in these places, it is used in the New Testament to denote those who had accepted the call, and were true Christians; Rom. 1:6, 7; 1 Cor. 1:2, 24; Rev. 17:14. It is evidently used in this sense here—to denote those who were true Christians. The connection as well as the usual meaning of the word, requires us thus to understand it” [emphasis his].

Richard Bauckham (Word Biblical Commentary: Jude) correctly identifies the phrase “the called” as “a technical term for Christians,” which it is. It is important for us to understand why, since the word “called” is effectively the noun “called ones,” and that almost every major version of the Bible translates it as a verb: “those who are called.” The reason is Calvinistic theology and the belief that God only calls those people whom He wants to be saved, and everyone that He calls will answer and get saved (the doctrine of irresistible grace). Thus, to many translators, since the “call” is irresistible, there is effectively no difference between the call and the “called ones” who accept the call: they are the same. The “call” is the guarantee that the call will be accepted; so not only does every “called one” get saved, but only the “called ones” get saved.

We wholeheartedly disagree with that Calvinist viewpoint. We believe that God actually wants “all people to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4) and has therefore called, or invited, everyone. However, not everyone chooses to answer the call and be saved. So in the New Testament Epistles, when “the called ones” refers to those people who have accepted God’s call and become saved, we should be aware that the “called ones” are saved because they made the freewill decision to answer God’s call and get saved. Romans 8:28 is an encouraging verse for every Christian: we have accepted God’s call, and God is at work on our behalf in every situation we face. [For more on “called,” see commentary on Romans 1:1].

8:29. “foreknew.” The Greek word is proginōskō (#4267 προγινώσκω) and it literally means “to know beforehand,” but it was also used idiomatically. We know that “foreknow” is being used in an idiomatic way in this verse just by reading it. If God has perfect foreknowledge, as is commonly taught, then He “foreknew” everyone, and since “those He foreknew” He predestined to be saved, that would mean that every person is going to be saved. But that is clearly not the teaching of Scripture, so what is the verse saying?

The idea of “foreknowledge of someone” is often used idiomatically to mean love and special attention. In fact, “remember,” “look” and “watch” are some of the words that are often used idiomatically and have what is sometimes called a “pregnant sense,” a meaning that is much more than just the typical meaning of the word.

So, for example, “foreknew” is being used in an idiomatic or pregnant way a few chapters later, in Romans 11:2, which says, “God did not reject his people [the Jews] whom he foreknew.” This verse is not saying that God simply knew about the Jews ahead of time. It is saying God “loved” or “paid special attention to” the Jews. Similarly, Ruth said to Boaz: “Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me” (Ruth 2:10; in the LXX the word is epiginōskō; also in Ruth 2:19). Ruth was not
saying that Boaz learned about her, but that he took care of her. Psalm 144:3 says God “takes knowledge” of man, meaning He loves him.

Places where “remembered” is used in a pregnant sense (and it can refer to God’s “remembering” for good or evil) include Genesis 8:1, where God “remembered” Noah, Genesis 19:29; 30:22; Judges 8:34; 16:28; 1 Samuel 1:19; Nehemiah 6:14; 13:31; Psalm 106:4; Hosea 8:13. The malefactor on the cross asked Jesus to “remember” him, which meant pay favorable attention to him (Luke 23:42).


“Watch” is used of much more than just watching in Matthew 25:13. There it means to keep watch and keep doing what you are supposed to be doing.

“in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” This phrase can be confusing because it can be read as if the emphasis is on “firstborn.” God did not foreknow and mark out believers “in order that” Jesus could be the “firstborn.” Jesus was the “firstborn” because he was the first to get up from the dead. The emphasis of the phrase is “among many brothers.” God foreknew and marked out people to be conformed to the image of His Son so there would be “many brothers,” many believers. If people did not believe, Christ would have been raised from the dead, but not many others would be, so Christ would have been the firstborn, but only among “a few brothers,” not “many brothers.” Thankfully, God acted in such a way that Christ will be the firstborn among many people.

8:30. “and those whom he marked out beforehand…” This verse contains the figure of speech “climax,” although it actually begins in verse 29. “Those he foreknew…he marked out. Those he marked out… he called. Those he called…he declared righteous. Those he declared righteous…he glorified. Reading the verse is like climbing a set of stairs, each step getting higher until the climax, that we are glorified” (cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*).

“glorified.” We have not been glorified yet in the full sense of which it is meant in this verse. This is an example of the prophetic perfect idiom (see commentary on Eph. 2:6). Although the verb “glorified” is in the aorist tense, not the perfect tense, the effect is the same.

8:32. “in place of us all.” From the Greek preposition huper (#5228 ὑπέρ). See Romans 5:6 commentary on “in place of the ungodly… for… in our place.”

“in addition to.” The Greek word is sun (#4862 σὺν; pronounced “soon”). Although it usually means “with” or “along with,” in some contexts it is better understood as “in addition to,” and that is the case here (BDAG). This verse is very important for our faith in God. Many people realize that God gave Jesus Christ so they could live forever, but then act as if God will not give them anything else and even withholds His blessings from them. This verse shatters that concept. How could it be that God, who gave His only Son, will not in addition to the gift of Christ, give us everything else we need?

8:35. “What.” The Greek is tis (#5101 τίς), and it is the opening word in both verses 33 (“Who will bring…”) and 34 (“Who is the one…”). It is most properly “who” in the Greek because all the nouns in the list, “tribulation, distress, persecution,” etc., are all masculine or feminine nouns. Because the nouns are masculine and feminine, saying “who” in Greek does not seem strange, but it seems very strange and can be confusing in English, which does not assign a gender to nouns. Paul is making his point have more
impact by repetition, *tis*...*tis*...*tis*. However, translating the last *tis* as “who” can confuse the English reader and make them think they do not understand what they are reading, so we felt that there was a strong argument for using “what” instead of “who.” Lenski agrees, and uses “what,” saying, “Since all of them [the nouns in the list] are neuters in English, we translate “what” (not “who”).

8:36. Quoted from Psalm 44:22.

“sheep to be slaughtered.” Literally, “sheep of slaughter.” A genitive of relation.

8:37. “No.” The Greek word *alla*, (“but”) is occasionally used as an adversative, “no.” This is the case here. The commentators are divided between those who see this as a “no,” and those who see it as a “but.” If you see it as a “but,” you are saying that we are considered sheep, “but” we conquer in our adversities. There is a problem with that. People in the OT could conquer in adversities too. So then, why the “but?”

In actuality there is a clean break between the Old Testament, in which a person could lose his salvation, and the Church, when one cannot lose his salvation. This is what is being conveyed here. The idea brought from verse 35 is “Who will separate us from the love of Christ.” Then there is a list of difficulties and hardships that have caused people to turn from God. The people of God even thought God would stand against them and consider them sheep to be slaughtered. That idea, and the idea that any Christian can be separated from salvation and the love of Christ, is shattered with a resounding “No!” Unlike what has been in the past Administrations, nothing will separate us from Christ’s love. The Christian’s salvation is secure. Some have said, “But the Christian can renounce his love for God and then lose his salvation.” That is clearly not what these verses say. They teach that “nothing” shall be able to separate a saved person from God. When a person is saved, his very nature is changed. He becomes a “new creation.” No person can undo that by a simple act of the will.

8:38. “am persuaded.” The Greek is *peithō* (#3982 πείθω; pronounced pay-thō), and it means “to be persuaded.” The verb is in the perfect tense, which normally would be translated as a past tense, but in this case the perfect tense has the sense of the present. It is an action that started in the past but is still true in the present, so “am persuaded” is the best translation. If we say, “I have been persuaded,” it could mean in English that Paul was persuaded in the past, but may not be at this present time, which is certainly not the case. *Peithō* is also in the passive voice, but this particular verb does not have an active voice, so whether the sense is active or passive must be determined from the context. Although many versions read “am convinced” (NASB; NET; NIV; NRSV), we feel that omits part of the deeper meaning of this verse. While it is true that “being convinced” is the end result of allowing oneself to be persuaded, it is important to recognize that each of us must allow himself to be persuaded by God. It is not the evidence that persuades a person. Jesus Christ did miracles that convinced some people but not others, but the miracles (evidence) were the same. The Egyptians saw the miracles that God did in Egypt, and some of them believed and even followed the Israelites out of Egypt (Exod. 12:38), while others, including Pharaoh, would not allow themselves to be persuaded by those same miracles. If the evidence does not convince people, what allows them to be persuaded? It all starts in the soil of the heart, and an honest person constantly seeks for truth, and holds that in the highest esteem. Then, if there is evidence that something he believes or is doing is not actually correct, he will leave his old ways behind and change. No wonder God exhorts us all to examine ourselves.
8:39. "the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The fullness of God’s love is “in” Christ Jesus. In this case, “in” expresses a fullness and connection that one must ponder to grasp. Romans 5:5 and 5:8 speak of the love of God, while 8:35 speaks of the love of Christ. This is the love of God that is “in Christ.” It is in Christ in the sense that it is connected in every way with Christ. The true love of God for mankind is expressed in Christ. It is impossible to fully grasp the love of God without grasping what God did in, and in connection with, Jesus Christ. The word “in” means “in connection with” Christ (see commentary on Rom. 3:24), but in this context it also means more than just that, for God worked “in” Christ to manifest His love to the world.

Chapter 9

9:1. Romans chapters 9-11 are considered the most difficult in the book of Romans. However, they do not lose sight of the central theme of Romans. For example, there are a dozen or so references to righteousness in just these three chapters, and statement that Christ is the fulfillment of the Law for everyone who believes is in the heart of the section (Rom. 10:4). These three chapters are the castle of Calvinism in the sense that without them, Calvinism and the idea of predestination does not have a powerful central presentation. And yet these chapters are misunderstood by Calvinists and indeed, by most other Christians. Part of the reason for that is they represent the “perfect storm” of what it takes to make something difficult to interpret. Biblical idioms that must be understood and articulated; Old Testament references that must be understood both as to time and meaning of the original statement; Old Testament characters that must be understood; words that are difficult to translate; and arguments that interweave and can be hard to follow.

“in Christ.” Paul is speaking the truth “in Christ,” i.e., in his connection with Jesus Christ. (cp. “in” meaning “in connection with” in the commentary on Romans 6:3).

“in connection with holy spirit.” Paul’s conscience (and love) toward the Jews had been built throughout his childhood and was in agreement with what the Lord would communicate to him via the gift of holy spirit. He hurt for the Jews, even as badly as he had been treated by them. In fact, one speaking offhand might think that Paul would be hardened toward the Jews by the mistreatment he had received from them, but his heart was soft towards them.

“holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

9:3. “Indeed.” The Greek is gar (#1063 γὰρ), and is usually translated “for” and understood to communicate a reason for something. However, that use of gar does not fit this verse, because Paul does not have continual sorrow in his heart for Israel “because” he could wish that he could be accursed in place of them. Rather, this is what some scholars refer to as the “confirmatory gar” and confirms and clarifies what has already been stated. Other examples include Mark 11:13; Galatians 5:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; James 1:7.

“could wish.” The Greek is euchomai (#2172 εὐχομαί), a verb, and the noun related to it, euche (#2171 εὑχή), means prayer in the general sense. The verb euchomai is used 7 times, and the noun euché 3 times. The semantic range of these words includes both
prayer to God and prayer in the general sense; and it can include the idea of wishing, i.e., to wish. The noun *euche* can also mean a vow, and of its three uses, twice it is used to mean vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23) and once to mean prayer (James 5:15). Here in Romans 9:3 *euuchomai* more clearly means “wish,” although the idea of prayer is not totally excluded, simply because we sometimes pray for things we wish for. It is important to realize that here in Romans 9:3 the word *euuchomai* is in the imperfect tense, and means “could wish.” Paul “could wish” to be accursed in place of his people, but he knows that is not possible, and so he does not actually ask God for that. The “could wish” expresses the willing condition of the heart, not something that is actually available to do. God gives each person free will, and people make their own choices. God honors those choices, and so must we, even when the bad choices others make cause us much pain. Christ died for everyone, and anyone who wants to can be saved through Christ. If people decide on death rather than life (cp. Deut. 30:19), although we may have great pain and may even get to the point that we “could wish” to die in the place of others, we do not act on our wish.

“*were.*” “Were” is both the singular and plural past subjunctive, and since it is controlled by “could wish,” “were” makes sense, which is why almost all versions use it. (here the imperfect verb is used to show the impossibility of this wish being fulfilled, and also to note the fact that Paul did not actually wish that he would be accursed for Israel; Cp. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*; also Lenski.) Perhaps a more literal translation would follow Young’s Literal, and say, “For I could wish, I myself, to be accursed….” However, that makes it seem like Paul was not clearly wishing that he would be accursed, but rather that he was emphasizing that he himself was the one doing the wishing.

“*in place of.*” The Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ) is typical of prepositions in that it has many different meanings and nuances, which are determined by the context. In this case, it means “in place of” or “instead of.” Wallace (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 387) concurs that in Romans 9:3 *huper* “is used in a substitutionary sense.” Paul, in a fashion similar to Moses many years before him (Exod. 32:32), would trade places with his people if he could. This is not boasting or wishful thinking on Paul’s part, or Moses’ part. These great men of God had intense passion and love for their people, and that gave them the strength and vision to endure and go forward day after day. If anything, this verse shows us that it is possible to love others more than we love ourselves, and we can give our lives in service to others. The ultimate expression of being accursed “in place of others” is the Lord Jesus Christ, who did in fact love us so much that he took our place. He became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13), and died in our place. Ministers must draw strength from God and from their love for people. If they do not, the daily fight will eventually become too much, and they will become embittered, quit, or do both. While the work of the Lord can be fun at times, it is a daily fight due to the spiritual battle and to human nature. We must love in order to endure

“*kinsmen.*” The Greek word is *suggenēs* (# 4773 συγγενής), and it means relative, kinsman. It is used eleven times in the NT, and only occurs in the Four Gospels, Acts, and Romans. In the Gospels and Acts it is used in the literal sense of a blood relative. In contrast, the four times it is used in Romans all are the wider sense of the word, and refer to “spiritual” relatives; just as fellow Christians are called “brothers” or “sisters” even if they are not related by blood. Literally, *suggenēs* means: of the same kin, akin to, related
by blood. However, it is used in a wider sense to of the same race, a fellow-countryman, or a spiritual brother or sister (Cp. Thayer). The other three “spiritual” uses are Romans 16:7, 11, and 21.

9:4. “adoption.” The initial recipients of God’s grace were the Israelites. They were the original children of Abraham and kingdom of priests, they were the first recipients of the gift of holy spirit we all enjoy today (Acts 2), they will be given the land of Israel in the resurrection (Ezekiel 37), and are the “olive tree” into which the Gentiles were grafted (Rom. 11:17-24). Thus it is not unusual that this verse would say that the “adoption” we enjoy, and in a fuller sense, the culmination of that adoption in the future kingdom, is theirs. For more on adoptions, see the note on Ephesians 1:5.

9:5. “Theirs are the fathers, and from them, according to the flesh, is the Christ.” This verse can, and has been, translated dozens of different ways. Trinitarians usually put a Trinitarian slant on it to the end that it says Christ is God. We thought the way the Revised Standard Version translated it hits the mark: “God, who is over all, be blessed forever. Amen.”

“according to the flesh.” This is a simple statement of fact, showing Christ was a true descendent of the patriarchs. It is the same phrase Paul uses two verses earlier to describe his genetic relationship to the Jews: “My brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:3). The Jews were Paul’s kinsmen “according to the flesh,” as opposed to his Christian brothers in the spirit (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament). Likewise, Christ came “from” (ek) the patriarchs according to the flesh—that is, as a direct human descendent through his mother Mary—but ultimately was “born from (ek) the holy spirit” (Matt. 1:20: γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματος ἐστιν ἁγίου). Hence, Paul here is focusing on Christ’s physical line from Abraham, given to him by his mother, rather than his fathering by God.

The parenthesis is the figure of speech parembole—a parenthesis that is thrown in for emphasis, but is a complete thought in itself (Bullinger, Figures of Speech).

9:6. “failed.” It could seem as if the Word of God had failed, because so many Israelites rejected the Messiah. However, we learn that not all “Israel,” (believers) come from “Israel” (the nation). Here we have Israel used two different ways, one to refer to those who have faith in God, and one to refer to the nation of Israel.


“children.” This is an idiomatic use of the word “children,” and it means “descendants.” Just as “father” can mean more in biblical language than just a biological father, and can also mean “ancestor,” “originator,” “mentor,” etc., so “children” does not mean biological children in this context, but descendent, as “the children of Israel” are the descendants of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel.

Although the Jews thought of themselves very highly just by virtue of the fact they were descendants of Abraham (cp. Matt. 3:9; John 8:39), if they would admit it, Abraham had eight children by three different women, so many other people shared the distinction of being physically “the children of Abraham.”


“The word; the promise.” The Greek text reads, “the word of promise,” but it is a genitive of apposition, and means, “the word, that is to say, the promise.” In this case, the word of God was the promise of God. Many of the modern versions are going with a translation similar to: “this is what the promise said,” and that meaning gets the point of
the sentence across, but with less fidelity to the original text (on the other hand, it is somewhat easier to understand, which is important). Also, the wording of the Greek is an example of how even early Christians thought of what God said as “the Word.”

9:12. “The older will serve the younger.” This phrase is quoted from Genesis 25:23. This prophecy is not about the individual people, Esau and Jacob. The prophecy refers to the countries they fathered, Jacob fathering Israel and Esau fathering the country of Edom. The prophecy is saying that Edom would serve Israel, and actually, ultimately, that people (“Esau”) would serve the Christ (“Jacob”). The prophecy is speaking of the descendants of Esau and Jacob many years after the men themselves lived.

Although most translations of Romans 9:10-12 make the “older” and “younger” out to be the individuals Jacob and Esau, we must be careful not to read that into the text, because neither Romans nor Genesis says that. For example, the HCSB reads, “though her sons had not been born.” The NASB reads, “though the twins were not yet born” (cp. NIV). The KJV reads, “the children being not yet born” (cp. NJB). All these translations make the verse to be speaking of the individual children of Rebecca, i.e., Esau and Jacob. But Adam Clarke correctly makes the point that adding a reference to the individual children is unwarranted. He writes:

As the word children is not in the text, the word nations would be more proper; for it is of nations that the apostle speaks, as the following verses show, as well as the history to which he refers.

Neither having done any good. To merit the distinction of being made the peculiar people of God; nor evil, to deserve to be left out of the covenant, and the distinguishing national blessings which it conferred; that the purpose of God according to election might stand—that such distinctions might appear to depend on nothing but God’s free choice, not of works, or any desert in the people or nations thus chosen; but of the mere purpose of him who calleth any people he pleases, to make them the depositories of his especial blessings, and thus to distinguish them from all others.

When we look at the phrase this verse is quoting from Genesis in its context there, we can see that Clarke is correct even from that standpoint. The prophecy to Rebecca that is recorded in Genesis is not about the two men, Esau and Jacob, but about the nations what would come from them. When Rebecca became pregnant, the twins inside her were so violent she sought Yahweh (the LORD) to find out what was happening. His answer is in Genesis 25:23.

Genesis 25:23

The LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

Reading the prophecy above makes it clear that it is about the “nations” and “peoples” of Israel and Edom, not about Esau and Jacob, who are not even mentioned in the verse. As to the statement, “the older will serve the younger,” the Hebrew text literally reads, “the greater will serve the less.” We can infer that the “greater” means the elder or firstborn, but we do not have to make that about the man Esau being older than Jacob. Edom was formed as a nation before Israel was, and thus the nation of Edom was older than the nation of Israel. Esau had children and became the nation of Edom, while
Jacob, though having children, went with those children into Egypt where they were enslaved. Israel did not become a nation until after the Exodus. Even so, eventually Israel became more powerful than Edom, and then “Esau” served “Jacob,” such as under the reigns of David and Solomon when Edom was subservient to Israel.

As for the individual men Esau and Jacob, Esau never served Jacob. In fact, in the twenty years that Jacob spent in Mesopotamia away from his family (Gen. 31:38, 41), Esau became so rich and powerful that when Jacob tried to give him flocks and herds as a present, he refused them, saying, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself” (Gen. 33:9). Esau had several wives and many sons (Gen. 36), and became the founder of the country of Edom, south and southeast of Israel (Gen. 36:43). Jacob also had many sons and a daughter, but instead of founding a nation like his brother Esau, which had both people and a land area, he left the country of Israel and went to Egypt, where he eventually died (Gen. 46:5–7; 49:33). The nation of Israel was being formed while the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and they got a land area many years later when Joshua conquered Israel.

9:13. “This happened.” Most people are not familiar enough with the Old Testament to realize that the prophecy in verse 12 was given about 1,700 years before Christ, while the quotation from Malachi in verse 13 is not another prophecy but rather a proof that the prophecy in verse 12 was true and had been fulfilled at least in part. Adding the italics helps readers see and remember that point.

“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” This is quoted from Malachi 1:2 and 3. As in verse 12, “Jacob” and “Esau” do not refer to the individuals, but to the countries they founded. Using the name of an individual instead of the name of the nation he founded is something we see many times in the Bible. In Genesis 9, for example, Noah’s sons Shem and Japheth, and his grandson, Canaan, were the subjects of a prophecy given by Noah. Noah’s prophecy was: “Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem” (Gen. 9:26, 27). This never happened to the individual men, Shem, Japheth, and Canaan. However, many years later those prophecies were fulfilled in those men’s descendants, in the nations of the Shemites (Israel), Japhethites (Gentiles, cp. Isa. 42:6), and Canaanites (cp. Josh. 9:27). The name “Jacob” is used for the nation of Israel many times in Scripture (cp. Num. 23:7, 10, 21, 23; 24:5; Duet. 32:9; 33:10; Ps. 14:7; 44:4; 53:6; 59:13; Isa. 27:6, 9; Jer. 10:2; Lam. 2:3; Hos. 10:1; Amos 7:5; Micah 1:5; 2:12; Nahum 2:2). Similarly, “Esau” is used for the Edomites (cp. Jer. 49:8, 10; Obad. 1:6). Israel is also called by “Isaac,” one of the names of the Fathers (cp. Amos 7:9). The nation of Egypt is called “Ham,” the man from whom the Egyptians descended (Ps. 78:51). The Amalekites and their nation are referred to by the name of their founder, “Amalek” (Num. 24:20; Deut. 25:17; Ps. 83:7). The name “Rachel” was used for her descendants (the Benjamites) who lived in the area of Jerusalem, close to Bethlehem (Matt. 2:18). Rachel was Jacob’s favorite wife who gave birth to Jacob’s youngest son, Benjamin, just outside of Bethlehem and died in childbirth (Gen. 35:16–18), so it was appropriate to say that when Herod killed all the children around Bethlehem, “Rachel” (actually, her descendants), sobbed for them.

The commentator Adam Clarke noted that “Jacob” and “Esau” actually referred to nations, and wrote: “That these words are used in a national and not in a personal sense, is evident from this: that, taken in the latter sense they are not true, for Jacob never did
exercise any power over Esau, nor was Esau ever subject to him. Jacob, on the contrary, was rather subject to Esau, and was sorely afraid of him, and...acknowledged Esau to be his lord, and himself to be his servant; see Gen. 32:4; 33:8, 13” (Clarke’s Commentary).

It is important that we realize the phrase “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,” is quoted from Malachi, who lived around 400 BC, some 1,300 years after Jacob and Esau were born, because it shows us that it is not a prophecy, but a statement of fact—proof the prophecy of verse 12 had been fulfilled. The statement was made because the obstinate and unbelieving Jews in Malachi’s time demanded of God, “How have you loved us?” (Mal. 1:2). God’s answer was that His love for the Jews should be obvious, especially when they are compared with other countries, such as Edom (Esau), and especially when we consider that Jacob and Esau were brothers. He had said the elder nation (Esau; Edom) would serve the younger (Jacob; Israel), and it happened just as God had foretold. So God’s answer to the Jews was that He loved “Jacob” (Israel), but “hated” “Esau” (Edom). Beale and Carson state it well: “The appeal to the words of Scripture as ‘having been written’ signals that God’s word to Rebecca already has come to fulfillment.” (Commentary on the New Testament).

“hated.” It is important that we understand the Semitic use of the word “hate” in this verse because it is not to be taken literally in our Western sense of the word, but is a biblical idiom meaning “love less.” The essence of the statement is, “I preferred Jacob to Esau” (cp. C. K. Barrett, Romans). Although one could make a case for that fact that by around 400 BC when the statement was made, history would support the fact that God did seem to “hate” Esau, that was due to their turning away from Him, and had nothing to do with the original prophecy made to Rebecca, which was only that the older would serve the younger. Esau was older than Jacob, and the nation of Edom was older than the nation of Israel. Nevertheless, the true meaning of the prophecy to Rebecca, and thus of direct relevance to God’s “loving” Israel and “hating” Edom, was that He chose that the Christ would come out of Israel. God could only choose one; therefore, before either was born or had done anything, the purpose of God was pleased to choose the nation from Jacob. This was a bestowing of great honor, so Esau, who did not receive this blessing, was said to be “loved less.” [For other examples of “hate” used in figurative, hyperbolic language, see: Gen. 29:30-31; Deut. 21:15-17 (KJV); Prov. 13:24; Matt. 6:24; Luke 14:26; 16:13; and John 12:25.]

That this verse is not about two people, but about two nations. C. H. Dodd writes that fact helps to explain that Romans 9 is not a reference to “God’s arbitrary predestination of particular persons to eternal happiness or misery, without any regard to their merit or demerit—a doctrine which some have most impiously fathered on God, who is the best of beings, and who cannot possibly hate, far less absolutely doom to misery, any creature that he has made: but that it means only his bestowing greater external favors, or, if you please, higher opportunities for knowing and doing their duty, upon some men, than he does upon others; and that merely according to his own wise purpose, without any regard to their merits or demerits, as having a right to confer greater or smaller degrees of perfection on whom he pleases” (C.H. Dodd, quoted in Clarke’s Commentary on Genesis 25:23). Clarke goes on to say, “The doctrine of unconditional predestination to eternal life and eternal death cannot be supported by the example of God’s dealings with Esau and Jacob, or with the Edomites and Israelites” (Clarke’s Commentary on Genesis 25:23).
It is important to realize that “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated [loved less]” is in reference to the Christ-line—the genealogy that would culminate in the birth of the Messiah (cp. v. 5). There was only one Messiah, and since there were two male descendants of Isaac, God had to choose one to be the line to the Messiah, and the other was not to be. Thus Jacob is said to be loved because his progeny led to the Messiah. The terms “loved” and “hated” need to be seen in the context of the chapter, which is the bringing forth of the Messiah. As to the individuals, Jacob and Esau themselves, a good case could be made for the fact that Esau did much better in his life than Jacob. Jacob lied to Isaac (Gen. 27:18-30) and as a result had to flee his home, and was gone for 20 years. During that time his mother died, and he spent 14 years as an indentured servant working off the dowry for the two women he married while away from his family. Not long after finally getting back home to Canaan, his sons sold his favorite son, Joseph, into slavery, and it was more than 20 more years before they were reunited. When they were, Jacob was uprooted from his home, the Promised Land, and spent his closing years in Egypt, where he finally died. In contrast, Esau stayed close to his family, married several wives, had many sons and daughters, prospered, and founded the country of Edom.

9:15. The quotation in this verse is from Exodus 33:19.

“Moses.” That Moses is mentioned by name is important, because he is a perfect contrast to Pharaoh. It is important to have both the vessel of mercy (Moses), and the vessel of destruction (Pharaoh), portrayed in the text. These two men are a concrete illustration of a major point God is making in chapters 9-11, which was that Israel was a vessel that had fitted itself to destruction and God had cut it off, while the “Israel of God,” including some Gentiles, was a vessel of mercy, that by its obedience had fitted itself to mercy.

Moses was a vessel who fitted himself to mercy, while Pharaoh was a vessel who fitted himself to destruction (cp. 9:22, 9:23). God came to both of them and made requests. His request to Moses was go back to Egypt, while his request to Pharaoh was let the People go worship. Both requests were difficult under the circumstances, and both were denied. Although we do not pay attention to it much because Moses turned out to be such a wonderful man of God, Moses refused God five times (Exod. 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13), before he finally obeyed God. Moses only seems to have obeyed then because Scripture tells us the anger of Yahweh burned against Moses (Exod. 4:14), but we are not told in the Word exactly how that anger was manifested to Moses. Under the pressure of God’s anger, Moses decided to obey, and then under the tutelage of God he became a vessel of mercy. We must not make the mistake to think that after Moses decided to obey, things went well for him. He almost died on the way back to Egypt (Exod. 4:24-26), he was over-optimistic about how fast God would deliver Israel and became angry with God (Exod. 5:22), he continued to have doubts about God fulfilling His promises (Exod. 6:10-12; 28-30), and it was very painful for him to see the oppression of Israel as the ten plagues ran their course, which took longer than six months and perhaps as long as a year. Through all this, God endured Moses’ doubt and anger and continued to work with him, and in the process of the interaction and obedience to God, Moses became a vessel of mercy.

Like Moses, Pharaoh was also asked to do something difficult: let the People go, and like Moses, he also refused. Then, as with Moses, God began to deal with Pharaoh to get him to change his mind. He sent increasingly harsh plague-warnings to Pharaoh, and
at any one of them, Pharaoh could have repented and let Israel go, especially as the plagues became very severe, and here we see the difference between Moses and Pharaoh. Moses repented when God showed His anger, while Pharaoh did not. Instead, Pharaoh became harder and harder in his heart, and cared less and less for the welfare of his people and the nation of Egypt. The interplay between God asking Pharaoh to do something that caused Pharaoh to harden his heart, and Pharaoh hardening his heart to God’s requests, is why sometimes the OT says God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and sometimes it says Pharaoh hardened it. God never actually hardened Pharaoh’s heart, but was the occasion of Pharaoh hardening it. Note how the Exodus records the interplay, using three different words for “harden.”

1. Exod. 4:21: I will make his heart strong (#2388 חazaar chazaq)
2. Exod. 7:3: I will harden Pharaoh’s heart (#7185; qashah)
3. Exod. 7:13: then Pharaoh’s heart grew strong (#2388 חazaar chazaq)
4. Exod. 7:22: and Pharaoh’s heart grew strong (#2388 חazaar chazaq)
5. Exod. 8:15: [Pharaoh] made his heart heavy (with stubbornness) (#3513 כבד kabad)
6. Exod. 8:19: and Pharaoh’s heart grew strong (#2388 חazaar chazaq)
7. Exod. 8:32: Pharaoh made his heart heavy (with stubbornness) (#3513 כבד kabad)
8. Exod. 9:12: and the Lord made the heart of Pharaoh strong (#2388 חazaar chazaq)
9. Exod. 9:35: and Pharaoh’s heart was strong (#2388 חazaar chazaq)
10. Exod. 10:1: I (God) have made his heart heavy (with stubbornness) (#3513 כבד kabad)
11. Exod. 10:20: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#2388 חazaar chazaq)
12. Exod. 10:27: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#2388 חazaar chazaq)
13. Exod. 11:10: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#2388 חazaar chazaq)
14. Exod. 14:4: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#2388 חazaar chazaq)
15. Exod. 14:8: the Lord made strong the heart of Pharaoh (#2388 חazaar chazaq)

With both Moses and Pharaoh, God had the choice not to wait for them to change and obey, and that is the meaning of God “has mercy on whom he wants, and he hardens whom he wants” (v. 18). It is God’s choice to work with, or not work with, people who disobey. Lenski writes: “Who would have known about God’s mercy toward Israel if God had struck down Pharaoh on that first day when Moses demanded Israel’s release” (Lenski, Romans, note on 9:23).

9:17. “I raised you up for this very thing.” The quotation is from Exodus 9:16. As with the other quotations in this section, it is very important that we understand them in their Old Testament context, because the meaning there is being brought into Romans. When Romans 9:17 mentions Pharaoh and quotes the Old Testament, it is assumed that we know about them from the Old Testament, which is why, for example, Romans only mentions Pharaoh by his title and does not give an explanation of who he is and what he did. Therefore we must understand Exodus to understand this section of Romans. The whole context in Exodus is God asking Pharaoh to obey, and Pharaoh refusing to obey. Then, God makes this powerful point: He did not have to give Pharaoh plague warnings, He could have wiped out Pharaoh from the beginning. Nevertheless, He chose to give increasingly severe plague warnings. God knew that if Pharaoh continued to resist Him and His plague warnings, a couple things would happen. For one thing, Pharaoh would have to become more and more hard hearted to continue to resist God, especially if he
had any compassion for his people and country, which were being ruined. For another thing, as Pharaoh resisted, God’s wrath and power were being made known more and more clearly. Let’s pay careful attention to the section of Scripture from which Paul is quoting (Exod. 9:16, which Paul is quoting, is in bold face type).

Exodus 9:13-17

13) Then the LORD said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me,
14) or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.
15) For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth.
16) But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.
17) You still set your self against my people and will not let them go.

This section of Exodus is after the sixth plague but before the seventh, and up until now the only real damage that had been done was the death of livestock. One thing we notice in these verses is God’s request that Pharaoh let Israel go. God’s request is not “fake” or disingenuous. Pharaoh could have let Israel go, but hardened himself against God (cp. v. 17). Verse 15 really helps us understand verse 16, and why Paul would quote verse 16. In verse 15 God states to Pharaoh that He could have already destroyed Pharaoh if He had wanted. This is certainly true. God did not have to give Pharaoh plague-warnings. After the Moses’ first request to let Israel go, which Pharaoh refused, God could have just put Egypt in confusion by striking Pharaoh with a lightning bolt, and causing an earthquake and flood, and ushered Israel out of Egypt in the confusion.

When a person disobeys God, it forces God to make a choice: God can stop working with the person, or He can offer more chances to obey. If He offers more choices to obey, and the person obeys, wonderful. If He offers more choices to obey, and the person becomes even more disobedient, then often this means that God’s power is shown and His name glorified, which is what happened with Pharaoh. From reading Exodus we can see the progression of events and the effect they had. The plagues became more and more severe, Pharaoh became more and more hardened and unreasonable, and God’s power was shown more and more clearly, and His name was held in higher and higher honor. God did not want the people of Egypt to be destroyed, but in light of the freewill disobedience of Pharaoh, God worked some redemptive purposes from Pharaoh’s disobedience.

It is safe to say that when Moses first came back to Egypt and told Pharaoh that Yahweh, the God of Israel, said to let the people go, Yahweh was little respected by the Egyptians, and indeed, by the other nations on earth. The Egyptians considered Him only a god of slaves. After the third plague, even Pharaoh’s magicians had to admit that the plague was “the finger of God” (Exod. 8:19). After the sixth plague, even some of Pharaoh’s officials feared Yahweh (Exod. 9:20). After the seventh plague, Pharaoh’s officials said to let the Israelites go (Exod. 10:7). After the ninth plague, Moses was highly regarded in Egypt by both Pharaoh’s officials and the Egyptians themselves.
By the time Israel left Egypt in the Exodus, Moses and the Israelites were so highly regarded that a large number of Egyptians left Egypt with them (Exod. 12:38). The nations around Israel remembered the plagues and the power of God for years. Hundreds of years later, as the period of the Judges was coming to a close and just before Saul was anointed as Israel’s first king, the Philistines were afraid of God because of what had happened in Egypt (1 Sam. 4:8).

God righteously gave Pharaoh chance after chance to repent, and as Pharaoh refused God time after time, God was able to bring a redemptive purpose out of the situation, turning the hearts of the people of Egypt, and even Pharaoh’s officials, and magnifying His name by His display of power.

From the Old Testament account of Pharaoh, we know that God presented Pharaoh with a difficult, but godly, decision: “Let my People go” (Exod. 5:1). Pharaoh could have made the righteous and freewill choice to obey God, which would have been the righteous decision to make even though it would mean his slave labor would be gone, but he chose to “harden” his heart. Because it was God who put Pharaoh in that difficult position, the text, using the common biblical idiom of permission (see explanation at Romans 9:18), says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Of course God knew how selfish and cruel Pharaoh was and that he would not let Israel go, but God gave him opportunity after opportunity (plague after plague) to change his mind. Eventually, God “made His power known” (cp. v. 22) and delivered Israel from slavery.

In Romans 9, Pharaoh is a good example for the point that God is making, which is that Israel acted just like Pharaoh. Time after time God tried to get Israel to obey, and time after time they defied Him, over time becoming harder and harder against God, and more and more defiant. They ignored the Law, then perverted it completely, they ignored the prophets, then killed the prophets, then killed God’s only Son. God reached out to them over and over, but they just responded by becoming more and more calloused toward Him.

God is using Pharaoh as a specific and parallel example to the nation of Israel. Israel, like Pharaoh, had difficult choices (obeying God’s laws is not always easy) and, like Pharaoh they rejected God, hardening their hearts against Him. Then, just as God showed his power against Pharaoh by delivering His people in spite of Egypt’s military might, God showed His wisdom and mercy against the nation of Israel by “making known the riches of His glory” (9:23) upon the true “Israel” that he had prepared beforehand, an Israel He called from both Jews and Gentiles (9:23, 24).

God never forces someone to be hardened. Everyone has freewill, and people are only hardened when they resist God and harden themselves in the process of resisting Him. It is ironic that the more God shows His love to a person, the more hardened the person has to become to ignore or defy that love. God is said to harden people, but that is only due to the Semitic idiom of permission which attributes actions to God when actually He only allows them to happen (see commentary verse 18).

Pharaoh had to become very hard indeed to resist God. Pharaoh had unrighteously enslaved Israel by using his superior military strength. God made the righteous request that Pharaoh let Israel go worship in the desert. When he said “No,” God could have simply destroyed Egypt as He had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. But God continued to warn Pharaoh with plague after plague, demonstrating His power and intention that Israel be allowed to go. Pharaoh ignored the requests to let Israel go, and ignored God’s
plague-warnings. His heart had to become harder and harder to continue to resist God. Before He acts in power, God wants to offer many warnings and chances to repent, even when it is very unlikely someone will repent. He even did things like tell Pharaoh to order that all servants and livestock be brought under shelter to not suffer damage from the plague of hail (Exod. 9:19). He does this for a number of reasons. First, people have freedom of will and there is always the chance they may change and repent even if it takes a number of warnings. Meyer correctly asserts: “The vessels of wrath are borne with in mercy and long-suffering to give them opportunity for repentance,...” (Meyer’s Commentary, note CVII on Rom. 9:23).

Second, offering many chances to repent shows that God is righteous and loving, and not a punitive or demanding God who destroys people who disobey once or twice. Third, it shows that God’s love and mercy, though great, are not endless. God can and will put an eventual end to man’s defiance, so let us not tempt God by ignoring His requests. Fourth, God’s eventual use of His power shows that He will deliver the righteous, even if it is not as quickly as those who are suffering would like, and this is a great comfort to those people who are being dominated by evil authorities. God’s people are comforted knowing that God’s promise of a new and better life are not just empty words, but many times in history He has acted to deliver His people, and He will do it again in the future. Lastly, as God’s power becomes known, other people are greatly influenced to respect Him and believe in Him.

God warned Pharaoh over and over, and warned Israel over and over. As they ignored warning after warning, and got harder and harder in their hearts, they were indeed “fitting themselves for destruction” (see commentary on 9:22).

9:18. “has mercy on whom he wants, and he hardens whom he wants.” This phrase has been seriously misunderstood. In order to understand it, there are a couple things we must understand. We must understand the context, particularly verse 17, and we must understand the Semitic “idiom of permission.”

An idiom is “a phrase or expression whose meaning cannot be understood from the ordinary meanings of the words in it.” (The World Book Dictionary, “idiom”). Idioms do not always make sense when translated into other languages or understood by different cultures, but it is important that we do our best to understand them. The “idiom of permission” is an idiom that occurs in the Hebrew language (in fact, in Semitic languages). E. W. Bullinger summarises it well in his book, Figures Of Speech Used In The Bible, “idioma,” #4: “active verbs were used...to express not the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do.” The idiom of permission is the reason why many verses in the Bible seem to attribute evil actions to God. Bullinger gives many examples, and a good one comes from Ezekiel 20:25, which says in the KJV: “Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good.” Bullinger comments: “God never gave Israel laws that were not good. What the verse is saying in idiomatic language is: ‘I permitted them to follow the wicked statutes of the surrounding nations, mentioned and forbidden in Leviticus 18:3’” (Bullinger, Figures, “idioma”).

It is widely recognized by scholars that in Semitic languages the active verb can used in a permissive sense. In The Emphasized Bible by Joseph B. Rotherham, the phrase often translated as, “I will harden his [Pharaoh’s] heart” is translated as “I will let his heart wax bold” (cp. Rotherham, Exod. 4:21). In defense of his translation, he offers the following in a footnote: “...the translation in the text above would seem fairer to the
average Occidental [Western] mind, and is thoroughly justifiable on two grounds: (1) of the known character of God, and (2) the well-attested latitude of the Semitic tongues, which are accustomed to speak of occasion as cause” (p. 87). Rotherham goes on in an appendix to say “...even positive commands are occasionally to be accepted as meaning no more than permission” and he cites Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar as more support for his translation.

Marcus Kalisch (May 16, 1828 - August 25, 1885) was a Jewish scholar who was educated at Berlin University where he studied classics, philology, and the Semitic languages, and he also studied at the Rabbinical College of Berlin. He was one of the pioneers of the critical study of the Old Testament in England. At one time he was secretary to the Chief Rabbi. In his commentary on Exodus he says:

“...the phrase ‘I will harden the heart of Pharaoh’ means ‘I know that I shall be the cause of Pharaoh’s obstinacy; my commands and wonders will be an occasion, an inducement to an increasing obduration of his heart.’

And the compassionate leniency of God, who instead of crushing the haughtiness of the refractory king with one powerful blow, first tried to reform him by various less awful punishments, and who generally announced the time of the occurrence of the plagues by the words, ‘Behold, I shall afflict tomorrow,’ in order to grant him time for reflection and repentance; this clemency on the part of God increased Pharaoh’s refractoriness; it was to him a cause of prolonged and renewed resistance.” (quoted in the Appendix of Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible).

To be clear then, we see that the Semitic idiom of permission is when a person reacts to something God has said or done (such as Pharaoh hardening his heart in reaction to God asking him to let Israel go), but the idiomatic way of expressing that reaction is to say that God caused the hardening. Although God is said to cause the thought or action, in actual fact God does not override the freewill of man, and he neither causes people to sin, nor gives His permission for them to do so.

When the idiom of permission is used, we readers must search for the connection between God and the action or reaction (often a sin someone is committing), and sometimes that connection is very subtle. It has been said that one cannot “break” God’s laws, but only breaks himself against them, because they are “immovable objects.” God has set up the universe to function according to many laws and principles, which He said were “very good” (Gen. 1:31). In reality, God’s laws cannot be broken, and that is true in both the physical and spiritual world. A farmer who disregards God’s principles of sowing and reaping will not prosper, and via the biblical idiom of permission we might read that “God ruined him.” Similarly, a rock climber who disregards the worn-out state of his safety rope may fall to his death because of the God’s law of gravity if his rope breaks, and in the Semitic idiom it might be said that, “God killed that careless person.” Is God to blame because He set these laws in place? Of course not. [For more on the idiom of permission, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, Don’t Blame God, Chapter 5, “God Is Good (with Figures)”].

9:19. “For who has ever withstood his purposes.” This phrase has to be properly understood if we are to understand this verse, the context, and how God works in our lives. First, this is a statement made by, “you” (“you will then say to me”) and the “you” is shown in verse 20 to be someone who argues with God, not someone who has faith in
God. Second, it gives the wrong impression to translate this verse, “For who can resist His will” (HCSB, ESV, NRSV), because, even as we see in this chapter, let alone the whole Bible, many people seem to resist the will of God and say “No” to God. In this chapter alone, the Jews resisted the will of God, and the Bible is full of examples of people who disregard and disobey God, and do not do what He wants them to do. So what is this verse saying?

The Greek word most English versions translate as “will” is boulēma (βούλημα), which refers to a plan, purpose, or intention. The BDAG lexicon translates it, “intention.” It is not the common word translated “will,” which is thelō (θέλω), which refers to what we “want” or “desire.” This verse is not saying, “Who has resisted the will of God and done something that God did not want them to do?” Many people do things God does not want them to do. This verse is saying, “Who has successfully withstood the plans and purposes of God?” The answer, of course, is no one. God is so resourceful and persistent that no one successfully withstands His purposes. God adjusts and adapts, and will always find a way to win in the end, even sometimes, as we see with Pharaoh, using the evil people do to show His character and magnify His glory.

The word “withstood” is the verb anthistēmi (ἀνθίστημι), and it is in the perfect tense, active voice. Wuest (Word Studies) writes: “The use of the perfect tense here speaks of a process of standing against God’s will which has come to a finished end, and the resulting state, that of a confirmed and permanent stand against God.” Vincent (Word Studies) writes: “The idea is the result rather than the process of resistance.” In other words, people can resist God and disobey Him, but because God always figures out a way to win in the end, no one can successfully withstand His purposes and intentions to the end that they are not accomplished.

We are now in a position to see what this verse is saying. Unbelievers and God-haters will accuse God of injustice, saying that because no one can successfully win against the plans and purposes of God, He should not find fault with people who sin. But let’s take the real-life example of Pharaoh and see if that is correct thinking. Although it is true that God found a way to show His power and elevate His name through Pharaoh, God did not want all that happened in Egypt to happen, even though Israel was released in the end.

When God first told Pharaoh to let Israel go into the wilderness (Exod. 5:1), there had been no plagues and no destruction or death of animals or people. Yet God’s words were not disingenuous or somehow fake—He wanted Israel to be able to go. Had Pharaoh released Israel at the command of God, God would still have been glorified—God always finds ways to bless people and glorify His name when people obey Him. Furthermore, had Pharaoh obeyed God and let Israel go before even the first plague, he would have continued to rule the most powerful nation on earth instead of destroying his nation and dying in a battle against God (although it does not make good movie script, and many movies show Pharaoh surviving after the Exodus, actually he died in the water along with much of his army).

Instead of obeying God and letting Israel go, Pharaoh hardened Himself against God. Our loving God then sent increasingly severe plague warnings to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh stood against Him time after time and ignored the destruction and pain his hard-heartedness was causing. In the end, Pharaoh did not successfully withstand the purpose of God, and Israel left Egypt. But can we say, like the unnamed antagonist here in
Romans 9:19, that because God’s purposes were eventually completed, that God should not find fault? Was Pharaoh, for example, without fault? Of course not! Pharaoh, and everyone else who defies God and sins against God, is at fault, even if God can find ways to bring glory to Himself and His people from their sinful actions.

9:20. “argue.” The Greek word is ἀνταποκρινομαι (antapokrinomai), and it means to reply or answer back, but because the verb is in the present tense, it portrays more of a back and forth dialogue, or as is clear from the context, an argument.

“Why did you make me like this?” This question is linked to both the previous verse and the next verse, and we must remember that it is spoken by the man who is arguing with God. His accusation is essentially, “Why did you make me hard like this, into a vessel of dishonor?” The fact that the Greek word translated “make” is in the aorist tense (a one-time action or “snapshot” of the situation) provides a key to understanding this verse. The verse is viewing the vessel as a finished product, not focusing on the process of making it, although the sinner could question that also. First, we must remember that God only “made,” i.e., completed the process of making, the person into a vessel of dishonor (v. 21) because of the person’s freewill responses. The perfect example of that is Pharaoh, who is mentioned right in this chapter. Although God used the person’s sinful behavior in a way that ultimately was redemptive and benefited Him in some way, it was the person’s own freewill decisions and sinful behavior that were responsible for the way God acted in relation to the person. Second, it is far too typical that, like the argumentative person in this verse, when the purposes of God win the day and the sinner is broken and defeated, he (or she) takes no responsibility for his actions, but blames God for what has happened, questioning God just like this verse says, “Why did YOU [God] make me this way?” A humble and honest question would be: “Why did I defy God the way I did and become so hardhearted?” God responded to the person’s sins in a redemptive manner, but that redemption destroys sinners.

When a person, like Pharaoh, is given the opportunity to obey God but defies Him, it is then God’s prerogative as to how to continue to work with the person or to end the relationship altogether. In that sense, God really is the potter and we are the clay. Like the example of the clay in Jeremiah 18:1-4, God can have a purpose for a person, but if that person will not cooperate then God can work to make something else of his life, or He can stop working with the person altogether.

The Bible is full of this interplay between God and people, although many times it is not clearly written. God worked with Moses to get him to go to Egypt and lead the Israelites. Moses refused God five times (Exod. 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13), but finally gave in to God. God had the choice not to wait for Moses to obey. He could have delivered Israel some other way when Moses refused the first time, but God chose to keep asking Moses, and eventually Moses did obey God and go to Egypt. The Bible does not say what God would have done had Moses continued to refuse, but we can be sure God would have found a way to deliver Israel from slavery.

God asked Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites (Judg. 6:14), but Gideon was not confident, and in the next months God and Gideon went back and forth, asking things of each other, testing each other, but God kept working with Gideon, slowly making him into a vessel of honor as Gideon kept struggling to obey God. King Saul behaved differently. He never truly obeyed God. God installed him as king, but character flaws soon began to show themselves. When Saul disobeyed concerning the Amalekites,
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God made the decision to take the kingdom from him, and Samuel brought the message to him, saying, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today” (1 Sam. 15:28). Unlike Gideon, who had problems but overcame them and became a vessel of honor, Saul never did fully obey God, and his continual disobedience resulted in him becoming a vessel of dishonor, even trying to murder David and eventually dying in a war with the Philistines.

Solomon followed King Saul’s footsteps. He had the potential to be a vessel of great honor, but later in his life began to ignore the Word of God. He tried to pay part of the debt for building the Temple by giving away towns in Israel (1 Kings 9:10-13). He broke commandment after commandment. In defiance of God’s commands in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, he amassed gold and horses, bought horses from Egypt, and took many wives. He also married pagan women and built places of worship for many pagan gods (1 Kings 11:7, 8). He did evil in God’s sight (1 Kings 11:6). God continued to warn Solomon as he traveled on his path of sin (1 Kings 11:9, 10), but as with Pharaoh, those warnings only further hardened Solomon. God’s warnings, and Solomon’s defiance of them, were forming him into a vessel of dishonor. Eventually, God stopped trying to reform Solomon and said He would tear the kingdom from him (1 Kings 11:11), which He did.

The Bible does have some examples of God apparently not offering people “chances” to change and repent, but dealing with their sin right on the spot. One example is the soldiers of Ahaziah, who came to arrest Elijah. Fire from heaven burned them up right then, with no “second chances” (2 Kings 1:10). Examples like that in the Word of God show us that while God is slow to anger and abounding in love (Num. 14:18), He is not one to tempt or toy with. It is always God prerogative to deal with sin and disobedience immediately or offer chances for repentance.

Over and over the Bible shows how God works with people in relation to the freewill decisions they make, but ultimately whether a person is a vessel to honor or a vessel to dishonor is the person’s choice. At this point we should remind ourselves that the focal point of this chapter is Israel, and God’s dealings with them and the true “Israel,” the Israel of God (cp. v. 6). God came to the nation of Israel over and over again, but they were stubborn and defiant. They ignored and killed His prophets, and eventually killed His only Son. It was God’s prerogative to work with them the way He did century after century as they became a vessel to dishonor instead of cutting them off early in their history and working with the Gentiles. It was also His prerogative to “cut them off” when He did and deal with the Gentiles (9:24, 30; 11:13-18).

That it is a person’s freewill decisions that are primarily responsible for him being either a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor is a point that is also made in 2 Timothy 2:20-22. Those verses point out that every house has some vessels that are honorable and some that are dishonorable. Here in Romans we see that vessels of dishonor make the freewill choice to be sinful, stubborn, and disobedient. The dishonorable vessels in Timothy are dishonorable for those same reasons. So Timothy says, “if anyone cleanses himself from these [dishonorable vessels], he will be a vessel for honorable use.” Verse 22 then states: “So flee youthful passions and diligently pursue righteousness....” We need to realize that whether a person is a vessel of honor or dishonor is up to that person. God starts with the “same lump” of clay (v. 21), and works with it as it will allow Him, deciding how to move forward with it to accomplish His redemptive purposes.
9:21. “into a vessel of honor and another into dishonor?” The translation and understanding of this phrase is vital to the understanding of this whole chapter, and it hinges upon the translation of Greek preposition *eis* (#1519 εἰς) and our understanding of vessels of honor and dishonor.

The Greek word translated “dishonor” is *atimia* (#819 ἀτιµία). The word *atimia* is from the Greek word *timē* (#5092 τιµή; pronounced tee-may) with the prefix “a” (“not”) in front, making it literally, “not honorable.” Although *atimia* usually means “dishonor,” it can carry a neutral sense and simply mean, “not honorable,” or “ordinary,” which explains the translations such as “common” (NRSV, NASB, NIV), or ordinary” (NET, NJB, NRSV). However, we believe “ordinary” and “common” are not the correct translations of *atimia* in this context. The context is not about “honorable” and “ordinary” vessels. The chapter is about Israel, and God uses the example of Pharaoh, illustrating through him how some vessels are honorable, having done the will of God, and some are dishonorable, having defied God. When we insert the concept of “common” or “ordinary” into the chapter, we cause confusion because there is nothing in the chapter to connect it with. Furthermore, in the end, no vessel is “ordinary.” People either believe and obey God and are honorable vessels, or they disobey God and are dishonorable vessels. Even believers whom we might think have no special honor, have special honor given to them by God (1 Cor. 12:23-26), so every person who believes and obeys God is a vessel of honor, while people who ignore God or disobey Him are vessels of dishonor.

We readily understand that our loving God makes some vessels into honorable vessels, but we need to understand what God means when He says that some vessels are made into dishonorable vessels. As with other words and phrases in this section of Romans, a knowledge of the context and biblical idiom is important (see 9:17). God never forces people to do dishonorable things, but God does place people in situations that reveal their true nature and intentions. As was pointed out in the commentary on verses 18 and 20, God never “hardens” people by taking their freewill from them or forcing them to make an evil decision. However, He does harden them by actively loving them over and over again, each time putting them in the position to refuse Him. Although a person could change from rebellious to repentant at any time, as they continue in rebellion and refuse God over and over, they become harder and more calloused as a result. It is in that sense that God “makes” some people into dishonorable vessels, letting them act dishonorably in response to His actions towards them.

It is God’s prerogative whether or not to keep reaching out to someone who is resistant and “make” them harder and harder, acting in a dishonorable way and becoming themselves dishonorable. We get a clearer picture of how a person becomes an honorable vessel or a dishonorable one by studying people in the Word. For example, it seemed that Solomon was destined for great honor, but ended his life by over and over again doing evil in the eyes of God (1 Kings 11:6, cp. note Rom. 9:20). The same could be said for many people who had the potential and positioning to be great, but turned away from God.

The other thing in the phrase, “into a vessel of honor and another into dishonor,” that we must understand if we are to understand both this verse and the chapter, is the Greek preposition *eis* (#1519 εἰς). Greek prepositions typically have many meanings, and the meaning we assign to *eis* in this verse make a huge difference in how we understand this section of Scripture, because *eis* can indicate purpose or it can refer to a destination.
or end result. If *eis* in this verse refers to purpose, then God makes people to be good or evil—it is just part of His plan. This verse would then be saying that God’s purpose in making people was to make some for honorable uses and other people for dishonorable uses, doing as He wished with no reference to any action or desire of the person.

In contrast to understanding *eis* as meaning purpose, *eis* can refer to a destination or end result. Then the verse would be saying that the end result of God’s working with people is that some of them are honorable vessels and some are dishonorable vessels. They reach their place of honor or dishonor by the process of interacting with God. This is the position we believe is correct.

Calvinists and others who think that God predestinates people to be saved or damned prefer the translation, “for,” because in it they see “honorable” or “dishonorable” as God’s purpose for people. They assert God has a plan for people, to save them or damn them, and He does so without reference to anything the people want or do. This position is well expressed in many commentaries, but a statement by Hendriksen says it well: “God, our Maker, has the right...to elect some to everlasting life, and to allow others to remain in the abyss of wretchedness [i.e., be damned to eternal hell].” This seemingly unfair and unloving treatment of people is defended by Calvinists and others who believe in predestination. They say that since everyone is a sinner, it is not unfair of God to damn anyone because everyone deserves to be damned, and when God decides to save some people just because He wants to—well, that is undeserved grace for them (cp. James Boice, *Romans*; 9:19-21).

R. C. H. Lenski, who uses the word “for” in his translation but does not believe that God saves or damns men without respect to their freewill decisions, points out that “for” can indicate the finished character of the vessel, and not just “their purpose.” He writes: “A vessel for honor—for dishonor, designates the character of each, designates the finished product, the one being fit of honor, the other fit for dishonor, the one fit for heaven, the other fit only for hell; it certainly does not designate only some circumstance or condition that existed when the vessels were made.” While we agree with Lenski that “for” can refer to the ultimate purpose of God and the state of the finished product, we think the most natural reading of “for” in English refers to purpose, and therefore most people reading the word “for” will think that God’s original purpose for making the vessel was so it would be honorable or dishonorable. The truth is that people act of their freewill and are on a path to be a certain way, and God works His purposes both with, and around, the person. God never designs anyone to be evil or unsaved and have no choice about it, but there are times when He can and does act in such a way that His power and glory are more clearly seen against the backdrop of evil. Furthermore, as we saw in verse 18, God can continue to interact with a person who defies Him and who becomes more and more calloused as the interactions and rejections continue, and over time the person forms into a vessel of dishonor.

With that understanding, we can see the great value in translating the Greek word *eis* as “into,” particularly since in this verse it is conjoined with “made” (*poieō; #4160 ποιέω*), and we are used to materials being “made into” something. God, the potter, has the right, the authority (*exousia; #1849 ἔξουσία*), to continue to work with people, offering them opportunities to repent, interacting with them, and allowing them to be made into vessels of honor or vessels of dishonor, knowing full well that if they become vessels of dishonor He has the ability to bring something redemptive out of their evil.
9:22. “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured...” The key to understanding this verse is the word “endured,” because it shows the pain that evil causes and that even though God, in all His resourcefulness, can bring some redemptive things out of evil, He still has to endure the evil that people (and demons) do. This verse is not saying that God wants to show His wrath and power so therefore He forces people to do evil, or refuses to deliver them from their sin, just so He can then punish them publicly. God is not a God of wrath, however, wrath is part of His justice and He can and will use it on some occasions when it is deserved.

If God caused people to do evil, or if He refused to help them get out of their sin and evil ways, then He cannot be said to “endure” evil any more than a sadist “endures” the pain he is causing another person. God endures evil because it is the result of people’s freewill decisions.

As we have seen from the previous verses and the scope of Scripture, God’s first desire is that people would obey Him so He can bless them. However, if someone is determined to do evil, then God is challenged with how to bring something redemptive out of that evil. Once a person is evil and defiant towards God, God then has to choose how He will deal with the person. He can respond to the person immediately as He did with Miriam when she complained about Moses and was immediately smitten with leprosy (Num. 12:10). In that case, there was no, “Do not do that again” warning from God. She sinned egregiously, and God responded publicly with power and wrath, no doubt in part to protect Moses and the national unity of Israel.

In contrast, when Pharaoh sinned and defied God, instead of destroying him with one hard-hitting plague, He offered him ten plague-warnings. God “endured” Pharaoh and the evil he was doing to people, showing mercy to Pharaoh and giving him chances to repent and save himself and his people, but also knowing that because He was enduring Pharaoh’s continued defiance, when He finally decided to show His wrath and power, He could do it in a way that would accomplish some redemptive purposes. It is from the scope of Scripture we see that God does not ever want His wrath to be a “first response,” because His nature is love and He wants people to repent, obey, and be in a relationship with Him, but there are times when He wants to show His wrath and His power because there is profit in it. God would never show His wrath without a reason. He is never wrathful without just cause.

That people have free will often puts God in a dilemma. If He gives people warnings and chances to repent and change, and they do repent, then His longsuffering and endurance had great profit. However, if the person refuses to change and repent, then the warnings simply force people to go on defying God, which only makes them more calloused and hard-hearted over time. Yet God, being loving and merciful, tends to give people chance after chance to repent, knowing that He can and will find a way to bring some redemptive purpose out of the evil people do.

There are a number of redemptive aspects to God’s showing His power and wrath. For one thing, it often puts an end to the evil being done in that situation. For example, both the Flood and the fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah put an end to the evil those people were doing. A reason that one of God’s laws is the death penalty is that it puts an end to the activities of evil people (cp. Exod. 21:12-17; Lev. 24:17-22; Num. 35:16-31; Deut. 19:1-11. Cp. John Schoenheit, *The Death Penalty*).
Another redemptive benefit of God’s wrath is that it shows people that God’s patience and mercy are not endless. God can and will put an eventual end to man’s defiance, and His use of wrath makes that point (cp. 2 Pet. 2:6). Furthermore, God’s use of power and wrath being employed against the wicked is a great comfort, and can even be a source of joy, to those people who are being dominated by evil authorities. As the Psalm says, “The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked” (Ps. 58:10. Cp. Deut. 32:43; Job 22:19; Ps. 52:4-7; Jer. 11:20; 20:11-13; cp. the commentary on Rom. 9:18). These reasons help explain why Scripture would say that God is “desiring to show his wrath and to make his power known.” It is not as if God “desires” to show His wrath, but rather, given how horrible evil would be if it were allowed to continue unchecked, God “desires” to bring it to an end by His wrath and power.

“fitting themselves.” The Greek verb is katartizō (#2675 καταρτίζω) and means to cause to be in a condition to function well, thus, to put in order or restore; or to prepare, make, create, equip, or outfit. For example, the Greeks used it of the fitting together of bones in the body and outfitting or equipping a ship or an army. In this verse the verb is a participle, and the form can be either passive voice or middle voice. Whether this verb is in the passive or middle voice makes all the difference in the world in this particular verse, and is central to the debate about freewill or predestination. If katartizō is in the passive voice, it means the vessels were fitted by an outside force that acted on them. In this case, God would have made the vessels to be vessels of dishonor. If, on the other hand, the verb katartizō is in the middle voice, it means the people fitted themselves for destruction. In that case the verb means the vessels caused their own problem and deserve the destruction they will ultimately receive, and that is what many commentators say this verse is saying. Meyer, although he himself disagrees, lists many such commentators. Hendricksen notes that it is possible “…that here, in verse 22, the people themselves—in co-operation with Satan—were the active agents.” Adam Clarke notes: “…they had fitted themselves for that destruction which the wrath, the vindictive justice of God, inflicted.” John Bengal did not go so far as to say that the verb should be understood to be in the middle voice and that the people fitted themselves, but notes that even if the people “were fitted” (passive voice) to destruction, the text does not say that God fitted the people for destruction. He rather states the verse “is only stating in what condition God finds them, when He brings upon them His wrath.” Lenski also believes the verb is passive, not middle, but notes that in the Greek text, “a perfect passive participle is used: ‘fitted for destruction,’ which hides the agent who, therefore, is not God—Satan fitted them.” The words of Bengal and Lenski should be important to those people who insist this text supports predestination, because even if the verb is in the passive voice (and we do not think it is), it is an assumption to say that God did the fitting. The Greek text does not say that.

Although Meyer and some commentators assert that “fitted themselves” is opposed to the context, we disagree. The verse clearly says that God “endured” with “much longsuffering” these vessels. But it hardly makes sense that God would have to endure these people with longsuffering if He is the one fitting the vessels for destruction. In that case, the people’s obstinace and eventual destruction would have been His plan and His work, and He would be accomplishing it, not enduring it.
As with Pharaoh, God is working His purposes of love and mercy, which cause a hardening in obstinate people—they harden themselves rather than yield and obey—and God endures this hardening rather than bringing immediate judgment because He wants everyone to have an opportunity for salvation (2 Pet. 3:9). Adam Clarke writes: “...He [God] had endured their obstinate rebellion with much long-suffering; which is a most absolute proof that the hardening of their hearts, and their ultimate punishment, were the consequences of their obstinate refusal of His grace and abuse of His goodness.”

“destruction.” The Greek word is ἀπώλεια (apôleia; pronounced ah-pô'-lay-ah), and it means “the destruction that one experiences; annihilation” (BDAG). Jesus said that the road is narrow and the gate small that leads to “life,” while the broad road and broad gate leads to “destruction” (ἀπώλεια). Philippians 3:19 and 2 Peter 3:7 say the end of ungodly men and the enemies of God is “destruction,” and Hebrews 10:39 says that believing results in the “saving of the soul” (KJV), while unbelief results in destruction. When Romans 9:22 uses this word, it shows that there is more in mind than just the physical death of the sinner, but his “destruction” in the lake of fire (see commentary; Rev. 20:10). This is confirmed by the contrasting phrase “for glory” in verse 23, which also refers to more than just glory we experience in this life, but everlasting glory as well.

9:23. “lavished upon.” The Greek preposition ἐπί (ἐπί; pronounced ep-e’i) generally does not mean “to” but “on” or “upon,” and it does not mean “to” here, as if God was showing his glory “to” Israel so they could see it. God was showing his glory that was lavished upon Israel, the glory they participated in, and indeed, the glory was in part shown by what they themselves experienced.

In Romans 9:22 and its commentary we saw reasons why God endured the behavior of the vessels of wrath. One of them was so that the obedient people of God would see, and draw strength and joy from seeing, the power of God in operation. That is the main point of this verse. God “endured,” “in order to make known the riches of his glory lavished upon the vessels of mercy.” The plagues in Egypt are just an example of this, because it happens all the time all over the world as evil tries to dominate good. As the plagues progressed and while Pharaoh was hardening himself against God, Israel experienced God’s mercy. During the fifth plague, the death of livestock, none of Israel’s animals died (Exod. 9:4-6). During the seventh plague, the plague of hail, no hail fell in Goshen where the Israelites lived (Exod. 9:26). During the ninth plague, the darkness that could be felt, the Israelite homes had light (Exod. 10:23). During the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, Israel was protected when they obeyed, while in Egypt “there was not a house without someone dead” (Exod. 12:30). The mercy of God continued even after that as Yahweh guided and protected Israel with a pillar of fire and then by dividing the Sea, which opened for Israel but closed upon, and destroyed, the Egyptians. It is never easy for believers to endure the evil that wicked people do, but through those difficult times God’s mercy is often profoundly manifested.

“prepared beforehand for glory.” The Greek word translated “prepared beforehand” is proetoimazó (προετοιμάζω; pronounced, pro-et-oy-maad'-zô), and it means to “prepare beforehand, make ready ahead of time,” and it is only used here and in Ephesians 2:10. God is preparing us now, ahead of time, for the eternal glory which will surely come.

Since these vessels of mercy are contrasted to the vessels of wrath who fitted themselves to destruction (a process we saw modeled by Pharaoh), we need to ask why
these vessels are “prepared beforehand” for glory. The answer is not that God predestines them to glory and they have no choice about it. That does not fit with the scope of Scripture or this context, nor does it properly contrast with the vessels of wrath who fitted themselves to destruction. The answer lies in part in that “for glory” (eis doxan; εἰς δόξαν) is not as much referring to the immediate glory of Israel being rescued from Egypt (although that is glorious too), but to the ultimate glory of salvation and everlasting life, which is a future event. This is confirmed by the contrast of the glory of the vessels of mercy to the “destruction” of sinners in verse 22. It is even more effectively confirmed by the inclusion of “us” and “the Gentiles” in verse 24, and the description in verses 25-31 of the righteousness (“salvation”) of the Gentiles. Lenski agrees, and says the glory being referred to is “the glory of heaven.” Meyer asserts that the glory is “the everlasting Messianic glory.”

Reading the full phrase from 9:23 and 24, without the verse break in the middle to distract us, is helpful. The subject is “the vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, including us, whom he called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles.” Now it is easy to see that the “vessels of mercy” did not just include Israel in Egypt who escaped from Pharaoh, but also all the vessels who escaped “destruction” in the lake of fire and are prepared beforehand for glory. Why does God have to prepare us “beforehand” for the glory? Because we live now, but the glory we will participate in comes later.

It is important to note that in verse 22, people “fitted themselves” for destruction, while in verse 23 God “prepared beforehand” the vessels of mercy. The two different Greek words meaning roughly “fitted,” and “prepared,” can be close in meaning in some contexts, but here the emphasis is very different. God does not want, nor plan for, anyone to be unsaved and miss the blessing of everlasting life. People who go “to destruction” do so because they “fit,” or “outfit” themselves for it. In contrast, God has planned and prepared for everyone to have everlasting life, and helps us achieve that as we obey Him. It is safe to say that no one would get everlasting life without God’s help and God’s doing the work of salvation. Also, in the end, no dead person can raise themselves from the grave or grant themselves everlasting life, and it is God who brings the Kingdom on earth. God does all that in fulfillment of His promises, and thus He is the one who has prepared people beforehand for everlasting life, which is future.

9:27. Quoted from Isaiah 10:22.

“on behalf of Israel.” In verses 25 and 26, Hosea spoke about the Gentiles. But Israel is not left out. Isaiah cries out on their behalf (the Greek is huper, “on behalf of,” not really “concerning” in this instance). Isaiah states a warning that any Israelite should have taken seriously, and repented of any evil ways to become part of the remnant who will be saved.

“fulfill his Word.” The Greek is literally, “do [the] Word,” but that seems to be unclear to the modern reader. The meaning is that God will do what He said, thus “fulfill” His Word. God had said many times that He will destroy the evildoer, but save the meek who believe in Him.
9:33. Quoted from Isaiah 28:16

“See!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“but.” The Greek reads kai, normally “and,” but here it is showing that the two parts of the quotation are connected, but we can do that more naturally with “but” than “and yet.”

“put to shame.” The verb is kataischunō (#2617 καταισχύνω). Notably, it is in the passive voice, meaning the action of shaming comes upon the person, rather than describing their internal state. It is not “be ashamed,” which would imply these feelings rise up in the person himself; rather, the shaming comes upon him from the outside, he is “put to shame.” We must understand that ancient Rome, as well as Palestine, was an honor and shame based society. There were elaborate social norms and expectations placed upon the members of society, and when they were broken, the society induced shaming as a means of social control.

Chapter 10

10:4. “with the result.” The Greek word eis (#1519 εἰς) in this verse indicates that righteousness is the result of belief (Cp. NET). A more literal, but not as clear, translation would be “resulting in righteousness for everyone who believes.” This truth fits precisely with verse 10: “with the heart man believes resulting (eis) in righteousness.”
10:5. “the person who does these commandments will live by them.” Paul is referring to Leviticus 18:5. Not an exact quotation, but it is not stated to be one.
10:6. “speaks this way.” The one speaking is “righteousness.” This is the figure of speech personification, and in this case God’s righteousness is portrayed as a person trying to win the hearts of the doubters. Thus Paul is not so much quoting Moses as he is using the principles in the Law to make his point. First, “righteousness” addresses the doubts of those who think that righteousness is difficult and even far away—perhaps even that Messianic salvation has not yet come from heaven (v. 6) or that the Messiah has not risen from the dead (v. 7). Then it affirms that the message of faith is close at hand, even in our hearts and mouths (v. 8). In this section, Paul calls to remembrance a very similar situation during the time of Moses. The Israelites had the Law, but were despairing of keeping it, thinking it was too difficult. Moses answered them, saying:

_Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (NIV)_

11) “Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.
12) It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?”
13) Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?”
14) No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

Just as the Old Testament proclaimed that obeying the Law was not too difficult a task, attaining righteousness by faith is not difficult either. What the Apostle Paul does,
however, is modify the statements somewhat so that they fit in the context of the promised Messiah. The gift of the Law has now been superseded by the gift of the Messiah.

“Do not say….” This is a reference to Deuteronomy 30:12, which reads “It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’” It is not an exact quotation, and it should be noted that Paul does not write: “Moses said,” or “the Law says,” but rather that “righteousness” says. Thus Paul is not so much quoting Moses as he is using the principles in the Law to make his point.

“ascend into heaven.” When Moses used this in Deuteronomy 30:12, it was in the context of going into heaven to get the commandments from God. In the context of Messianic expectation however, people would not get the Law from God, but would get the Messiah from Him and then bring him back down with them. Thus the explanatory parenthesis, “that is, in order to bring Christ down.” Getting Christ from heaven would be, as Deuteronomy 30:11 notes, both difficult and beyond their reach. Furthermore, it contains a denial of the fact that the difficult work of God had already been done. Human effort, no matter how satisfying and empowering to those who need to feel in control of their own destiny, is worthless. God had sent the Messiah, and if we reject him and wish to go to heaven and get another, it is not only too difficult (impossible!), but a rejection of God’s gracious provision.

“(that is, in order to bring Christ down).” The figure of speech, Epitrechon, which is a type of parenthesis (Cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). An Epitrechon (which means “running along”) is a short parenthetical insertion placed in the text as an explanatory remark. It is not complete in itself, but needs the rest of the sentence to be complete.

10:7. “descend into the abyss.” The meaning of this phrase might be considered unclear except that it is explained clearly in the parenthesis, which lets us know that in this case, the “abyss” stands for the grave and the state of being dead. In Deuteronomy 30:13, Moses did not use “abyss,” but “sea,” but Paul modifies the words of Moses and adapts them for the Messianic situation. In verse 6 he spoke in reference to those who thought that the Messiah had not yet come and who would therefore have to go to heaven to get him. In this verse he speaks of those who doubt the Messiah is raised from the dead, and they must help God with that task. The use of abyss makes sense in this context because of the associated meanings of sea, “abyss,” and the place of the dead. For example, Job 28:14 compares the abyss and the sea, both of which in that context contain the dead. Thus, Paul’s changing Moses’ “sea” to the word “abyss” would not have struck most readers as being as drastic as it seems in English. As in verse 6 and going into heaven, the task of helping God with raising the dead illuminates the absurdity of human effort. We simply cannot do what God requires, we have to submit to His provision and accept his gift. Even during the Administration of the Law, there was an element of faith that was necessary for salvation.

“(that is, to bring Christ up out from among the dead.)” The figure of speech, Epitrechon, which is a type of parenthesis (Cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). An Epitrechon (which means “running along”) is a short parenthetical insertion placed in the text as an explanatory remark. It is not complete in itself, but needs the rest of the sentence to be complete.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24.
10:8. “in your heart.” On the surface this seems to be untrue because the Word of God was not “in the heart” of the unbelievers, which is why they were said to ignore God’s righteousness (v. 3). However, there are deeper issues involved here. First, Paul is quoting Deuteronomy 30:14, and the Jews were taught the Law from the time they were little children. The knowledge of the Law was clearly in their hearts, i.e., in the depth of them. Beyond that, the Law, indeed, all God’s commands, are holy and good, and mankind has an inherent knowledge of good and evil that is part of our basic nature (Gen. 3:22: “man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil”). Romans 2:14 notes that even without the Mosaic Law, the Gentiles can do “by nature” the things contained in the Law. This inherent knowledge of good and evil is the reason that what is considered right and wrong, and crime and justice, are similar in every culture. For example, every culture treats lying and stealing as wrong. It is precisely because people do know good from evil that God can judge all mankind to a set of righteous standards. Although we all have a sin nature that makes us selfish and self-centered, which is why children need to be taught to share, we also know instinctively, from the pain we feel when we are mistreated, that love is the correct path and hatred hurts and is wrong.

In a similar vein, we all know that we sin. Everyone knows he makes mistakes. Therefore, at a fundamental level, we all know that if we are going to be “right,” it must be done for us. So in a very real sense, the “message of righteousness” is in our hearts, and if we diligently seek it, we will find it.

10:9. “because.” The Greek word ὅτι (#3754 ὅτι) can be “because” or “since,” or it can be “that.” In this case, the meaning “because” best fits the context and scope of Scripture.

Romans 10:9 is one of the very succinct and clear verses in the Church Epistles that shows how to get saved, and also shows how easy it is to get saved. We get saved by confessing Jesus is Lord and believing God raised him from the dead. It is that simple. Salvation is easy to receive because it is a free gift. Jesus paid for our salvation so now we just have to take it, just like when someone buys us a Christmas present and we just have to take it to have it.

Once we confess Christ as Lord and believe God raised him from the dead, our salvation is guaranteed and is never in doubt [for more on the guarantee of salvation, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation.”]. One thing that it is important to know about our salvation via the New Birth is that we receive the gift of holy spirit and get a new divine nature, but our flesh does not change. In fact it fights against our spirit (Gal. 5:17). Because our flesh does not change, and we cannot “feel” the spirit inside us, many Christians doubt their salvation, especially when they have sinned or are feeling disconnected from God. That is why it is important to properly understand our new nature and also outwardly manifest the gift of holy spirit, especially by speaking in tongues. When a person gets saved, he gets “born again,” and something is actually “born” inside the person—and the thing that is born is the nature of God. God is holy and God is spirit, and the person who is born of God receives the gift of holy spirit. However, like God, the holy spirit nature of God is invisible and cannot be “felt” by our natural bodies. Therefore we must bring our spiritual nature, the gift of holy spirit, into the senses world so we can see it and know it is there. That is a primary reason God gave the Christian Church the manifestation of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12:10). Speaking in tongues is the external manifestation of the internal presence of the gift of holy spirit, and
it proof that we have the gift of holy spirit and are saved [For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5].

We believe the translation “because” that opens Romans 10:9 is very important because it clearly connects verses 8 and 9. The point God is making in verse 8 is “the message is near to you.” But how do we know the message is near to us? The answer is “because” all we have to do to be saved is confess and believe. A summary of verses 6-9 is: “Righteousness from God is not difficult to obtain. Do not say you have to go to heaven to get it, or down to the grave. It is near you, because if you just confess Jesus is Lord and believe God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

“confess.” The Greek word is homologeō (#3670 ὁμολογέω), which means “to say the same thing as another,” and in this case the person must speak the same thing as the truth on the subject, i.e., that Jesus Christ is Lord. It could be argued that because we normally think of confess in a negative context, such as when someone confesses he stole something, that “profess” or even “declare” would be better translations. However, while they may be good, the negative pressure against Christ and Christianity in the world seems to make “confess” a good translation, and sadly, many are afraid to openly confess Christ because of the pressure against it. Also, using “confess” shows that a person previously had another lord (be it themselves, greed, etc.) and that they have “confessed” that previous negative lordship. In this verse, the word homologeō and the word pisteuō (“believe” [#4100 πιστεύω]) are both in the aorist tense, which is very important. The aorist indicates a one-time action, and usually in the past. In fact, a very good case could be made for the translation: “If you confessed with your mouth…and believed in your heart…you will be saved.” There are many people who think that a one-time confession of Christ does not get a person “saved,” but rather Christians must continue to confess Christ as Lord over and over again. If that were the case, then “confess” and “believe” would be in the present tense, active voice, but they are not. The Greek text supports the fact that a person confesses Jesus one time and believes one time, and at that time becomes born again and is thus guaranteed everlasting life. A person can sin, or even live an immoral lifestyle after becoming born again, but that does not undo his guarantee of salvation. We do not work for salvation (Eph. 2:8), and just as good works cannot get us saved, evil works cannot undo our new birth [for more on the permanence of salvation, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation.”]

“Lord.” Almost every time the word “Lord” occurs in the New Testament, it is a translation of the Greek word kurios (#2962 κύριος). Kurios is a masculine title indicating respect and position in society, and it is used many times in the New Testament.

It confuses some modern readers that God is called “Lord,” Jesus is called “Lord,” and other people are called “Lord,” but that would not confuse anyone in the first century. The word kurios was a general term for someone who was above you in some way, like “boss” or “captain,” and sometimes it was used simply as a term of respect, just like we sometimes use the word “sir.” If we need to ask a question to a stranger, we might start by saying, “Excuse me, sir,” even though the person is certainly not nobility and may not even be a good person.

One thing that complicates the study of the word “Lord” (kurios) is that many translations of the New Testament only translate kurios as “Lord” when it refers to Christ or God, when it refers to others they use “master,” “sir,” “owner,” etc. This complicates
what would otherwise be a simple study, and it falsely strengthens the belief that if both Jesus and God, and only Jesus and God, are called “Lord,” then Jesus must be God. That is simply not true. Kurios was a commonly used word in Greek, and, as was previously stated, was a masculine term of respect and social standing.

- God is called “Lord” (Matt. 1:20; 11:25; Acts 2:39; 1 Tim. 6:15; James 5:10).
- Jesus is called “Lord” (Matt. 7:21; Acts 10:36; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 4:5).
- Property owners are called “Lord” (Matt. 20:8; 21:40; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:13; Gal. 4:1, “owner” = kurios).
- Slave owners are called “Lord” (Matt. 10:24; 18:25, 31, 32, 35; 24:45; Luke 12:43; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1, “master” = kurios).
- Husbands are called “Lord” (1 Pet. 3:6, “master” = kurios).
- A son calls his father “Lord” (Matt. 21:30, “sir” = kurios).
- A wife sometimes referred to her husband as “Lord” (1 Pet. 3:6).
- “Lord” was used in respectful address. The Greeks called Philip, “Lord.” Mary Magdalene called the person she thought was the gardener, “Lord.” Cornelius called the angel, “Lord.” John called one of the elders, “Lord.” (John 12:21; 20:15; Acts 10:4; Rev. 7:14, “sir” = kurios).
- The Roman Emperor is called “Lord” (Acts 25:26, “His Majesty” = kurios).
- Roman authorities are called “Lord” (Matt. 27:63, “sir” = kurios).

When Romans 10:9 tells us that we must confess Christ as kurios (Lord) to be saved, it is saying that we must recognize Jesus as boss, one who has authority over us. Both God and Jesus have authority over us, because Jesus sits at God’s right hand and administers His work.

There are Trinitarians who assert that saying Jesus is “Lord” makes him God. This is poor scholarship, and cannot be the case because if calling someone “Lord” made them God, then all the other people we saw above who were called “Lord” would be God also. Furthermore, the Bible says it was “God” who made Jesus “Lord.” Acts 2:36 says: “God has made this Jesus...both Lord and Christ.” If “Lord” equals “God,” then somehow God made Jesus “God,” which is something that even Trinitarians do not teach, because it is vital to Trinitarian doctrine that Jesus be co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. The fact that the Bible says God made Jesus “Lord” is an argument against the Trinity. That God, Jesus, property owners, slave owners, Roman authorities, fathers, husbands, and even strangers are called, “Lord” caused no problem for first century Greeks. They knew kurios was a word that communicated respect and social position.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “from among the dead.”

“will be saved.” The Greek is sōzō (σωζω), which means to be saved, or be rescued, and in this context means saved from death by being given everlasting life. In this verse, sōzō is in the future tense, which is very important, especially when it is contrasted with “confess” and “believe,” which are aorist tense, which normally refers to an event in the past. Thus, Romans 10:9 accurately points to the fact that our “salvation” is a future event. Romans 10:9 could be accurately translated, “Because if you confessed
with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believed in your heart that God raised him out from among the dead, you will be saved.”

Christians are not “saved” yet in the full sense of the word. We are still subject to sin, sickness and death. When we are “saved” in the full sense of the word, we will be in our new, everlasting bodies, no longer subject to sin, sickness, and death. What we have now is a promise of salvation; a guarantee of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). There are some verses that say we are saved, and they are idiomatic. The idiom that some scholars refer to as the prophetic perfect occurs when a future event is so certain to occur that God speaks of it as already past. That is the case with the Christian’s salvation. The guarantee of salvation is so certain that God sometimes speaks of our salvation in the past tense. See the commentary on Romans 8:24, and for more on the prophetic perfect, see the commentary on Ephesians 2:6.

The New Birth and being “saved” or guaranteed salvation is referred to by different terms that emphasize different aspects of salvation. The word “saved” emphasizes the fact that a person who is born again and “saved” is “saved” from death and given everlasting life.

The term “new birth” or “born again,” is a good translation of the Greek word anagennaō (#313; ἀναγεννάω; from the Greek prefix ana, “again” or “up,” and gennaō, “to give birth”), and it refers to the fact that the person who is “saved” has been “born” a second time, literally “born again.” This is very important to properly understand, because God does not use the word “born” haphazardly. “Born again” is not just a colorful metaphor; it describes a spiritual reality. In life, when there has been a birth, something has actually been “born.” When a human is “born again,” the “thing” that is born in him is the very nature of God. God is holy, and God is spirit, and a person who is “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3, 23), receives the nature of God, which is “holy spirit.” A person who is “born again” is “born of God” (1 John 5:4), and is a child of God (1 John 3:2). God also emphasizes our being born a second time by the Greek word apokueō (#616; ἀποκύεω; from the Greek prefix apo, “away from,” and kueō, “to be pregnant”), which means “to give birth to” (James 1:18).

Another way God refers to our salvation is that it is a new origin. Our first origin was in the flesh. When we get born again, we have a new origin, a spiritual one. God tells us this by using the word paliggenesia (#3824; παλιγγενεσία; from palin, “again” and genesis, “genesis” or “origin”), which means to have an origin again, a new origin or new “genesis,” (Titus 3:5).

Another aspect of our new birth is that we have a new, divine nature. This makes perfect sense because the child always has the nature of the parents. Since God is now our Father, Scripture says we are partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

Another term that describes an aspect of our salvation is the term “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). We are new creations because in the new birth, the gift of holy spirit was created inside us and we literally are “new creations.”

Another term that describes an aspect of our salvation is “baptized in holy spirit” (Acts 1:5). This term emphasizes the spiritual power that the presence of the gift of holy spirit which is born inside us brings. Furthermore, the phrase “baptized in holy spirit” shows that God gave us an abundance of spirit, not just a small amount.

Another term that describes an aspect of our salvation is “holy one.” Every Christian is a “holy one” because of the divine nature of God, the gift of holy spirit,
which is born in him. In many English versions, the Greek word for “holy one” is translated “saint.” Christians are “holy,” not because of their behavior (which may be unholy), but because of their holy spiritual nature (see commentary on Philippians 1:1).

Another term that refers to our salvation is the term “Christian.” The name “Christian” was first coined when Paul and Barnabas were ministering in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:26), and it occurs three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). Its basic meaning is “follower of Christ” (see Bromiley, International Standard Bible Encyclopedia; under “Christian.” The Latin and Greek evidence about the term “Christian” is so strong that scholars generally agree as to its meaning). Most scholars recognize that “Christian” was not a name the believers coined about themselves, but rather it was a name given to the followers of Christ by others as a way to easily refer to them. Sadly, today the term “Christian” is not used properly. Instead of being used to refer to people who are actually born again of the spirit of God, it is used of people who are “cultural Christians” and not actually saved. In fact, today people who have been raised in a family that goes to church or have been baptized when they were a baby are often called “Christians” even though they have never had faith in Christ. Modern dictionaries give a number of meanings for the word “Christian,” including a member of a Christian Church, a person who follows the example of Christ, or even a good and decent human being. From God’s perspective, however, a true Christian is a person who makes Jesus his Lord, which means each Christian is saved. No one is a genuine Christian because of the church he attends, or because he was baptized in water, or because he does good works. Unbelievers can do all those things. A Christian is someone who is saved and thus has been baptized in holy spirit and therefore has spiritual power. The loss of the true meaning of “Christian” has caused a lot of confusion in the Church today.

10:11. Quoted from Isaiah 28:16.
   “put to shame.” See commentary on 9:33.

10:12. “call on him.” This is a prayer formula, and refers to prayer to Jesus Christ (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:2).

10:13. Quoted from Joel 2:32.
   “calls on the name of the Lord.” This is a prayer formula, and refers to prayer to Jesus Christ (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:2).

10:15. Quoted from Isaiah 52:7.

10:16. “not all.” Figure of speech tapeinosis, “understatement” (Bullinger, Figures of Speech). It is not that “not all” believed. The majority of Israel, like the majority of all mankind, has rejected God. The figure of speech, by understating the truth, actually emphasizes the point, and emphasizes the fact that very few Jews believed.
   “obey.” The Greek word is hupakouō (#5219 ὑπακοῦω; pronounced hoop-a-koo’-ō), from akouō, to hear, to listen. Hupakouō means to listen and then to act, or “to obey,” but it is based on the fact that the person first listened. Thus there is a richness in the Greek that is hard to capture in English. When the text says they did not “obey,” it is saying that they did not pay any attention to what they were hearing and so they did not obey.
   Quoted from Isaiah 53:1.
   “what they heard from us.” The Greek is the noun akoē (#189 ἀκοὴ), and it refers to what is heard. While it can be translated “report,” since it occurs twice in the next verse (v. 17) as “hearing,” if it is “heard” in v. 16, there is more of a recognizable flow to
this section of Scripture. In fact, if all the “hearing” words are translated as such in this section, we get something like:

16 (But they did not all obey the Good News they heard. For Isaiah says, 

   Lord, who has believed what they heard from us? [From Isa. 53:1]) 17 So trust comes from hearing, and hearing by the message of Christ.

10:17. “So.” After making the case that people need to hear to believe, he sums up, “so” (cp. NIV), the faith (the Christian faith) comes through hearing.

   “faith.” The Greek contains the article “the.” It is not just “faith” in general that comes by hearing, but “the” faith, meaning the (Christian) faith for a person’s salvation. The context of this section starts in 10:1 with Paul’s desire that the Israelites would be saved; he then moves in verses 8 and 9 to the word of faith spoken for salvation, then on to calling on the Lord to be saved (v. 13), and then the need for missionaries to speak of this great salvation (vv. 14-15). Thus, by verse 17, it is clear from all this context that “the” faith being spoken of is the Christian faith in all its aspects.

   “message of Christ.” Primarily a genitive of relation, the message about Christ, but it certainly includes the words “from Christ,” (Genitive of origin). The word about Christ, and the words of Christ, both lead men to salvation and “the faith.” When one word (of) has two applicable meanings, it is the Figure of Speech amphibologia, “double entendre.”


Chapter 11

11:2. “petitions.” This is a historical present, using the present tense to speak of an event that happened in the past. This usage portrays the event vividly, placing us in the middle of the action as though we are there to see Isaiah petition God, and hear the divine answer “say” (present tense, v. 4) back to Isaiah, essentially, that all of God’s people have not been cast off, there is a remnant of true Israel that remains (cp. 9:6, “not all those who are descended from Israel are truly Israel” [NET]). The question Paul was concerned with in present time was whether Israel had been cast off (11:1-2). By employing the historical present, Paul vividly resurrects Isaiah’s conversation with God from the past and brings it to bear on this question in the present, concluding with, “Even so, then at this present time there is also a remnant...” (11:5).

11:3. Quoted from 1 Kings 19:10, 14.

   “life.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word psuchē has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“divine response.” This is from chrematismos (#5538 χρηματισμός), the noun form of the verb chrematizo (#5537 χρηματίζω). See entry on “divinely instructed” in Matthew 2:12.

“men.” The Greek is anēr (#435 ἄνήρ), “men,” not the generic for “people.” The reference to “men” was no doubt to be a comfort to Elijah, because it meant that part of God’s army on earth was still intact. Gideon only needed 300 men and God’s help to defeat the Midianite army of 135,000.

11:5. “choice made by grace.” Compare NASB: “according to God’s gracious choice.” The Greek literally reads, “according to the choice of grace.” To translate “choice of grace” as a remnant “chosen by grace” could be confusing, as though God specifically chose each member of the remnant “by grace.” This is not the idea. Rather, that fact that there exists a remnant at all from national Israel is due to God’s gracious choice.


11:9. “dining table.” The Greek is trapeza (#5132 τράπεζα), a table, but it is clear from the context of Psalm 69:22 that the table being referred to is a dining table. Of course we must remember that the “dining table” of the eastern biblical world, even in Roman society, was not like our modern “table” around which people sat in chairs, but rather it was a cleared flat area, usually on a rug, or else a very low table that people reclined around, or, as in the Roman world, a low table with flat couches on 3 sides, and the diners reclined on the couches.

The context of Psalm 69:22 is very important to understanding why this quotation is used here. The enemies put poison into David’s food and gave him vinegar, not wine to drink, so David asks for vengeance. In this case, the Jews have ignored God and thus were bringing God’s vengeance on themselves.

“deathtrap.” The skandalon was the trigger of the trap, which then killed the victim.

“due retribution.” The people spurned God, and had a retribution coming to them (cp. Lenski.)

11:11. “resulting in falling beyond recovery.” This phrase is a result clause with hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood (cp. Wallace, Greek Grammar, pg. 473) (See Matt. 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled”). Paul is asking (using me which expects a negative answer) if Israel stumbled with the result that they have fallen irrevocably (cp. NET translation: “they did not stumble into an irrevocable fall, did they?”). The word for fall is pīptō (#4098 πίπτω), which here has the sense of “be completely ruined” (BDAG). Robertson says this is the “effective aorist” of pīptō, meaning “to fall completely and for good” (Word Pictures in the New Testament). Our translation captures both the sense of result and the irrevocableness of the fall in question.

“in order to.” The Greek is eis to with the infinitive, which here clearly indicates God’s purpose or intent.

11:15. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “from among the dead.”

11:19. “so that.” In the Greek this is a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose-result clause. The branches were broken off for the purpose of grafting in Gentiles, and his breaking them off resulted in room for the Gentiles. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.”

11:20. The English does not let us exactly reproduce the meaning of the Greek, or the Semitic understanding behind it. In both Hebrew and Greek, “fear” had the two meanings: of being in awe of something, and being afraid. The idea was that God was so
holy and powerful that, while we are in awe of Him, there is also an element of fear. We are not to be arrogant, but we are to “stand in awe” (NAB; RSV; NRSV) and “be afraid [if we disobey]” (HCSB; NIVO). Most versions, like the REV, use the word “fear” and try to educate the reader of its two different meanings.

11:25. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]


11:32. “imprisoned.” The Greek word is sugkleiō (#4788 συγκλείω; pronounced soon-clay’-ō), and it means, to enclose on all sides, imprison, encage. Everyone alive has been trapped by sin and disobedience. No one can escape on their own, it has to be the work of an outsider, Jesus Christ. This applies to both the Jews and Gentiles. All men, due to sin nature, have a natural tendency to defy God; we are all caged together in defiance.

11:34, 35. Quoted from Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11.

Chapter 12

12:1. “reasonable service” The Greek word for reasonable is logikos (#3050 λογικός), and the exact meaning in this verse is quite hard to pin down. Thayer points out that the word was a favorite of ancient Greek philosophers, who used it in the sense of “rational,” from the use of logos as “reason.” Thus if it were used that way in the verse, “your reasonable service” would be a good translation. However, logikos was also used in a sense that referred to what belonged to the realm of words and logic versus the realm of matter. If used in that sense, “reasonable” stands opposed not to that which is foolish or unreasonable, but rather to that which is material, external, or of the flesh, such as the ritualistic and outward worship of the Jews. This is why many versions go with the translation “spiritual service” or “spiritual worship.” We felt, however, that to English speakers, “spiritual” was more misleading than “reasonable.” For us as Christians, our service and worship should come from within, not from without, and thus with our mind and spirit, not our flesh. Nigel Turner (Christian Words) sets forth one more possibility for the meaning of logikos, and that is “of the Word,” due to the Christian community beginning to associate logos with the Word. That is a possibility also. The only other time that this word is used is in 1 Pet 2:2 as “milk of the word” (see commentary). We think that all three of these possible definitions are true to an extent, but think that “reasonable service” makes the most sense in an English translation. Furthermore, since the concept of “reasonable” is an important part of the Greek word, it seemed important to bring that out into English.

12:2. “conformed to the pattern.” The Greek word translated “conformed to the pattern” is suschēmatizō (#4964 συσχηματίζω), which means to be formed or conformed to a mold or pattern. The Devil has an agenda to make the world, and the people in it, more and more ungodly. Christians will be rewarded for not conforming to the pattern of the age, but remaining godly. Nyland (The Source New Testament) has not to “go along with” the current age.
“age.” The Greek noun translated “age” is aiōn (#165 aion). The Greek word aiōn gets translated “age,” most of the time, but it is important that we think of “age” the same way the Greeks did. Generally, when we think of “age,” we mean a period of time. Although the word did refer to a period of time, it referred to the thinking and attitudes that existed in that age. Richard Trench writes that aiōn refers to “All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to cease and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral, atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again, inevitably to exhale,—all this is included in the aiōn.…” (Synonyms of the NT).

Just as the owners of a Mexican or Chinese restaurant work hard to create an “atmosphere” that represents their home country, the Adversary works hard to make sure that this world has an “ungodly atmosphere.” We need to think through the implications of the statement that we are not to be conformed to the pattern of this “age,” i.e., the pattern of the ungodly atmosphere in which we are immersed. It helps a lot to understand and acknowledge that this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) is not an accident. The Adversary has worked hard for generations to put in place customs and ways of doing things that are contrary to God’s love and commands. This evil age did not “just happen.” Also, we must then realize the pressures that the culture puts on people to conform to those ungodly ways, and the price a person will have to pay to not conform to the ways of the world. There is serious pressure brought from the culture against people who want to live truly godly lives. That is why Scripture can promise: “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). As children of God, Christians should be willing to pay the price to serve and obey God, and we know that we will be richly rewarded in the Kingdom for our work for God now.

“be transformed.” The Greek verb is metamorpho (#3339 μεταμορφώ), “be transformed” and it is in the passive voice. We do not actively transform ourselves. We control our thinking, and as we do, transformation takes place.

“test and approve.” The Greek word is dokimaz (#1381 δοκιμάζω) “to draw a conclusion about worth on the basis of testing” (BDAG). Although we generally try to stay away from using a phrase to translate a Greek word, in this case the meaning is clear enough that a general exception needs to be made. In many situations, the Christian does not start out by knowing the will of God. Too many Christians who do not know the will of God in a situation either do nothing or pray for an inordinately long time, waiting for a clear answer. Often the will of God is “Try something!” We are to test (and many tests fail) and then finally be able to approve, the will of God.

12:3. “of himself.” This is supplied from the context, which is our relation to others in the Body of Christ.

“ought.” The Greek is dei (#1163 δεῖ; pronounced “day”), and refers to what is necessary. From God’s perspective, it is necessary that we think sensibly and not more highly of ourselves than is right.

“That measure of faith.” The Greek does not say that each person has the same measure of faith. On the contrary, although some versions say, “the measure of faith,” there is no word “the” in the Greek, and “a measure of faith” would be more accurate. Each person has a function in the body and a service (“ministry”) to perform, and God makes sure that each person has the faith potential to do the ministry God gave them. One
person may not have the faith to do what another person does, but he or she has the faith potential to do what God has called him or her to do.

12:7. “teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “teaching” was better than “doctrine,” because the verse is speaking of the person who is a teacher using his gift and teaching.” For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13).

12:8. “liberality.” The Greek word is haplotēs (#572 ἕπλοτης), and literally means, “singleness.” It the same Semitic idiom Jesus used in Matthew 6:22, when he said if your eye was “single,” then your whole body would be full of light. Idiomatically, the “single eye” is the generous eye. Christians are to give generously, liberally (see commentary on Matthew 6:22).

“the one who leads and cares for people.” The Greek word translated “leads and cares for” here is proistēmi (#4291 προϊστήμι; pronounced pro-hiss’-tay-me), and it has two very important meanings. Proistēmi means to lead, preside over, rule. However, it also has a very significant second meaning: to be a protector or guardian, to give aid and attention to, to care for. Both the BDAG and Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicons suggest this second definition is the primary meaning in Romans 12, and while other lexicons and translations may not go that far, good Greek-English lexicons have the second meaning of proistēmi. Anyone reading the Greek text sees both meanings at once.

In the Greco-Roman world it was a well-established custom that leaders, especially civic leaders, were also to give aid to and care for the people under them. Although most English versions feel that “lead” is the primary meaning in Romans 12:8 and thus have that in their versions, the Amplified Bible has both meanings (the Amplified Bible reads: “he who gives aid and superintends”) and we felt both meanings were important enough to have in the text as well, and thus the REV reads, “the one who leads and cares for people.” In contrast to most versions and the Amplified and REV, some versions have the meaning about giving aid as the only meaning in the text. Thus The Inspired Letters of the New Testament by Frank Laubach, has: “He who helps others, let him do it with all his might.” Similarly, The Source New Testament by A. Nyland has: “Let the person who gives aid do it eagerly.”

We felt that having only the definition about helping or giving aid and omitting the definition about being a leaders would mislead the readers. Anyone in the Greco-Roman world grew up knowing that being a civic leader and giving aid went hand in hand, but that is not clear in today’s world. In our modern world, people who care for others typically don’t lead, and leaders far too often do not care for others, even when they are supposed to. Thus we felt that to bring the meaning of the Greek into the English we had to follow the example of the Amplified Bible and include both meanings.

The take-home message of this verse is important to anyone who believes he or she is called into a leadership position in the Body of Christ. From God’s point of view, service in the ministry is civic service and leadership involves actually getting with people and helping them. Christian leaders are not to “lead from behind the lines,” by just telling people what they should do, they are get with people and lead in a personal and meaningful way, giving help, support and aid where it is needed.
12:9. “(abhor that which is evil; cling to that which is good).” The structure of this verse in the context of verses 10-13, which are structured the same way, seems to dictate that the phrase in parenthesis is explaining what it means to have love without hypocrisy, rather than starting a new thought. Love that does not abhor evil and cling to good is not love, but hypocrisy.

12:10. “As to” (see Lenski).

“brotherly affection.” The Greek is philadelphia (#5360 φιλαδελφία), a compound Greek word made up of philos (#5384 φίλος, a strong liking, a friendship; see commentary on John 21:15) and adelphos (#80 ἀδελφός), which means “brother.” It is the strong bond of friendship that exists between brothers.

“family affection.” This Greek word is philostorgos (#5387 φιλόστοργος), which is a compound word made up of philos (the noun form of phileō; see commentary on John 21:15) and storgē. The Greek verb storgē does not occur as a single word in the NT, but is used in compound form. It is the mutual love of parents and children, and wives and husbands. Storgē is the love that naturally exists between family members. A mother may not know why she loves her child, she just does. Family love is often unexplainable and very strong. God wants Christians to have that kind of love for each other. The negation of family love, being without affection, is the compound word astorgos (#794 ἀστοργός), found in Romans 1:31 and 2 Timothy 3:3. For an explanation of the other types of love in the Bible, see the commentary note on John 21:15.

“leading and outdoing.” The Greek word is proēgeomai (#4285 προηγέομαι). We agree with Friberg’s lexicon which lists leading and outdoing as meanings, and see both those meanings in this verse. When it comes to honor, we are not to be content just to be part of the crowd, but we are to lead, and even outdo each other, in the good sense of never being satisfied with how we honor God and man.

12:11. “not procrastinating” “Pertaining to shrinking from or hesitating to engage in something worthwhile, possibly implying lack of ambition” (Louw-Nida, Lexicon, and cp. Lenski.).

12:13. “As to hospitality.” The biblical customs concerning hospitality differ greatly because the Bible takes place over thousands of years and involves many cultures. However, throughout the Bible there is a consistent message that people should extend hospitality to each other. This was very true in the Roman world, and the New Testament instructs Christians to extend hospitality to others. Besides Romans 12:13, the Bible specifically tells Christian leaders to show hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8), and 1 Peter 4:9 says, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

One of the major aspects of showing hospitality to others was opening your home to overnight guests. In fact, a number of homes had guestrooms just for that purpose. One of the many reasons Christians were to show hospitality to others was because the inns in the Roman world were almost always unpleasant, ungodly places. Travel has always been difficult, and in fact, our English words “travel” and “travail” not only come from the same Latin root word, they were once the same English word and were differentiated only recently; English writings from as late as the 1700’s show “travail” being used when today we would say, “travel”. In the Roman world, the condition of the inns only added to the travail of travel.

The inns were so unpleasant that people who could avoid them usually did. Most wealthy people and dignitaries were able to stay in the private residences of friends and
contacts, but sometimes they just camped beside the road. Friends and associates often had an “I’ll stay at your place and you stay at mine” agreement, and sometimes formalized it with a *tessera hospitalis*. The *tessera* was a small clay tablet or a clay flat-figure that came in many shapes and sizes, but was often in the shape of a pig, cow, lion, or shaking hands. The *tessera* was broken in half, and each party to the agreement kept a half. The traveler carried his half, which gave him entré to the other home even if the owner was away—if the halves matched, slaves or servants who watched over the house immediately granted room and board to the traveler.

In many cases sleeping outdoors would have been nicer than staying in a Roman inn, but the danger of robbers was usually so great that people sought out the “safety” of an inn. The general exceptions were wealthy people and groups. The wealthy usually traveled with a small army of servants who would carry the tents and food and act as bodyguards, while groups were generally protected by virtue of their size.

As a class of people, the innkeepers were of such ill repute that Roman law forbade them from joining the army or forming a trade guild. They were generally cheats and thieves, and suspected of spying on their clients and selling the information, which was very likely since they and their prostitute staff were in a good position to find out lots of juicy information from the clientele. Innkeepers’ wives also had a bad reputation (although many innkeepers were women), and St. Augustine warned travelers about innkeeper’s wives who were witches and who would add magic potions to the food and turn the traveler into a mule.

The standard clientele of the inns were usually equally as rough as the innkeepers. They were peddlers, muleteers, sailors or soldiers, slaves or freedmen running errands, runaway slaves, and the like. Roman graffiti is just one thing that reveals the rough character of the low class Roman. The excavation of Pompeii reveals a lot of graffiti on both private and public buildings, and perhaps a third of it is scatological, and a number are curses.

Although inns in the Roman world all differed somewhat, just as our modern motels do, they also had a lot of similarity. A standard Roman inn was a courtyard surrounded by rooms. Baggage and animals stayed in the open yard, while people spent the night in a room (or beside their animal if they thought it would be stolen). Almost all inns had a kitchen and a dining room, although sometimes the cooking and eating occurred in one big room. Some inns converted the dining room into a dormitory for sleeping at night or used it for sleeping if the rooms were all full.

Innkeepers made money most any way they could, so many inns had some kind of shop attached, such as smith’s shop, where travelers could have repairs made to animal tack, carts, etc., and some inns offered medical treatment, if it could be called that, to people who got sick on the road.

Winter cold and summer heat are always hard on travelers, and most inns offered only a little comfort. To fight the winter cold, some of the more expensive inns had a hot air duct system under the floor or in the walls (the same basic system that was used to heat the *caldarium*, the “hot pool,” in the Roman baths). The average inn, however, would have had some kind of brazier or fireplace that heated with coal or wood, or else no heat at all. However, there was no reliable relief from the heat of summer. The only way to cool rooms during the summer was any breeze coming through the door or a
window. Many inns had second story rooms that better caught the daily breezes and were more comfortable than lower rooms.

Unlike modern hotels, the average inn did not rent a whole room to the traveler, but rather rented a sleeping space in a room. In nicer inns a person could rent a bed with a straw mattress, but often the “bed” was just a spot on the floor with straw or grasses cut from a field. The obvious question anyone renting a place in the inn would ask themselves was, “With whom (and with how many) will I be sharing a room tonight?” One had to guard his person and belongings very carefully. Roman records show that a number of people who stayed at the inns were murdered for the goods they were carrying, and stealing was very common.

Every experienced traveler also became an expert at inspecting bedding for bedbugs and other creatures, such as fleas, spiders, lizards, etc. No telling how many people had already slept on the matting that was the bed. Bedbugs were so common that they had a nickname: *cauponarum aestiva animalia*, “the summertime creatures of the inn.”

The inns were not usually very desirable places to eat, so most travelers carried at least a little something to eat on their journey, making Jesus’ specific instruction to his Apostles not to take food with them when they traveled an unusual request (Mark 6:8). The ancients watered down their wine, and that included the Romans. Unscrupulous innkeepers, however, watered it down a lot to increase their profits. Paul refers to this practice in 2 Corinthians 4:2, and says he is not “adulterating the word of God” (cp. NASB), that is, he did not water down the Word for his own profit, but taught it full strength, even though sometimes that cost him dearly.

Much more ghastly than watering down the wine was the cheating of some innkeepers (actually, the Roman physician Galen said he knew of many) who stole dead bodies from the Coliseum and cooked them in order to boost profits. Inn food was usually in the form of spicy soups and stews so apparently clients rarely noticed. One cheating innkeeper was discovered, however, when a human finger bone showed up in the stew.

All inns had gambling—it just came with the clientele who stayed there. However, there were locals who frequented the inns to take part in the gambling and perhaps enrich themselves with some of the travelers’ purses. In fact, just as today people go “bar-hopping” or on a “bar-crawl,” occasionally some of the more well-to-do townsfolk would go from inn to inn, gambling and carousing through the night. The noise from the raucous partiers could make sleeping in the inn difficult.

Most inns were staffed by male and female slaves who, along with their everyday chores, made money for the owner by being rented out as prostitutes. So if the person or persons the traveler was sharing the room with had the money to pay for sex, well, that would be an added distraction in the room.

Since innkeepers were often dishonest, savvy travelers agreed upon the price they would pay ahead of time. A writing found in southeast Italy speaks of some of the services in an ancient inn, and the guest had obviously agreed upon the prices before paying (quoted from Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, p. 207).

**Guest:** “Innkeeper, let’s reckon up the bill.”
Innkeeper: “One sextarius of wine [about a pint] and bread: one as. Food, two asses.” [The assarion, or as, was about a tenth of a denarius, so a laborer would earn about ten asserions or “asses” as it was abbreviated, per day].

Guest: “Correct.”

Innkeeper: “Girl, eight asses.”

Guest: “Correct again.”

Innkeeper: “Hay for the mule, two asses.”

Guest: “That mule will be the death of me!”

To avoid the inns and the ungodliness associated with them, Christians tried to find other Christians with whom they could stay. Thankfully, many Christians knew about the believers in other towns and where to find them, and people usually willingly opened their homes and hearts to brothers and sisters on the road. God commanded Christians who had food and shelter to provide hospitality for others, and that is something we should still be willing to practice today.


“seeking to show it.” That phrase is translated from the one Greek word diōkō (#1377 διώκω), which is used in both Romans 12:13 and 12:14. Diōkō occurs some 45 times in the New Testament and is used in both a good sense and a bad sense. When used in a good sense it means to run quickly and decisively toward something, to run after something in order to obtain it, to pursue. When used in a bad or negative sense it means to persecute, or to cause to run or flee (thus drive out or drive away).

Paul uses diōkō very effectively to get his point across in Romans 12:13 and 14, using the definitions of diōkō against one another (in Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, Bullinger notes this as one of the occurrences of antanaclasis, when a word or word is used in the same sentence but has two different meanings). The meaning in 12:14 is obvious to us: we are not to curse those who persecute us, but are to bless them. When contrasted with that use of diōkō, by using it in verse 13 the Word emphasizes that we are to “chase after” hospitality, “pursue” it, “run after it in order to obtain it.”

It should go without saying that this command still applies to Christians today. Although our motels and restaurants are nicer today than in the Roman world, Christians should still “seek to show hospitality.” Ecclesiastes 5:13 warns us of wealth that harms its owner, and that can be the case today. Sometimes we are afraid to open our homes to others because we fear what might happen to our things—things we have usually worked hard for. While we want to be wise, true wisdom lies in the eternal verities of valuing relationships, helping others, and fellowshipping around the Good News. These are the
things we should be seeking. We should never be so materialistically minded that we put our “stuff” ahead of the chance to share and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.


12:16. “Have the same regard for one another.” The Greek is literally, “the same thing toward one another thinking.” We believe Lenski is correct when he says, “This is not…‘harmonious mutual relationship’ but something far more definite: having in mind for another the same thing that under like circumstances one has in mind for oneself.” The New Jerusalem Bible says, “Give the same consideration to all others alike,” in other words, do not pay attention to the social status of people when you are dealing with them. Many people act differently toward others depending on their social status, and we are not to do this. Treat everyone the same. This guidance is expanded in the context.

“do not regard that which is ‘high.’” It is easier to express possible multiple meanings in Greek than in English here, and the Greek simply says, “not thinking [about] the high.” Thus it can be thinking about, or regarding people of high standing (NJB, “social standing”) or “high things,” (as the KJV), those things we think of as higher or more valuable. Our life is not better or godlier if we associate with rich people rather than poor people, or live in a mansion rather than a hut. God looks on the heart of people, not their wealth or social status, and He pays attention to how we use the things that we have for His purposes, no matter if they are prestigious, very valuable, or ordinary. We are not to be captivated by that which is “high” in the world.

“associate with the lowly.” As with “high” in the previous phrase, the Greek “lowly” can refer to lowly people or lowly things.

12:17. “Think ahead of time.” The Greek is pronoeō (#4306 προνοεω), which is a compound word from the prefix pro (before) and noeō (to have in the mind). It can mean “to consider” and “to think about beforehand.” Interestingly, the KJV says “provide,” which in the English of the time period meant, “to exercise foresight in taking due measures in view of a possible event” (Oxford English Dictionary), or “to think about beforehand.” Over time the meaning of “provide” became “furnish for use.” While we certainly are to “consider” how to do what is honorable for men, the verse is deeper than that. We are to think ahead of time how to be honorable to God and men. Especially in the context of not repaying evil for evil, thinking ahead of time how to act can keep us from acting out of emotion and the heat of the moment. We can do what is honorable if we plan ahead.

12:19. Quoted from Deuteronomy 32:35.

“give place to the wrath of God.” This phrase contains the figure of speech Ellipsis. Leaving out “of God,” which is clearly implied in the context, places the emphasis on “wrath.” Evildoers will not go unpunished. The Christian does not need to avenge himself, but can pray and wait for God’s wrath to manifest itself. The verb, “give place” is in the imperative mood; it is a command. God forcefully commands us to not avenge ourselves. Our part is to love and bless those who persecute us, and to step aside to allow God to avenge His people.


“for by doing this you will heap coals of fire on his head.” The meaning of this phrase is not immediately obvious, and so there have been many suggestions as to what it means. A large part of the problem in interpreting the verse is that there is no literal custom like it referred to in the ancient sources.
The most common interpretation of the phrase about coals of fire, and the one that best fits the context, history, and examples from ancient writings, is that the coals are not literal, but refer to a mental burning; a burning that occurs in the mind of the enemy when a kindness is done to him. We must keep in mind that Rome was an “honor/shame” society, and that people loved honor and sought after it. If a believer did an honorable thing by being kind and helping an enemy, it could create a mental conflict in that enemy because quid-pro-quo would say do something honorable back, or be shamed for failing to do so. That mental shame or conflict might prompt the person to change and come to Christ.

The burning coals on the head represent something such as the burning shame that arises in a person who is helped by an enemy, or the burning mental conflict that being helped by an enemy produces. Thus, much more in the honor-shame society of Rome than in our modern society, doing good for an enemy would indeed heap coals of fire on his head. Lange writes: “The most immediate effect of such expressions [of love] is burning shame, a religious and moral crisis. He will bend his head as if fiery coal lay on it.” The key to the section is recognizing that shame and crisis produce change, and it is the goal of the coals of fire to produce genuine change in the enemy and win them over. Did not Jesus Christ win us to himself even when we were hostile to him (Rom. 5:6-10), by giving himself for us? And Scripture says it is the kindness of God that leads people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Telling believers to do good to an enemy in the hopes that the goodness would produce shame or mental conflict that would lead to change fits with the message of Romans and the flavor of the entire New Testament.

Most commentators agree that the burning coals refer to the burning shame, or some kind of mental conflict in the person who has been helped, but they differ on how to understand the shame. Some commentators have felt that showing kindness to enemies in contexts such as this is a way to draw down upon the person severe Divine wrath, or make clear to the person there will be divine wrath in the future since the context includes “vengeance is mine, says the Lord” (cp. Chrysostom, Theodore, Zwingli, Beza, etc.). This explanation, however, contradicts the spirit of the chapter, and indeed the spirit of the entire NT. We do not bless people so the wrath of God can come, or to make people aware the wrath of God will be poured out in the future. Also, it is the believer who is doing the kindness, and thus would be the believer who was wreaking some kind of vengeance. If being good to an enemy was a type of vengeance, then the believer’s motives would not actually be to love and help the enemy, but to attack him, although in a seemingly strange and generally unproductive way, since the history of doing kindness to enemies, while it sometimes warms an enemy’s heart, is often simply ignored and taken advantage of, and produces no change at all.

Church Fathers such as Augustine and Jerome spoke the coals of fire on the head in terms of the pain of penitence (repentance). This is true, but we must be sure to take the illustration of the coals of fire to its full conclusion. It is true that there often is a feeling of shame and remorse when we recognize we have been wrong, but it is not the goal of kindness to produce the pain of repentance, even though repentance is part of the process of change. The goal of kindness, as we see from God’s and Christ’s undeserved kindness to us, is to produce change in the person to whom the kindness is shown. The kindness will produce the burning feeling of shame or mental conflict, which leads to repentance (which also often has shame), which results in being won to Christ.
It has been suggested by some Bible teachers that the Romans must have tortured people by putting burning coals on their head. However, there is simply no historical evidence of a practice like that. Also, that interpretation does not fit with the context. The believer is not doing good to enemies to torture them, but rather to be like Christ and to win them over by kindness.

K. C. Pillai, a native of India who taught on oriental customs, understood the verse in a totally different way, and said the coals on the head referred to a biblical custom. Pillai taught that in biblical villages, someone, usually a young boy, would be appointed to carry hot coals from tent to tent or house to house in the morning so families could easily start their morning fires. The boy would carry the coals in a clay vessel on his head and the hot coals would warm him in the cool morning air. In the same way, our good deeds would be coals on the head and warm up the heart of an enemy.

Unfortunately, as plausible as Pillai’s suggestion seems, there is no evidence in any ancient source that it actually occurred, and especially in Rome, where people lived in tight quarters. That fact, along with our knowledge that Pillai taught other things that were just modern interpretations of biblical verses, causes us to discount his interpretation as not being accurate.

The history of Christianity is a wonderful history of people doing good to those who have done nothing to deserve being treated well, and winning over those unbelievers by the very good they do not deserve. This, of course, started with God, who so loved the undeserving world that He gave His only Son. This example was followed by Christ, who so loved us that, while we were still enemies, he gave his life for us. The early Christians followed God and Christ, and through the centuries Christians have followed those examples, and done good to the undeserving, and by that good have won some of them to Christ. If we are going to help God change anyone, then we must be as Christ was, and give up ourselves for the benefit of others. If we can be kind to others, we have a chance of helping them change and come to Christ.

Chapter 13

13:1. “soul.” Here, “soul,” psuchē, means “person,” but there is an emphasis on the fact that the people need to control their thoughts and emotions. It is very easy to become mentally and emotionally agitated to the point of sin by what our leaders and representative do, and God warns us against that ungodly behavior. See commentary on Romans 2:9.

“For there is no authority except of God, and the powers that exist have been instituted by God.” This verse can be confusing to the average reader, who can assume from it that every government and governmental authority figure is from God. We only have to look at the Word of God to tell that is not what the verse is saying. Many godly people rebelled against their governments. Moses rebelled against Pharaoh’s evil leadership, and had God’s help doing it; including the plagues on Egypt, the death of Pharaoh himself and the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Rahab the prostitute lied to her king (Josh. 2:2-6), but was rewarded for it and is even in the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5). Many of the Judges fought against oppressive government, and had God’s help doing it. For example, the Bible says God raised up
Ehud as a deliverer, and he not only rebelled against the Moabite government, he assassinated Eglon, the king of Moab (Judg. 3:12-30). David rebelled against King Saul, and had the help of God’s prophets when hiding from Saul. Jeroboam rebelled against King Rehoboam (Solomon’s son), and when Rehoboam got his army together to fight with Jeroboam, Yahweh’s prophet said not to fight, that the rebellion was from God (1 Kings 12:24). The religious leaders in Jerusalem had an arrest warrant out on Jesus, but he did not turn himself in, he ignored it (John 11:57). The Apostles openly disobeyed the commandments of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body in Israel, and told the leaders, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29; cp. Acts 4:19). Since the Bible says a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, it cannot be that God puts governments and people in place and then helps others fight them or tear them down.

So if the verse is not saying that every government and ruler is from God, what is it saying? God is a God of order, and not of disorder or confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). In that light, God has established that there would be governments by which people’s lives could be governed. For example, in the Old Testament He provided for leadership in the Wilderness (Deut. 1:13ff), then local leadership over the towns of Israel, usually referred to as the elders of the gate. When Israel wanted a king, God selected Saul. In the future, the Millennial Kingdom and Everlasting Kingdom will be ruled by a king: Jesus Christ.

We can see that God has established that there would be an organization to society, and thus there have to be governments, and in doing that He has set the general principle in place that people obey their governments; God is not an anarchist. It goes without saying that governments that are run by humans are not going to be perfect, and God is not going to tolerate rebellion and civil disobedience just because some people do not agree with what the government is doing. The general biblical principle is that God has set things such that there is, and in fact has to be, authority to govern mankind and that authority is invested in the government, so we should obey the government, even when we do not agree with its laws. Therefore, when the Bible says, “and the powers that exist have been instituted by God,” it does not mean that every individual leader has been put in place by God, or every governmental institution has been put in place by God. It means that God is the one who decreed that governmental powers exist, and so Christians are told to obey the government (Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13, 14), which is, of course, a general command, not an absolute command.

Although Romans 13 says that governmental authorities have been appointed by God, it cannot be divorced from the scope of Scripture, and so from other scriptures we learn several things about government. For one thing, just because a government leader is in a position of authority because God ordained government does not mean that he (or she) is not being held accountable by God for his thoughts and actions. In fact, God holds leaders to a higher standard and higher level of accountability than the average person being governed. God’s Word and His Law are still the standard by which people are to relate to each other, and are the standard from which governments are to construct their laws. That is why when God told Israel some things about having a righteous king, one of them was:

“When he [the king] takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully
all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left” (Deut. 17:18-20).

If the king takes the time to write his own copy of the Law by his own hand, he will become more acquainted with what it says—a good thing since God will hold him accountable to govern his people by God’s laws. While godly leaders will be blessed, government leaders who take advantage of their authority will find themselves in serious trouble on the Day of Judgment.

Government leaders need to know that the decisions they make, and influence others to make, are being weighed by God, and if the leaders of a country lead that country and its people away from God, the country itself will suffer, as both history and the Bible show. Deuteronomy 28 is written to Israel, but much of it applies to any nation, because it is God who blesses and protects those who love Him, and cannot protect and bless those who turn from Him.

Lastly, we need to realize that when government leaders decide to abrogate their innate responsibility to obey God, their creator, and pass laws and regulations that are contrary to His laws, godly people find themselves in the position of the Apostles: we ought to obey God rather than men. Because God has ordained government, those people who disobey their government almost always suffer to some extent, even if their disobedience is for a godly cause. Israel suffered in Egypt when Moses stood against Pharaoh, David suffered in the wilderness when rebelling against Saul, and the Apostles were jailed and beaten when opposing their ungodly religious leaders. Thus, even when rebellion seems to be called for by godly people, it is not without a price.

13:3. “the one in authority.” Although this can be rendered as an abstract noun, just “the authority,” the context shows that it refers to someone in authority (cp. v. says that he is God’s “public servant”).

13:4. “carry the sword.” Often the Romans in charge of keeping peace carried a sword, certainly the Roman soldiers did.

13:6. “taxes.” The Greek is phoros (#5411 φόρος). “That which is brought in as payment to a state, with implication of dependent status, tribute, tax” (BDAG) “A payment made by the people of one nation to another, with the implication that this is a symbol of submission and dependence” (Louw-Nida, *Lexicon*)

13:8. “Do not keep on owing.” The verb “owe” is opheilō (#3784 ὁφείλω), and it means to owe, or be in debt to. The conjugation of this verb is important. Grammatically it can be present indicative, or a present imperative. If indicative, it would be saying, “You do not owe anyone anything except to love...,” but that cannot be the sense, because we can owe people, and the context has just said that we have to pay people what we owe (vs. 6 and 7). That means opheilō is a present, active, imperative, verb. The fact that it is a present active means that it can have an ongoing force, which it does in this context (cp. Hendriksen, *Romans*; “Do not keep on owing...”). This verse is not contradicting the other verses in the Bible that say people can lend when they have extra, or borrow when they have need (cp. Exod. 22:25, 26; Deut. 15:7-11; 24:6; Neh. 5:3-5; Ps. 37:26; Matt. 5:42; lending is included, because if it is a sin to borrow, then it would be a sin to cause another to sin by lending to him).

This verse is not saying that a person cannot borrow if he has a need, or a person cannot borrow longer term or for larger items (house, car) if the debt is being repaid. The
verb, “do not keep on owing,” shows that this verse is a condemnation of those who borrow and who do not repay or repay slowly and grudgingly, forcing the person who has kindly helped when there was a need to come and ask for what is rightfully his.


13:10. “love does no wrong.” Is that what it is to love someone, to do him no harm? If I do not harm someone, therefore I love him? No, a thousand times no. This is the figure of speech tapeinosis, or demeaning. It is the deliberate demeaning, or lessening of something in order to elevate or increase it. It often comes in the form of an understatement. We are aware that sometimes the most powerful way to emphasize something is to understate it. The understatement is subtle, and therefore this tapeinosis is often not noticed, but love is much more than just not harming someone. Without the tapeinosis, a more literal understanding of love is that it does good to its neighbor.

13:12. “the day is near.” The word “near” is from the Greek word eggizō (#1448 ἔγγιζω), which is a common word that means “near,” “nearby,” or “close at hand,” and can refer to near in space (Luke 18:40) or near in time (Matt. 26:45). Here it is near in time. God said that the end was “near” even though it has now been some 2000 years without the end coming. In both the Old Testament, Gospels, and New Testament, God said the end was near (Isa. 13:6; 29:17; 51:5; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; Obad. 1:15; Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Rom. 16:20; James 5:8; Rev. 1:1). We do not know the reason for this, but the effect is that we should always be ready for the Lord. In contrast with “night,” “the day” (the Greek has the definite article, “the”) is the time of light and goodness, and in this context it is also a reference to the “Day of the Lord,” when the Rapture of the Church occurs ending the Administration of the Grace of God and beginning the Tribulation, which will culminate with the Second Coming of Jesus and the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21).

13:13. “daytime.” In contrast with verse 12 in which the Greek word hēmera (day) has the definite article (“the day”), this verse has hēmera without the definite article, so it means “daytime.” The Roman world had only oil lamps and torches to produce light after dark and these were not very effective. Thus many people did things in the dark when they could not be seen that they would never have done in the daylight when they would be easily recognized. God wants us to “walk with decency” in the nighttime just as we do in the daytime. The Christian is not to live a double life, living in sin when he can get away with it, then pretending to be godly when others can see. Christians are to live as if they were being watched by other godly people all the time.

“orgies.” The Greek word is kōmos (#2970 κῶμος), it usually translated as “orgies,” “reveling,” or “carousing.” The word originally meant something like “merrymaking” but came to be associated with wild religious festivals where drunken, frenzied mobs would parade the streets after dinner hours with torches accosting people, singing, and carousing. This was associated with orgies and self-mutilation.

13:14. “and do not think ahead.” The Greek is simply “to do” in the imperative present middle and the Greek word for “forethoughts,” but the translation “do not do forethoughts” is awkward. We have rendered the phrase “do not think ahead.”

“forethoughts” is the Greek noun pronoia (#4307), what is thought about beforehand. The flesh has desires, and many people follow those desires instead of bringing their thoughts captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). How many, many times our sin starts by our paying attention to what our flesh desires, thinking ahead about what it
wants, what it is pressuring us to do that is outside the will of God. We start with the faintest forethoughts, which become stronger and stronger as we dwell on them and as the forethoughts take shape into ideas and plans. We dwell on the desires, then can become consumed with them to the point that we begin planning to fulfill them, finally acting on what our flesh craves. This verse is the way out: do not think ahead about how to fulfill the desires of the flesh.

“flesh.” The “flesh,” which in this context represents both our flesh and our sin nature, produces desires in us that are not godly. These can be as simple as oversleeping or overeating, desires of the flesh of our body, or they can be desires that are very depraved in nature. The more ungodly a person becomes, the more mental time he or she spends thinking about and planning how to fulfill these ungodly desires. God tells us to bring our thoughts captive to Christ, to not allow ourselves to think ungodly thoughts (2 Cor. 10:5). The book of James describes the downhill course of ungodly thinking. First, we are enticed by our own desires or lusts (epithumia; the same Greek word as used here in Rom. 13:14). The lust then “conceives” as it is incubated in our minds, and then it gives birth to sin. Sin eventually ends in death (James 1:14, 15). In the Greek, the verb “to do” in this verse is in the imperative mood, the mood of command. God knows that if we think about how to satisfy our fleshly desires, we will end up in sin, so He commands us to not allow ourselves to think ahead of time about how to satisfy our fleshly desires.

Chapter 14

14:1. “for the purpose of.” The purpose clause comes from the Greek preposition eis, which can indicate purpose. We are to “welcome” those who are weak in the faith (not just “accept” them), but we are not to welcome them just so we can debate with them about why they believe what they believe.

“to the end of quarreling.” The Greek word is diakrisis (#1253 διάκρισις) and it comes from the root word krinō, which is “to judge.” Thus, the word can refer to passing judgment, or that which came from passing judgment, i.e., a quarrel. This verse says that we are to welcome people who differ from us, and we should, with open arms. But too often Christians receive each other, but have secret motives of changing each other, which often just leads to fights. The Greek preposition eis generally means “to” or “with the result that,” (sometimes “for the purpose of”), and here it seems to be saying that we should receive weaker Christians, but not to the end that we begin quarreling about their opinions. If we receive them, lets continue in that love. If God opens a door for discussion, fine, but we do not start with that purpose.

14:3. “The one who eats everything must not treat...with contempt.” This seems to be the best rendering of the verb exoutheneō (#1848 εξουθενέω), “to look down upon; to treat with contempt,” which is in the third person, present imperative. In other words, the meaning here is that each person is to be careful how they treat others. If the verse is rendered something like “Let the one who eats not...” as many versions are, then the understood subject of the verb (the Church, perhaps?) is to make sure that people do not treat others with contempt. But there is no guidance about how to stop people from looking down on others, and no guidance as to what to do with someone in the Church who looks down on others.
“treat...with contempt.” From exoutheneo (#1848 ἐξουθενέω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

“accepted.” The Greek is proslambanō (#4355 προσλαμβάνω) and it means to accept, as God or Christ would accept someone, but often more than that, to welcome someone, to take the person into one’s home. It occurs in verse 1 and here in verse 3. In verse 1 we translated it “welcome” because it was one person welcoming another. In the context of verse 1, “accepting” seemed too cold for the context; as Christians, we are not just to “accept” one another, but to welcome each other. However, we do not usually think of God as “welcoming” us, but rather we feel blessed to know that we are “accepted” by God. Although we recognize that “welcome” and “accepted” are the same word in Greek, we thought it communicated the sense in English better to say “welcome” than “accepted.”

14:4. “someone else’s.” The Greek is “another’s.” We thought the phrase “someone else’s” captured that thought into English very clearly.

“household slave.” The Greek is oiketēs (#3610 οἰκέτης) and means a slave who is part of the household, or it can refer to a domestic. The emphasis here must not be missed. This is not simply doulos, slave (or servant; #1401), or another Greek word for servant. The emphasis is that this person is part of the household. A household slave was a slave, certainly, but also part of the household. He or she was not a hired servant who could come and go, but a part of the household. That God would use the word oiketēs here brings our minds back to the fact that each Christian is part of God’s household, a slave in His house. Just as no Roman would go to another man’s house and pass judgment on his slaves, we are all God’s slaves in His household and are not to pass judgment on one another.

14:5. “above another day.” We are not to judge others for the time, or days, they set aside for special activities or rest. See commentary on Colossians 2:16.

14:8. “we live...we live...we die...we die.” A beautiful figure of speech, epadiplosis, which is the name of the figure of speech that occurs when the figure epanadiplosis occurs in successive phrases or sentences (Bullinger, Figures).

14:9. “became alive.” When used with “died,” the word zaō, live, has the force of “become alive” or even “become alive again.”


“judgment seat of God.” Every person will be judged in the future, and rewarded or punished according to what he deserves. Although this verse says “judgment seat of God,” Jesus will do the actual judging, and 2 Corinthians 5:10 says “judgment seat of Christ.”

It is much easier to understand verses that speak about the judgment seat or of worship if we have an Eastern mindset and do not think like a Westerner. Eastern rulers almost always had a vizier, a “second in command,” who ran the daily affairs of the kingdom. There are many examples of this in the Bible. Joseph was the vizier, or second in command, for Pharaoh (Gen. 41:38-45), and Haman and Mordecai were for Ahasuerus, the king of Persia (Esther 1:1, 3:1, 8:2). King Darius planned to make Daniel his second in command (Dan. 6:2). “King Belshazzar” (Dan. 5:1) was actually the vizier, the second in command acting as the king de facto. The real king was Nabonidus, which
is why Belshazzar could only make Daniel the third ruler in the kingdom, because he himself was already second ruler (Dan. 5:7).

Much of the time, the true regent was not available to the public. Oriental rulers spent a lot of time in pleasure with women, sports and hunting, eating, receiving dignitaries, etc. They were often considered gods on earth and were simply not available to the general public. The book of Esther tells us of one time when king Ahasuerus was in his private quarters and had not come out for a month (4:11). The king’s vizier would have been running the kingdom during that time. If we understand the king-like authority of the vizier, and that in a very real sense he often ran the kingdom, we can better understand verses about the judgment seat of Christ and why Christ is worshipped. Regarding the judgment seat: sometimes it is called the Judgment seat of God (Rom. 14:10), and sometimes the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Revelation 20:11-13 describes what we refer to as the “White Throne” judgment, and although the one doing the judging is not stated, we can tell from the scope of Scripture that it is Jesus Christ (the more accurate Greek texts read “throne” in verse 12, not “God”). No one from the ancient Middle East would be confused by sometimes saying the judgment seat of “God” and other times saying the judgment seat of “Christ.” God is the power behind the judgment, which is actually done by the vizier, in this case, Jesus Christ. Thus, it is God’s judgment seat because it has His ultimate authority. However, it is Christ’s judgment seat because he does the actual judging. Jesus Christ made it clear that he would be doing the actual judging when he said: “the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son...And he [God] has given him [Christ] authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me” (John 5:22, 27, 30).

Regarding worship: In the kingdoms of the ancient Middle East, the king was worshipped, but so was the vizier (and so were the gods of the kingdom). Oriental people did not see worship as a “god only” thing. Worship consisted of things such as bowing or prostration, acts of respect, etc., and they were given to any god or person who was due that kind of treatment. In Persia, for example, people worshipped their gods, and the king, and the vizier. Note in the book of Esther that the king commanded the vizier be respected, and the people “bowed, and reverenced” Haman (KJV). The Hebrew word translated “reverenced” is most often translated “worshipped” when the subject is God, and it confuses the issue of worship when the same word is translated “worship” when the subject is God, but “reverence” or “give honor to” when the subject is humans. The English reader loses the fact that both God and people were worshipped, but the worshippers knew who was a god, who was the king, and who were simply officials in the kingdom. John was perfectly comfortable worshiping the angel (falling down prostrate before him; Rev. 22:8), but the angel said not to do it because “I am a fellow servant,” not because worship was not due to those who are “worth it.” Both God and Christ are due “worship,” and both should be by Christians, who also should know who is God and who is the vizier.


14:14. This verse is the figure of speech Parembole, which is a form of parenthesis. A Parembole occurs when the interposed sentence is independent and complete in itself. It would make sense if it were separated from the sentences before and after it.
“in.” The Greek word *en* in the phrase, “in the Lord Jesus” refers to Paul’s connection with Christ. It means, “in connection with.” The word *en* can mean “by” in some instances, but it is less likely that it means “by” here, since Paul was likely not personally instructed by Jesus about clean and unclean things, but rather came to that knowledge, part by the instruction of others, part based on Scripture, and part due to spiritual insight and revelation. Thus, he was persuaded “in connection” with the Lord Jesus. See commentary on Romans 6:3.

14:15. “walking in love.” In place of “in” the Greek reads *kata*, “according to love.” In English usage, however, to walk *in* love is to walk according to love.

14:16. “defaming talk.” The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

14:17. “joy in holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

14:23. “condemned.” The one who acts against his own conscience and without faith is condemned both by himself (self-condemnation) and by God, for what he is doing is sin, as the verse says.

“based on trust.” The Greek simply has the phrase *ek pistis*, more literally, “from trust,” but it means that what we do must be “out from our trust,” or we would say more clearly, based on our trust (cp. The Complete Jewish Bible; A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans, by Newman and Nida). This is a stern warning for Christians to be clear about what they believe and then base their actions on that. Too many times we Christians get swept up in the moment or “go along with the crowd” and end up doing things that we really do not want to do. We have to know what we believe and then act in accordance with those beliefs.

Chapter 15

15:1. “weaknesses.” The Greek is *adunatos* (#102 ἀδύνατος), and means without strength, impotent, powerless, weakly, disabled. In this case the context makes the meaning clear. The context of Romans 14 is the weak in faith not walking in the freedom they have in Christ, and those who are strong in the faith learning to live in peace with them, not leading them to sin against their conscience. It could be said that the chapter break between Romans 14:23 and 15:1 breaks the context and causes the majority of Christians to misunderstand the meaning of 15:1-3. Romans 14 and 15 are clear: we who are strong in the faith have an obligation to help, and bear, those who are not. We have an obligation to not please ourselves, but to do what blesses others.


15:4. “to teach us.” The Greek word “teach” is *didaskalia* (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (almost as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or the teaching. (See commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13). Here it is used with the preposition *eis*, which is an indicator of purpose: thus, “for teaching us,” “for our instruction,” “to teach us,” etc. The KJV translates *didaskalia* as “learning” in this verse, which has caused some people to misunderstand it, and worse, to use it to make an artificial division between what God
gave us to “learn” from, in contrast to what God gave us as instruction “to” us. Of course there are some things we learn from that are not written for us to obey, and other things that are written to us for us to obey, but that is not the point of this particular verse. *Didaskalia* is used 21 times in the NT, and this is the only place the KJV translates it “learning.” Had the KJV translated it “teaching” here, we could have seen its relation to verses such as 2 Timothy 3:16, where “all” Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, is profitable for “teaching.” Christians are to be taught from the whole Bible. God changes some of His rules from Administration to Administration. For example, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were to eat only plants (Gen. 1:29). After the Flood, God changed His rules about eating and told mankind we could eat meat also (Gen. 9:3; for more on Administrations in the Bible, see commentary on Eph. 3:2). On the other hand, some of God’s rules do not change. We all know that commandments of God such as “do not steal” or “love your neighbor” are applicable through all administrations. Charles Ryrie wrote: “…certain principles…are often carried over into succeeding ages, because God’s truth does not cease to be truth, and these principles become part of the cumulative body of truth for which man is responsible….” (*Dispensationalism*, pp. 35, 36). How do we know what commands of God we are to obey and what commands have been superseded by other commands? The only way is to read and study the whole Bible and see if and when God changes. On certain subjects, such as what we are to eat, or regulations about marriage, the changes are clear. On other subjects, the changes are not as clear, but can be discovered by diligent study. One thing we must keep in mind is that the Church Epistles are specifically addressed “to” the Church, so commandments in them are like a trump card: if God gives us a command in the Church Epistles, that trumps the commands of God in other Administrations. Thus, when God says in 1 Corinthians 7:2 that marriage is a one-man-to-one-woman relationship, that trumps the Law, which allowed a man to have more than one wife.

All of God’s revelation is to teach us. That is the lesson here, and in 2 Timothy 3:16, which both use the word *didaskalia*. However, there is a difference between being “taught” by something and obeying it. We are taught by the Levitical rules of animal sacrifice, but we are not to obey them. That is why it is imperative for anyone who wants to obey God to know what commands are “to” him and what commands he only learns from. There are some people who overly emphasize the fact that the Church Epistles are written “to” the Church, and downplay the rest of God’s revelation to mankind. We must never do that. Even commands of God we are not to obey, like the instructions in Leviticus on how to do animal sacrifice, teach us about God and His ways. More importantly, however, there is much in the Old Testament and Gospels that are “to” the Church by virtue of the fact they are commands of God that were never superseded by any revelation in the Church Epistles. Many subjects covered in the Old Testament or Gospels are never again mentioned in the Epistles: God said it once, and that should be good enough for us. For example, “love your neighbor” is a command that applies in all Administrations. But only in the Law does God give us examples of how to do that in many specific situations; for example, how to structure a righteous society by having building codes, specific civil penalties for lawbreakers, regulations about lending and borrowing, and much more. These regulations are “to” us as much as the information in the Church Epistles by virtue of the fact that God gives them once and never repeats them. They are His one-time revelation for building a godly society. When it comes to
prayer, the Church Epistles emphasize prayer (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2, 1 Thess. 4:17), but it is in the sermon on the mount we have a sample prayer with instructions on things like making sure we are not praying in order to be seen by people. That revelation is still “to” us because it is never superseded by anything in the Church Epistles. Like 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed,” and every verse of it is to teach us. Furthermore, much of it is directly applicable “to” us.

Here in Romans 15:4, it seemed clear to say “to teach us” (being internally consistent in the REV, translating didaskalia as either “teach,” “teaching,” etc., or as “doctrine” (that which is taught)). It seemed more confusing to say that the things written earlier were “doctrine,” because that could confuse people about whether we should try to obey all the Law, which we obviously cannot in light of later revelation.

15:8, 9. “Christ has become a servant…” The Greek syntax of verses 8-9 can be read in several ways. Either there are two subjects, Christ who becomes a servant and the Gentiles who glorify God, or Christ is the singular subject throughout. We have translated the passage with Christ as the continuing subject. Rather than the Gentiles, it is Christ who glorifies God, as verse nine illuminates with the quotation: “I will praise you among the Gentiles.”

The main clause of these verses is “Christ has become a servant,” while the rest of 8-9 fleshes out exactly how. It is fleshed out in three senses: who is Christ a servant to, why is he a servant, and towards what end does he serve. First, concerning the who, he is a servant of the circumcision (i.e., the Jews. This is a genitive of reference), then he is a servant with respect to the Gentiles (where τὰ δὲ ἔθνη is the accusative of respect [Beale and Carson, Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, 687-88]). Thus there are two categories of people with respect to which Christ serves—Jews and Gentiles. This encompasses all of humanity.

Next, we are given two parallel huper clauses [#5228 ὑπὲρ “for the sake of”] telling us why Christ is a servant to each group: to the Jews it is for the sake of the truth of God, namely to confirm that God is faithful to his promises to the Jewish people; and to the Gentiles it is for the sake of mercy, likely because these promises also come to Gentiles by God’s mercy alone.

Lastly, there is a purpose expressed for Christ’s service to each group. This is communicated through eis to and the infinitive, which expresses purpose (or it could also express result [Wallace, Exegetical Syntax, 611]). These two purpose clauses give us a greater sense of the “why” contained in the huper clauses mentioned above. They work together with the huper clauses, adding on to them. For the Jews, we have already seen, it was in order to confirm the promises made to the fathers. For the Gentiles, Christ’s purpose was to glorify God (the Greek only has the infinitive “to glorify” at this point, dropping off the eis to in an ellipsis, since the Greek readers would easily supply it in their minds). Not only would Christ glorify God by bringing mercy to the Gentiles, even the Gentiles themselves would bring much praise and glory to the Father on account of Christ’s work as well—which is seen in the following verses that call the Gentiles to rejoice, praise, and hope in God (vv. 10-12).

15:9. Quoted from Psalm 18:49.
15:10. Quoted from Deuteronomy 32:43.
15:12. Quoted from Isaiah 11:10 (from the Septuagint).
“the shoot from Jesse.” Jesus Christ is the shoot that came up from the stump of Jesse. The title “shoot from Jesse” refers to the hope the Messiah gives us as well as the fact that he provides nourishment and stability. Most English versions have “root” instead of “shoot,” “root-shoot,” “scion,” “descendant,” etc. However, when it comes to determining the meaning of a title (and “Shoot from Jesse” is a title of the Messiah), we have to use the context in which the title occurs. In this case, both the introduction of the title in Isaiah 11, and the last use in Revelation 22, show us that it refers to a shoot or sprout that comes up from the root. The phrase, “Shoot from Jesse” occurs two times (Isa. 11:10; Rom. 15:12), but Romans 15:12 is a quotation of Isaiah (from the Septuagint). Similarly, the phrase “Shoot from David” occurs two times (Rev. 5:5 and 22:16). Jesse was the father of David (Ruth 4:22; 1 Chron. 2:12, 13), so the phrases are basically equivalent. However, the name “Jesse” is more closely associated with the whole royal lineage and the people of God, while the name “David” is more directly associated with the kingdom.

There are some Trinitarians who assert that the translation should be “root” and that this title proves that Jesus is God, but that is not the case. First, we do not have to draw that conclusion even if we think the translation should be “root,” because there are other meanings of “root” besides being the source of something, but the context of when and where the title appears shows it does not refer to the Messiah being the source of David. This is why even many Trinitarian scholars do not think it refers to “source.”

The Hebrew word translated “root” or “shoot” is sheresh (שֹׁרֶשׁ #8328) and the Greek word is rhiza (ῥίζα #4491 pronounced hreed-zah). In both Hebrew and Greek the words can refer to either a “root” or a “shoot” that comes up from a root. Furthermore, in both Hebrew and Greek the words are used both literally and metaphorically. For example, a literal use of the Hebrew word occurs in Job 14:8, while Job 5:3 and Proverbs 12:3 use the word metaphorically as a source of supply and stability, and Deuteronomy 29:18 uses it metaphorically to refer to the source of something. The same thing happens in Greek. The word rhiza can refer to a literal root (cp. Matt. 3:10; Luke 17:6), or it can be used metaphorically as the source of supply and stability (cp. Rom. 11:18), or it can be used for the origin of something (1 Tim. 6:10).

Given the two possible translations, “root,” or “shoot,” the better translation of both the Hebrew and Greek word is “shoot,” i.e., a shoot that comes up from the root. This is clear from the first use in Isaiah 11:10 and the last use in Revelation 22:16.

The context of Isaiah is that the Jews lived in a time when it seemed their kingdom was in ruins and the hope of Israel seemed gone. The kingdom of Israel, represented by the words “Jesse” or “David,” was just a stump of what it had been under David and Solomon. The once-great united kingdom of Israel had split into two rival countries; Israel to the north and the much smaller Judah in the south. Furthermore, both countries has been attacked by foreigners, including Egypt, the Syrians, and the Assyrians. In fact, during Isaiah’s day Assyria captured Israel and carried the people away, replacing them with foreigners. It did not look as if there would ever be a kingdom of Israel again. The people needed hope. At that time the word of the Lord came to Isaiah and promised that a shoot would indeed come up out of the stump of Jesse. That prophecy is Isaiah 11.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse...And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

After those wonderful verses came the powerful verse about the Messiah himself: “In that day the Shoot from Jesse shall stand as a banner for the peoples. All the nations will inquire of him, and his resting place shall be glorious.” The context makes the title, “Shoot from Jesse” very clear. The Messiah will come from Jesse and restore the kingdom, indeed, he will restore the entire earth to its Edenic state. He will start out as a “shoot,” with humble beginnings, but he will eventually rule and restore the earth.

Notice that there is no hint in this context that the Messiah somehow started Israel or was its source. There is no hint of the Trinity. The Messiah is shown to be a descendant of Jesse; he comes from the stump of Jesse (11:1). As for the translation “shoot,” many lexicons, commentaries, and versions prefer the translation “shoot” or some equivalent to it, and not the translation “root,” even though most English versions still read “root.” For example, the BDAG Lexicon lists Romans 15:12 saying, “that which grows from a root: [a] shoot, scion.” Commentaries by scholars such as Lenski and Thomas Schreiner concur. Meyer’s New Testament Commentary says “root-shoot,” referring to a descendant (and points out that the Hebrew word sheresh (#8328 שֶׁרֶשׁ) can also refer to a shoot from a living root). Newman and Nida understand that the text is referring to someone who comes from Jesse and think perhaps the best translation should be “descendant” (A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans). R. C. H. Lenski writes in his commentary on Romans 15:12:

The word ῥίζα refers to a live root that sends up a sprout, hence “the root-sprout,” the article designates the one person referred to. Jesse was David’s father; in Rev. 5:5 and 22:16 we have “root-sprout of David.” The royal house that sprang from David was cut down; from the root Jesse (appositional genitive) only a tender young sprout would grow up, so tiny and apparently so weak compared with the old royal tree. …Here is the hand of God: a mere root-sprout, small, lowly, from the defunct royal Jewish house, is the Lord and hope of the world of all nations.

A number of English versions have “shoot” or something equivalent, including what the “shoot” is, a “descendant.” The New English Bible and the Moffatt Bible have “Scion,” which is a shoot or bud. God’s New Covenant, the translation done by Heinz Cassirer, has, “the scion sprung from Jesse.” The New Testament by Edgar Goodspeed says, “The descendant of Jesse will come,” and The Good News Bible has “A descendant of Jesse will appear.” Charles Williams (The New Testament in the Language of the People) translated the phrase, “The noted Son of Jesse will come,” showing that he felt rhiza referred to the descendant of Jesse, the Son of Jesse.
Isaiah is clear that the Messiah comes from Jesse, and thus “shoot” is a better translation than “root,” but Revelation 22:16 also shows us that the translation should be “shoot from David” or an equivalent phrase. Jesus Christ is speaking, and he says, “I am the rhiza and offspring of David.” Jesus is highlighting who he is by phrasing it two different ways. He is not using the terms in an opposite manner, as if he were both the source of David and the offspring of David. For one thing, his audience would not have understood that. He was using the title “shoot from David” just as Isaiah used “shoot from Jesse.” Furthermore, in typical Semitic fashion, he was stating something twice in slightly different ways for clarity and emphasis. Thus he said he was the shoot that came from David, the offspring of David. This is closely related to the Messianic title, “Son of David.” As the Messiah who came from David and would restore Israel and the earth, it is fitting that Isaiah and Romans show that Jesus will be someone whom not only the Jews, but the Gentiles, will look to for leadership.

The fact that both the Hebrew word sheresh and the Greek word rhiza can refer to either a root or a shoot from the root allows for one more possibility: that the text contains the figure of speech amphibologia, double entendre, and both meanings are included in the verse. Although the context dictates that “shoot” would be the dominant reading, we cannot rule out the fact that God chooses words very carefully, and the Messiah is also our stability and source of sustenance. Thus while we are to focus on the fact that the Messiah is the “shoot from Jesse” (and David) and is our hope when hope seems lost, we are not to lose sight of the fact that our sustenance and stability are also provided by the Messiah.


“as you continue to believe.” The sense of the Greek en is “through,” or perhaps even better, “in connection with.” The joy and peace do not “just happen” to the Christian, but are in connection with his continuing faith, his continuing believing.

“abound in hope through the power of holy spirit.” In this verse, God connects the reality of the hope in the life of a believer to the power of the holy spirit. The gift of holy spirit makes the hope more real in many ways. First, there is the effect the holy spirit has in us as it works to conform us into the image of Christ (Gal. 5:16-25). Perhaps more to the point is how, when we see the power of holy spirit at work in us as we receive revelation, speak in tongues, and manifest the spirit in other ways, God becomes more real to us, and thus his promises about the future (our hope) abounds in us as well. The verse immediately before 15:13, (Rom. 15:12), speaks of the hope of the coming of the Messiah, the root of David, which is one of the great promises of God that we can hope for. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

15:16. “a servant.” The Greek is leitourgos (#3011 λειτουργός). It is used of a public minister, a servant of the state, and it is also used of a minister in a sacred manner. Many think that the word always connotes a sacred minister, but there is much to argue that in this context the word can mean a secular minister. There are aspects of both meanings that are true, and this is one of the advantages of the Greek text—it packs both meanings into one word. In the Roman world, public servants bore the expense for festivals, celebrations, games (including the gladiator matches), etc. By addressing himself as a public servant one would immediately note that he was the one who bore the expense of
his own efforts in bringing the Gentiles to Christ, something he points out at other places in the Epistles. Both public servants and sacred ministers did what they did on behalf of others, which was certainly the case with Paul.

“my offering, namely, the Gentiles.” The Greek, “offering of the Gentiles” is the objective genitive and thus has the force of “the offering, that is to say, the Gentiles.” Paul’s offering to God was the Gentiles.

“made holy by holy spirit.” The gift of “holy spirit” that is born inside each believer “sanctifies” them, i.e., it makes them holy. Thus the Gentiles, when they get born again, become holy to God. God is holy and spirit, and like any parent, when He gives birth, His children get his nature, so they are holy too. The way it works is that when a person gets “born again,” he or she receives the gift of God’s nature, which the Bible calls “holy spirit” (1 Thess. 4:8), and because God’s children have God’s holy nature, they are holy and are called “holy ones.” (See commentary on Philippians 1:1, “holy ones.”) [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

15:19. “power of holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

“all the way around to Illyricum.” Scripture never mentions Paul traveling in Macedonia further west than Berea (Acts 17:10ff), and the logical place for him to travel west to Illyricum would have been from Thessalonica. From there he could have taken the Egnation Way west to one of its two ports on the Adriatic Sea, Dyrrhachium or Apollonia. Thus it is likely that when Paul was in Thessalonica on his 3rd Missionary Journey. He made the decision to go through Macedonia (Acts 19:21) and it is likely that when he was in Macedonia (Acts 20:2) he took some time and traveled west. He did not have the time to travel west on his return journey through Macedonia (Acts 20:3), because he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem.


15:24. Although many commentators see an anacoluthon in this verse, for us there is no need for it (Cp. Lenski).

“once I have first enjoyed your company for a while.” The Greek reads somewhat differently, saying that Paul would like to “fill up” his “measure” with them, which is very unclear in English. When we say we have “had our fill” of a guest, it means we are unhappy with the situation and it is time for him to leave. Thus we believe the REV has the correct sense of the verse.

15:26. “Macedonia,” “Achaia.” This is the figure of speech, metonymy. This is a common use of metonymy, the regions being put for the people who live in them. The Gentile believers had made a contribution to help their Jewish brothers, and Paul was eager to deliver this gift, no doubt in part because he hoped it would help alleviate some of the division between the Jewish and Gentile Christians.

15:27. “minister.” The Greek is leitourgeō (#3008 λειτουργέω), and it means to serve the state at one’s own cost, or to do a service or perform a work. It was a word used specifically of the priests and Levites who performed sacred rites in the Temple, and is used in the NT of Christians serving Christ. Therefore this word brings to mind the specific service of the Levitical priests to God, and by being used here of the Gentiles, it is as if just as the Levites have served as priests to God, now the Gentiles serve as priests to the Jews, who in a way represent God to them (they would be the representatives of God, having brought the Law, the Christ, the Old Testament, etc.).
15:28. “myself made sure that they have received this fruit.” The Gentile churches that Paul founded had given a gift to the Jewish Church in Jerusalem. That is one of the reasons Paul felt that he must take the gift personally, and not hurry on to Rome and Spain right away from Corinth or Macedonia. Paul had directed that there be a financial gift sent to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4) and had encouraged the people to give (2 Cor. 8 and 9). Paul felt very strongly that the Jewish church needed to know that even as the Word went out first from them to the Gentiles, now the blessings of the Gentile churches were coming back to the Jews. That is why the verse says “myself made sure.” The text more literally reads “myself having sealed to them this fruit” (the verb being in the middle voice), using the custom of the seal to make the point. The “seal” was the assurance that the job was done completely. When a letter was completely written and addressed, then it was “sealed.” In this case, Paul wrote that he would “seal” the money to the believers in Jerusalem, i.e., make sure it was securely received by them. Anyone could have taken money to Jerusalem, but Paul felt his presence was essential to communicate the essence of the message that went with the blessing.

“by way of you.” Paul would travel through Rome on his way to Spain.

15:31. “that I may be delivered from those who are defiant in Judea.” Paul wrote this to Rome from Corinth on his third missionary journey (covered in Acts 18:23-21:17). In his first two missionary journeys, Paul departed from Antioch of Syria and ended there. This journey he departed from Antioch but never returned, because he was arrested in Jerusalem. It is clear from this verse and verse 32 that Paul planned to take the financial blessing he was traveling with to Jerusalem, securely transfer it to the believers there, and then travel to Spain by way of Rome (cp. 15:28). At some point during his travel God started to try to tell him not to go to Jerusalem, but he went anyway, against the will of God (see commentary on Acts 21:12, 14). As a result of his disobedience, he spent more than 4 years as a prisoner. He spent more than two years in Caesarea (Acts 24:27), then months traveling to Rome (Acts 27:9; 28:11), and then at least two years under arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). Paul disobeyed the will of God and went to Jerusalem, and his ministry was severely curtailed as a result.

“service.” The Greek word is diakonia (#1248 διακονία), and generally it means service or ministering, the office of those who serve in the church, the office of the deacon in the church, and the service of those who prepare and present food. In this case in Romans, the context shows us it refers to the “service” of bringing a gift, in this case, money, to the believers in Jerusalem. This explains why translations such as the New Jerusalem Bible translate it, “the aid I am carrying.”


15:32. “rest.” The Greek word is sunanapauomai (#4875 συναναπαύομαι), and it means to relax in someone’s company, or rest with (BDAG). The Romans were so familiar to Paul, and so at ease with him, that he could genuinely rest with them.

Chapter 16

16:1. “introducing and commending.” The Greek word is sunistemi (#4921 συνίστημι). It has a number of different meanings, but in this context, the BDAG Greek lexicon notes
that it means “to bring together as friends or in a trusting relationship by commending/recommending; to present, introduce or recommend someone to someone else.” In this verse, both the idea of introducing and recommending are equally important, so we conflated the text in the REV to include both meanings. Paul did not just introduce Phoebe, he recommended her to the Romans. However, as the Roman church did not know Phoebe, he also introduced her.

“deacon.” The Greek word is diakonos (#1249 διάκονος; pronounced dee-á-kah-nas), which means servant or “deacon.” In general the word means a servant or an assistant, but in the Christian Church it came to be an official title of an office in the church of those who were not “overseers” (actually running the congregation), but in charge of important duties. This is clear from a study of the word in the New Testament, particularly as it is used in 1 Timothy 3:8, 12; Philippians 1:1. There have been endless debates about whether God would allow a woman to hold the office of deacon in the church. Those who say that women cannot hold offices of authority in the Church say that in this verse diakonos should be translated “servant.” In contrast, those people who say that women could hold offices in the Church say that diakonos should be translated “deacon.” We assert that in the Church there is neither male nor female in Christ (Gal. 3:28), and that Phoebe held the office of a deacon in the church at Cenchreae. There is much evidence that women played a very important role in the early church (cp. notes 1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:12). One important piece of evidence that Phoebe was a “deacon” and not just a “servant” is the fact that she is called “a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.” There is no other place in the New Testament where a person is called a “servant” of a specific church. Christians are servants of God, or servants of Christ, but not servants of a specific church. In contrast, deacons were appointed to be deacons in specific churches. No person was a “deacon” of the Christian Church at large.

Phoebe was a deacon in the church at Cenchreae, which was a port of Corinth on the Aegean Sea, about 7 miles (11 km) southeast of Corinth. She must have been a very spiritual and trusted woman in the first century church, because Paul trusted her to take the Epistle of the Romans to the Church at Rome, even though the Christians at Rome did not know her.

Romans 16:1 is one of the verses in the New Testament that shows that women were elevated in the Christian Church in a way that they had never been in the Jewish or Greco-Roman culture. [For more on how the NT elevated and empowered women, see commentary on 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:11; 5:14; 1 Pet. 3:7].

16:2. “receive her in the Lord, in a manner worthy of the holy ones.” The two phrases appear to be appositional, such that “receive her in the Lord” is the same as “in a manner worthy of the holy ones.” We might expand it to be, “receive her in the Lord, that is to say, in a manner worthy of the holy ones.” The idea seems to be that the Romans receive Phoebe “in” in connection with, the Lord, in a godly way. This verse does not seem to be using the phrase “in the Lord” as descriptive of Phoebe, as if it were saying, “receive Phoebe, who is in the Lord, in a manner worthy of the holy ones,” although the wording of the Greek text certainly allows for Phoebe to be a believer who is “in the Lord.”

“help her in whatever she may need from you.” This phrase has led many to believe that Phoebe had business in Rome and needed to go there anyway, and that may
be true. It may also be that what she needed was hospitality and help getting back home after delivering the Epistle of Romans.


16:7. “Junia.” The identity and role of “Junia” has been hotly debated from a number of angles. It was once insisted that Junia could be a masculine name, but that argument has been pretty much conclusively settled by a study that showed there were over 250 uses of the name Junia in the Greek sources extant today, and not one of them was masculine. (Cp. New International Biblical Commentary: Romans, by James Edwards). Another angle of the argument arose because there are Greek manuscripts that have the masculine name Junias instead of the feminine Junia. However, those manuscripts were shown to be of a later date and not representing the original text, and thus what they actually showed was the anti-feminine bias of the Church at that time, and scribes would rather alter the text than admit to a feminine apostle. Today there are many commentators who recognize that Junia is indeed a woman’s name, but assert that the proper translation of the text is not that she was an apostle, but rather was “noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles” (HCSB) or “well known to the apostles” (ESV). However, although the Greek text can read that way, is that the most common and logical reading? The reason commentators assert that is the way the Greek text should be translated comes from bias, not a simple reading of Greek. Lenski, usually a very reliable commentator, but one who feels that women should not be leaders, writes that if Junia were an apostle, “such an apostle would be strange indeed” (The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans). The simple and straightforward reading of the Greek text is that Junia was an apostle. Thus, Romans 16:7 is one of the many verses in the NT that elevated women in the family, society, and Church [For more about women’s position in the family, society, and Church, see commentary on Acts 17:12; 18:26; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14; and 1 Pet. 3:7. Also, see Appendix 12: “The Role of Women in the Church”].

16:17. “keep on the lookout for.” The Greek is skopeō (#4648 σκοπέω), and it means to pay careful attention to, notice, watch. It is in the active voice, present tense, so it means to continually keep doing it. In this context, it seems like “watch out for” was not exactly the meaning, because that phrase is more akin to “be careful of” or “guard yourself against,” than “keep your eye on those” (NASB). The context seems to be that God is warning Christians to keep an eye out for people who cause division rather than to “be on guard against” people who cause division. The context makes it seem like the congregation at Rome had not yet been infected by people causing division (cp. v. 19), but Paul was telling them to make sure they pay attention in case anyone does start to sow division.

“cause.” The Greek is poieō (#4160 ποιέω), which is to do or to make, and in the phrase with the definite article is a substantivized present participle, which means “those who are making.” There are people who, out of ignorance or on purpose, because of their pride, stubbornness, or evil hearts, cause division and create obstacles, temptations, and pitfalls. Destroying someone’s spiritual walk can have everlasting consequences, and people who do that to themselves or others need to be dealt with swiftly and decisively.

“Stay away from them!” The Greek is eklíno (#1578 ἐκκλίνω), and it means to avoid association with someone, to shun, to keep away from. This is a verb in which the tense and mood communicate volumes, and the word itself and wording of the phrase augments the verb. The verb is in the imperative mood, and thus is a command, so we
placed an exclamation point at the end of the sentence. Further, the aorist tense points to the fact that people who cause division are to be decisively and once and for all avoided. Lenski translates the phrase, “definitely incline away from them!” He adds, “definitely, decisively, once for all, incline away from them—‘from them,’ not merely from their teachings” (Lenski; Romans). People who cause divisions are to be dealt with quickly and decisively, not allowed to linger in the congregation and spread their poison.

16:18. “serve.” The Greek verb is douleuō (#1398 δουλεύω), from the noun doulos, a slave. It means to serve as a slave, or serve, and metaphorically can also mean to obey or submit to. An argument could be made that in this verse douleuō should be translated, “to serve as a slave to,” or “be a slave to.” As it is used here, douleuō can refer to the fact that the individual works very hard, like a slave. Just because a person serves himself does not mean the work is easy, although some people do serve their own appetites by trying to make their lives easy. Many people work to please themselves, but work very hard, some even to the point of destroying their health, family, friendships, etc. The word douleuō can also refer to “serving as a slave to,” in the sense of being a slave to one’s appetites, like a drug addict is a slave to his addiction. Some people are slaves to their desires rather than being in control of their desires. Even in that case, however, the people are working to please themselves. In this verse the Scripture is pointing out the motivation for the work—to please themselves instead of the Lord Jesus.

“belly.” The Greek is koilia (#2836 κοιλία), and it has various meanings, including, belly, womb, stomach, and the inner parts of a person. It refers to the emotional life of the person. Modern science is now learning that the enteric nervous system is integrally involved with our emotions, and thankfully this is reflected in the biblical languages, both Hebrew and Greek. It is why we talk about a “gut feeling,” or have an upset stomach when we hear bad news, or why our bowels sometimes release when we are really afraid or shocked.

Here the word “belly” paints a graphic picture and includes many meanings, such as emotions and intentions, and shows that these kind of people just serve themselves and do what they feel like doing. They are not serving Christ. “Belly” harkens all the way back to the garden of Eden, when Eve served her own “belly” and not God, and did what she “felt like doing.”

“smooth talk.” The Greek word is chrēstologia (#5542 χρηστολογία), a compound word from chrestos (“kind”) and logia (“speech”). In this case, used in a bad sense, it is “smooth talk,” meant to deceive unwary listeners.

“nice-sounding words.” The Greek is eulogia (#2129 εὐλογία), a compound word from eu (good) and logia (speech). In the Bible it is used in both its good sense of a “good saying,” thus “blessing, eulogy, etc.” (cp. Rom. 15:29), and in its bad sense of flattery, as it is used here. These liars speak “nice sounding words,” but they do not mean them, so they are really just lies and flattery. Nevertheless, they are effective because people are naive or unsuspecting. The Adversary tries to stop Christians from being discerning by labeling them as “judgmental,” and often that ruse works. Sometimes a teacher will be speaking a mix of truth and error and someone listening will try to point out the error that is mixed in with the truth, but get accused of being picky and judgmental. It is never wrong to separate truth from error. Scripture tells us to “...test everything and hold fast to what is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). Paul got very upset with the Church at Corinth when they did not correctly discern the motives and teachings of the
false apostles: “For if someone comes who preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or if you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different Good News, which you did not accept, you put up with that easily enough” (2 Cor. 11:4). Yet we know that the false apostles who had infiltrated the church at Corinth did not teach only error. They, like all false teachers and even the Devil in Genesis 3, mixed truth and error, and Christians must be discerning enough to separate them. Not all smooth talk and nice words are godly and true.

“thoroughly deceive.” The Greek is exapatao (#1818 ἐξαπατάω). It is the verb apatao (#538; “deceive”) and the prefix ek as an intensifier, thus, “thoroughly deceive.”

“unsuspecting.” The Greek is akakos (#172 ἄκακος), a word made from the prefix a (“not”) and kakos (bad, of a bad nature, morally bad), and it means without badness, harmless, innocent, free from guilt. In this context it means unsuspecting (BDAG).

People who are morally upright get taken advantage of when they remain unsuspecting. It is not that the righteous have to be suspicious of everyone, but on the other hand they need to keep their eyes open for inconsistencies in people’s lives and words.

16:19. “untainted.” The Greek is akeraios (#185 ἀκέραιος), meaning unmixed or pure, as in unmixed wines or metals; without a mixture of evil, free from guile, innocent, simple. Thus, in this context, “untainted” (Louw-Nida; Greek Lexicon). There are commentators who think that the meaning of akeraios here has to be contrasted to “wise,” so that we are “wise about what is good and about what is evil.” Thus, some versions use “innocent” (HCS; ESV; NASB), and others use “guileless” (NRSV). There is a problem with those translations, however. To be contrasted with the mental quality of wisdom, “guileless” and “innocent” have to be mental qualities too, and thus mean “ignorant” or “naive.” For example, the Bible in Basic English translates the phrase, “without knowledge of evil.” But there are verses that tell Christians not to be ignorant of Satan or his devices (cp. 2 Cor. 2:11). The Christian is to be wise about both what is good and what is evil, and also is to keep from getting involved in evil. The contrast in this verse is between “good” and “evil.” The Christian is to be wise about what is good, and at the same time, not be “mixed” (tainted) with evil. There are versions which pick up this sense of the word. For example, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible translates it “pure,” and GWN (God’s Word to the Nations) translates it, “to avoid what is evil.”

16:20. “God of peace.” The phrase “God of peace” is a common one in the New Testament (cp. Rom. 15:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20). This is undoubtedly due to the fact that peace is so important to a blessed life, and it is so absent in the world around us. God is here called the “God of peace” because the context is those people who are causing divisions and problems among the believers (v. 17). God is not a God of division and strife, but of peace, and although people influenced by Satan are causing problems now, that will go away very soon.

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“swiftly.” The Greek phrase translated swiftly is en tachos (ἐν τάχος), literally meaning, “in speed.” The main idea of the verse is that very soon God will crush Satan. The Bible says exactly that in many other places as well—that Satan’s end will be soon
Another implication of the phrase is that when Satan’s end comes, it will come quickly. The rule of the Devil will be destroyed very quickly when the Lord Jesus appears (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:11-20:3). It will not be a lingering death, but will be destroyed in hours when the Lord appears to fight the Battle of Armageddon. There is one more overtone in the verse that we must pay attention to, and that is that this verse also includes the believers’ victory over Satan now if we will obey God and do what He tells us to. We do have many victories over Satan in this life (cp. 1 John 2:14; 4:4). We must note that the verse says that Satan will be crushed “under your feet,” i.e., the feet of the believers. Of course this will be more fully fulfilled when we participate in the Battle of Armageddon (cp. Rev. 19:14), but we also have victories over Satan’s plans now. In this case in the Church at Rome that involved people causing division, if we are wise about what is good and untainted by evil (v. 19), and if we watch for, and stay away from, people who cause divisions, then we will quickly defeat Satan’s plans to divide our congregations. It is never easy to confront and dismiss those who cause divisions, in part because we want to allow people to have their own opinions. However, there are people who step over the line in that area, and we must deal with them quickly and decisively, as God says to. If we do, Satan’s plans will be quickly stopped. If we do not obey God in this matter, the word of those who cause division will spread like gangrene and overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17, 18).

“grace of our Lord Jesus.” A textual variation (notably in the Western Texts) adds the word “Christ” to this benediction (cp. ESV; NRSV; KJV; ASV). However the original was most likely the shorter reading found in the earliest manuscripts and represented in the REV and most modern versions. The addition is explained by the principle called “the expansion of piety,“ which is the tendency of scribes to continue to enlarge names, titles, doxologies, etc. over time, often due to misplaced reverence. In this case, the original “Lord Jesus” gets expanded to “Lord Jesus Christ.” It is much more likely that “Christ” was added than that it was omitted by copyists. [For more on “the expansion of piety,” see, James White, The King James Only Controversy, pp. 43-46].

16:21. “my kinsmen.” The Greek word is suggenēs (#4773 συγγενής), and it refers to people who are related by blood, or in a wider sense, are of the same country or race. In this case it refers to Paul’s fellow Jews. See commentary on Romans 9:3.

16:22. “greet you in the Lord.” This does not mean, “I greet you, who are in the Lord,” but rather, “greet you in connection with the Lord.” It is Tertius’ way of letting the Christians at Rome know that he is a fellow Christian, and is greeting them as such. The same basic format is found in 1 Corinthians 16:19. It seems certain that Paul would not let a non-Christian scribe write down the Epistle of Romans as he dictated it. Given the circumstances and confines of writing as a prisoner in Rome, it is certain that Paul and Tertius had a wonderful working relationship.

16:24. Omitted from the REV. The textual evidence is very strong that the phrase that appears in the KJV is an addition, which is why almost all modern versions omit it. If it were original, there seems to be no reason why a scribe would have omitted it, and the general tendency was to expand liturgical formulations, such as the ones found at the end of epistles. Other good evidence that it was an addition comes from the fact that the phrase does not appear in the same place in all the manuscripts. Some place it earlier, and some manuscripts place this verse after verse 27 so the book ends with the benediction.
16:25. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word *musterion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *musterion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

16:26. “by the command of.” The Greek is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:1.

16:27. “forever.” The literal Greek is “to the ages,” which in this context, which is the glory of God, means “forever.”