

Introduction: Issues and Methodology

THIS BOOK BEGAN WITH DISSATISFACTION. My dissatisfaction originated in reading a number of excellent commentaries on Paul's letter to the Romans that have appeared over the past twenty-five years.¹ This may sound odd, but let me explain. Although I learned a great deal about Romans from reading these commentaries, I still came away feeling dissatisfied with them for several reasons.

One reason for this dissatisfaction is the commentary format itself. Commentaries are both necessary and valuable. But they also force an interpreter to concentrate on individual passages and details rather than on the movement of an argument or narrative across passages. One comes away with a detailed knowledge of passages taken individually but much less about how the passages form an articulated whole. Introductions can obviate this to some extent but not altogether. Once the commentary proper begins, the interpretation of individual passages takes precedence.

In addition to this rather general reason for my dissatisfaction, there are also reasons peculiar to the interpretation of Romans. The first concerns the contexts necessary for understanding what Paul was about when he wrote or, more likely, dictated Romans. Most modern interpreters of Paul agree that Romans was not a theological treatise in any conventional sense but a real letter written to a specific Christian community for specific purposes. To understand Romans, one needs to

¹ Some of the more significant commentaries are the following: Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (SP 6; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996); C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975–1979); James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (2 vols.; WBC 38A, 38B; Dallas: Word, 1988); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993); Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); Heinrich Schlier, *Der Römerbrief: Kommentar* (HTKNT 6; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1977); Walter Schmithals, *Der Römerbrief: Ein Kommentar* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1988); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT 6; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (3 vols.; EKKNT 6; Zurich: Benziger, 1978–1982).

understand the character and makeup of the Roman Christian community. One also needs to understand Paul's situation when he wrote the letter and his relationship to the Roman Christians at that time. What did they know about him, and what did he know about them? What difference did this make to what Paul wrote in Romans? Although most interpreters on Romans recognize the importance of these multiple contexts, they do not act on this recognition persistently or consistently enough. For example, most interpreters note that, for all Romans and Galatians have in common, they seem to take radically different positions at certain points. Interpreters tend to attribute these differences to the different audiences Paul was addressing in Romans and Galatians. But they do not adequately press the implications of the differences. They continue to interpret Romans through "parallel" passages in Galatians and vice versa. The result is that consistently the radical differences between Galatians and Romans are often overlooked or underestimated. For example, in Gal 3:15–18, Paul wrote about the promises that God made to Abraham and "to his seed" in Gen 12:7, 13:5, 17:7, and 24:7. He insisted, however, that "to his seed" was singular and so was referring only to Christ and, by implication, not to the Jewish people. In Rom 4:13, 16, Paul again appealed to these promises to Abraham and "to his seed." But here he took "seed" as a collective noun referring to Abraham as the father of "many nations." In the context of Romans 4, Paul clearly meant by "many nations" both Jews and Gentiles. There is a radical difference between excluding the Jewish people from God's promises to Abraham and including them in those promises. Much more is happening here than a change of audience. This example is emblematic of the way interpreters treat the often radical differences between Galatians and Romans. To account for these radical differences, we need to pay much more attention to the specific contexts in which Paul was writing both Galatians and Romans than has been the case.

Again, virtually all interpreters of Romans agree that Romans is not a theological treatise. Context is important if one is ever to understand Romans properly. Nevertheless, there is still a tendency to treat what Paul wrote in Romans as topics rather than as issues. What I mean is that interpreters tend to be interested primarily in *what* Paul wrote and pay too little attention to *how* and *why* he wrote as he did. What were the issues Paul thought were at stake that led him to write as he did to the Roman Christians? Here again more persistent attention to specific contexts is called for. But something more is also called for, a more careful reading of Romans as an argument or as an articulated series of arguments meant to *persuade* the Roman Christians of certain things. For example, the tendency is to think of much of Romans as Paul's explanations of justification (Rom 1–4), salvation (5–8), and the fate of Israel (9–11). But if Romans was something other than a theological treatise, why did Paul choose these topics? What was at stake for Paul? How and why were these topics also issues between Paul and the Roman Christian community? Romans was more than the explanation of topics. It was an articulated series of arguments about important differences between Paul and the Roman Christians.

A further problem in the interpretation of Romans is a literary one. What is the structure of Romans, especially the structure of the main body of Romans 1–11? Because of their emphasis on the topics of Romans just mentioned, interpreters tend to overlook or, at least, undervalue the specifically literary clues to the structure of

the letter. For example, as one reads Rom 1:16–11:36, one cannot help but be struck by the differences in style and tone between different sections of the letter. On the one hand, some sections of Romans read like expositions or explanations. Their tone is calm and not argumentative. Romans 1:18–32, 3:21–26, 5:1–21, and 8:1–30 are of this sort. On the other hand, other sections of Romans are quite argumentative or polemical in style and tone. Romans 2:1–3:20, 3:27–4:25, 6:1–7:25, and 8:31–11:36 are of this sort, and they are marked by various rhetorical devices that create a much livelier, more engaged, and argumentative tone. These devices include rhetorical questions, apostrophes (addresses to imaginary interlocutors), dialogues with imaginary interlocutors, refutations of objections and false conclusions, speeches-in-character, comparisons of various sorts, and examples. Paul's use of these devices in these sections of Romans creates a very different tone from that found in the expository or explanatory sections. I will argue that these literary cues are surer guides to the structure of Romans than the theologically oriented "topics" are.

More broadly, but connected with this: what was the genre of the main body of Romans? When the Roman Christian community heard Paul's letter read to them, what did they think they were hearing? Again, because most interpreters are concerned primarily with the topics or the contents of the letter, they do not pay enough attention to the question of genre. All the rhetorical devices mentioned above as well as the argumentative, polemic tone of much of the letter suggest that when the Roman Christian community heard it read to them, they probably would have understood it as a diatribe. As we shall see, this has implications not only for how one interprets the arguments of the letter but also for how Paul understood his relationship to the Roman Christian community.

These, then, are the immediate reasons for my dissatisfaction. A broader and less obvious reason is, I think, at the root of the others. Why is there almost an inevitable tendency, especially in the interpretation of Romans, to gravitate toward concentrating on the contents or the topics of the letter to the detriment of its contexts, issues, literary structure, and genre? The reason is rooted in history. Over the centuries Paul has been a controversial writer. His letters, especially Galatians and Romans, have been the subject of almost endless interpretations and reinterpretations. This has especially been the case in the wake of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The interpretation of Paul was at the center of many of the theological conflicts not only between Catholics and Protestants but also between Catholics and Catholics and Protestants and Protestants. These conflicts dominated the interpretations of Paul, especially of his letters to the Galatians and the Romans, well into the last century.

In recent decades, we have come to live in a more ecumenical age. For the most part, this ecumenism is reflected in the best recent commentaries on Paul's letters, even those on Galatians and Romans. Most try to move across denominational boundaries and take seriously interpreters from other denominations and of no denomination. But this task is more difficult than it first appears. While most interpreters have moved beyond specifically denominational interpretations of Paul, it has been much more difficult to move beyond the framework itself of these interpretations. For example, while most interpreters have moved beyond taking denominational positions in the interpretation of Romans on such topics as justification by

faith, salvation, or the “works of the law,” the belief has remained that these topics are indeed what Paul’s letter to the Romans is about. Positions on these topics vary greatly, but the belief persists that, for the most part, these topics lie at the heart of Romans.² The result has been that the same traditional topics continue to dominate the interpretation of Romans. It has been very difficult to get below the varnish of these topics to the grain of the letter itself.³

This reality lies at the root of my dissatisfaction. It is also what led me to write this book. The result is an interpretation of Romans that, for the most part, satisfies my own search to understand what Paul was about and what he hoped to achieve in writing to the Roman Christian community. Whether it satisfies anyone else is not for me to say. At this point, however, I want to describe the broad contours of the argument this study will be making. I hope they will provide the reader with some orientation for the more detailed arguments that follow.

This book’s primary interest is the arguments of Paul in Romans. It is not a commentary on Romans. It thus is not concerned with a detailed, verse-by-verse interpretation of Romans such as is proper to a commentary but with these details only insofar as they contribute to an understanding of Paul’s arguments. In addition, it is not concerned with issues that came to be of great importance in the later theological controversies about Paul’s theology but were not Paul’s primary concerns in Romans. Such issues include justification, original sin, and the contrast between faith and works.

This study insists on the importance of the multiple contexts within which Romans must be interpreted. This is especially the case for three closely related contexts that are explicitly the subjects of chapters 1 and 2 but also play a role again and again in the course of this study. The first is the context of the Roman Christian community. Our knowledge of the history and character of this community is quite limited. But there is enough evidence to indicate that, though largely Gentile in background, the roots of the Roman Christian community were in the Roman Jewish community. This was the case even for most of the Gentile members of the community. This background continued to influence the outlooks and practices of the Roman Christian community even after its separation from the Roman Jewish community around A.D. 49 because of its belief in Christ. Its members continued to see themselves as part of Judaism. More specifically, although they no longer practiced circumcision, most still insisted on the continued observance of the ethical commandments of the Mosaic law. For most of them, both belief in Jesus as the Christ and observance of the ethical commandment of the law obviously belonged together.

² An admirable exception to this is Krister Stendahl’s marvelous essay “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78–96. He correctly argued that Paul’s concern was not with sin and guilt but with the relationship between Jews and Gentiles or between Jewish Christians and Gentiles Christians. Paul was not an example of an introspective conscience.

³ Both Lloyd Gaston (*Paul and the Torah* [Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987]) and John G. Gager (*Reinventing Paul* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000]) have also tried to do this. Their critiques of traditional interpretations of Paul are usually very much to the point. But I find their own interpretations of Paul too dominated by other, albeit admirable, concerns about the contemporary relationship between Jews and Christians.

Especially Jewish monotheism and observance of the law were what distinguished them from their Greco-Roman neighbors and grounded their orderly and ethically superior way of life. As part of Israel, they also shared in God's promises to Israel and looked forward to being part of the eschatological victory promised by God to Israel.

The second is the context of Paul himself. Paul wrote Romans in the light of his own past experiences and the controversies in which he had been involved. These influenced Paul's writing of Romans in complex ways. Roughly twenty years before Romans, Paul's life as a Jew was suddenly transformed by God's revelation to him of the risen Jesus and by God's call to him to preach faith in that risen Jesus to the Gentiles (Gal 1:15–16; Phil 3:3–11; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8–9). Paul also became convinced that this faith in the risen Jesus no longer entailed observance of the Mosaic law, either for Jewish or for Gentile believers. These convictions involved Paul in a series of controversies, with both Peter and other Jewish believers (Gal 2:1–14) and with the Gentile believers of Galatia who wanted to be circumcised and observe the law in addition to believing in Jesus. Paul also advocated an ethical alternative to observance of the law. In place of observance of the law, believers were to live their lives by the practice of various virtues. In this they were to be guided by the Spirit of God, which they received in their baptism (Gal 5:1–6:10). Paul argued for these convictions especially in his letter to the Galatian believers. In his dismay and anger at the Galatians' desire to be circumcised and observe the law, Paul seems at points in the letter to have discounted almost completely the value of the law (Gal 3:6–14) and even to have excluded the Jewish people from the promises made by God to Abraham about them (Gal 3:15–18; 4:21–31). In Galatians, Paul contrasted faith in Christ and observance of the law so starkly that they seem opposed to one another almost in principle. I will insist throughout this book on interpreting Galatians both in its complexity and in the sharpness of its polemic. Interpreters have too often rubbed smooth the rough edges of Galatians. When Paul came to write Romans, he came to it as the heir of a legacy of sometimes bitter controversies. This needs to be taken very seriously, and so I will return again and again, in the course of this book, especially to Galatians to understand the controversial context within which Paul wrote to the Roman Christians.

The third is the immediate context in which Paul wrote Romans. Here I will argue that Paul and the Roman Christians knew a good deal about each other. On the one hand, through members who knew Paul, the Roman Christian community had come to know about Paul and what they thought he stood for. This was especially the case for what Paul had written to the Galatians. In addition, they knew of the ethical disarray of the Corinthian Christians to whom Paul had addressed 1 Corinthians. For most of the Roman Christians, Paul was not simply controversial but was also someone about whom they themselves had grave suspicions and misgivings. On the other hand, Paul also knew a good deal about the Roman Christians and was aware of their suspicions and misgivings about him and his controversial views. He wrote Romans, as we shall see, to overcome these suspicions and misgivings and to persuade them of the truth of his interpretation of the gospel.

I will also insist, much more than has previously been the case, on the importance of literary cues and genre for understanding the structure and argument of

Romans. As mentioned above, whereas some sections of Romans read like expositions or explanations, other sections are quite argumentative or polemical, marked by various rhetorical devices that create a much livelier, more engaged tone. On the basis of these literary cues, I will argue that the structure of Rom 1:18–11:36 is made up of four major sections (1:18–3:20; 3:21–4:25; 5:1–7:25; 8:1–11:36). Each major section begins with an expository or explanatory passage (1:18–32; 3:21–26; 5:1–21; 8:1–30) which is then followed by a longer and more argumentative or polemical passage (2:1–3:20; 3:27–4:25; 6:1–7:25; 8:31–11:36). These sections also mark out the main stages in Paul's arguments. In addition, I will argue that the body of Romans is best understood as an example of a diatribe. In the ancient world, diatribes were popular discourses or instructions usually of an ethical-religious nature and also had a strong dialogical component. They originated in the setting of a philosophical school, and their purpose was not simply to inform but also to transform the hearers ethically or religiously. All the rhetorical devices mentioned above as well as the argumentative, polemic tone of much of the letter point in this direction. When the Roman Christian community heard Paul's letter read to them, they probably would have understood it as a diatribe. As we shall see, this also has implications not only for how one interprets the arguments of the letter but also for how Paul understood his relationship to the Roman Christian community. All of this is the subject especially of chapter 3.

Chapters 4–14 of this study contain detailed analyses of Paul's arguments. These arguments are Paul's attempts to respond to the deep misgivings the Roman Christian community had about aspects of his interpretation of the gospel. Several points need to be kept in mind throughout this analysis. First, the attitudes of the Roman Christian community toward Paul were complex. Paul and the Roman Christian community certainly had some basic convictions in common. Both saw themselves within the context of Judaism, that is, the Jewish way of life. Both were committed to Jewish monotheism, the belief in one God who was the God of Israel. Both accepted the Jewish scriptures as a central source of authority. Both were committed to the centrality of Jesus as the Messiah, or Christ, within the context of Jewish belief. Both saw their faith in Jesus as the Messiah as the fulfillment of their Jewish beliefs and expectations and not a rejection of them. Although they did so for different reasons, both also agreed that circumcision was no longer necessary for full membership in the community. Because of this, both would have agreed that Gentile believers were now to have equal status with Jewish believers.

There were, however, significant differences between them. These differences clustered around their different convictions about the basic value and continued observance of the Mosaic law. The Roman Christians, whether of Gentile or of Jewish origin, for the most part continued to observe the ethical commandments of the law. Because of the ethical superiority of its commandments, the law was what distinguished them from their non-believing fellow citizens. Given these convictions, they looked with alarm at some of the things they thought Paul advocated. Paul's views of the law called into question much that was integral to their identity. They were scandalized by the sharp contrasts he continually drew in Galatians between the Mosaic law and its observance, on the one hand, and faith and righteousness, on the other. These contrasts were so stark that they found it difficult to imagine how Paul

could ever have considered the Mosaic law to have been of divine origin or its observance to have been divinely commanded. Paul was claiming that no one was ever made righteous through observance of the law. He was, in effect, calling into question not only the Roman Christians' present observance of the law; he was also calling into question observance of the law in the past by the Jewish people. He was, in fact, calling into question not only the status of the law but also the status of the Jewish people, whether present or past. There seemed to be no advantage, nor did it seem there had ever been an advantage, to being members of the Jewish people. Paul's account of things even called into question the future of the Jewish people. The promises God made to Abraham and to his "seed" were not to the Jewish people but to Christ and, through Christ, to believers in him. The Jewish people, Israel, could be neither sons nor heirs of God's promises to Abraham and so were excluded from the future, eschatological fulfillment of those promises. All of this seemed to them to annul the clear meaning of the Jewish scriptures. Finally, they were also troubled by what they saw as the practical consequences of Paul's views about the law. For them, observance of the law provided a framework for conducting their lives in an orderly, ethical fashion. The Roman Christians feared that Paul's conviction that believers, empowered by the Spirit, would be able to practice virtue and avoid vice without observing the law was wrongheaded. They saw the moral disarray of the Corinthian Christians as ample evidence that their fears were well founded. They viewed these problems as the predictable results of abandoning observance of the Mosaic law.

Second, Paul's responses to these misgivings were also complex. Paul consistently appeals to convictions and viewpoints he shares with the Roman Christians, and bases his arguments on them. This is especially the case in the expository sections of the letter. In 1:18–32, he bases his arguments on a Hellenistic Jewish critique—shared by him and the Roman Christians—of Gentile religiosity and morality. In the other three expository sections, he appeals to traditional Christian creedal formulas that both of them have in common. In three of the four major argumentative sections of the letter (2:1–3:20; 3:27–4:25; 8:31–11:36), Paul appeals extensively to the Jewish scriptures for support of his arguments. In the other major argumentative section (Rom 6–7), although Paul appeals only once to the Jewish scriptures for support (7:7, citing Exod 20:27; Deut 5:18), they play a major role in his argument in 7:7–25. The authority of the Jewish scriptures is something Paul shares with his Roman Christian audience.

Paul also consistently takes the concerns of his Roman Christian audience seriously. He often responds to them by significantly revising earlier controversial positions that he now acknowledges to have been misguided. This is true, for example, of his reinterpretation of the significance of Abraham in Romans 4. It is also true of his reinterpretation of the significance of baptism, the role of the Spirit, the place of freedom, and the value of the law in Romans 6–7. Finally, it is especially true of his reinterpretation of the ultimate fate of the Jewish people, Israel, and their relationship to the Gentiles in 8:31–11:36.

More important, however, Paul significantly revises the framework within which he places his arguments. As mentioned, his earlier arguments in Galatians were marked by stark contrasts between faith in Christ and observance of the

Mosaic law. Paul's perspective in Romans, however, is much more historically or temporally oriented. Paul pointedly distinguishes between the past (1:18–3:20), the present (3:21–4:25; 5:1–7:25), and the future (Rom 8–11). This very different perspective allows Paul to acknowledge the value and even the binding force of the law in the past (2:1–3:20), while at the same time claiming that believers are now no longer obligated to observe it (3:21–26). This historically oriented perspective allows Paul to interpret the history and the future of the Jewish people in such a way as ultimately to include them in the mystery of God's providence rather than exclude them as he seemed to do in parts of Galatians.

Third, for all of his willingness to rethink and significantly revise some of his earlier controversial views, Paul continues to insist on several of his earlier basic convictions. First, the righteousness of God is now revealed in Christ. Second, this righteousness is now appropriated through faith in Christ and apart from observance of the Mosaic law. And finally, Jews and Gentiles alike experience God's righteousness through faith in Christ and apart from observance of the law. All three of these convictions were rooted in Paul's own experience of God's revelation to him of the risen Jesus and in his call to preach this Jesus to the Gentiles (Gal 1:15–16; Phil 3:3–11; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8–9). Paul is not willing to compromise on these convictions, and in Romans he tries to persuade the Roman Christians of their truth. All of Paul's arguments based on what they have in common are meant to persuade them of the truth of these convictions.

Finally, to understand Paul's convictions and those of his Roman Christian audience, we must keep in mind one further perspective they share. For both Paul and the Roman Christians, their convictions, both those on which they agree and those on which they disagree, are primarily concerned with the relationship between two groups, Jews and Gentiles. Neither Paul nor the Roman Christians are primarily concerned with individuals as such. This is crucial to keep in mind lest we fall back into the trap of thinking that Romans is primarily about the sin, guilt, justification, and salvation of the individual. To do so inevitably leads once again to the misinterpretation of Romans in the categories of the Reformation debates. This must be resisted clearly and consistently.⁴

Chapter 4 of this study treats the issues and arguments in the first major section of Romans (1:18–3:20). These issues concern the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. More specifically, given their convictions about the ethical superiority of the Mosaic law, the Roman Christians were profoundly troubled by Paul's belief that Jews and Gentiles as groups were in reality equally sinful. In addition, they thought that Paul was also implicitly challenging the value of the Mosaic law itself. After all, if the Mosaic law did not lead to the practice of that law, what was its value? The Mosaic law would be no more valuable than the legal systems of the Greeks and other peoples.

In the subproposition for this section, Paul begins by claiming that the wrath of God is being revealed against *all* human wickedness (1:18–20). He follows this up with an uncontroversial critique of specifically Gentile religiosity and conduct (1:21–32). Paul is clearly using standard Hellenistic-Jewish apologetic motifs that his

⁴This is something on which Stendahl ("The Apostle Paul") rightly insists.

Roman Christian audience would readily understand and agree with. In 2:1–3:20, he slowly turns to the issue of Jewish sinfulness. His tone here becomes much more argumentative. He argues that, as groups, Jews are as sinful as Gentiles, although for different reasons. Gentiles are sinful because of their adherence to idolatry and the practice of moral depravity. Jews, however, are sinful because of their lack of adherence to observance of the Mosaic law. Paul grounds this controversial conclusion in appeals to the Jewish scriptures and to traditionally Jewish viewpoints current in contemporary, especially Hellenistic, Judaism. Central to his argument is his appeal to the traditionally Jewish and scripturally grounded notion of God's impartiality. God judges everyone, both Jews and Gentiles, on an equal basis. On this basis, both Jews and Gentiles as groups are equally under the power of sin. Paul also claims that this reality does not at all demean the value of being a Jew or of the Mosaic law. Jews have been entrusted with the Mosaic law, and that alone is a great gift. The problem is that they have not observed the law. In fact, Paul claims, he is even upholding the value of the law because it is the law itself that brings about the knowledge of this sinfulness.

In 1:18–3:20, Paul crafts his rhetoric very carefully in order to persuade his Roman Christian audience that his apparently controversial position about the equal sinfulness of both Jews and Gentiles is rooted in the Jewish scriptures and in Jewish tradition, both of which he and the Roman Christian community have in common. His arguments are temporally or historically oriented: in the course of history both Jews and Gentiles have been equally sinful even though in different ways. This perspective is very different from that of Galatians, which was dominated by stark and virtually unresolvable contrasts. The difference will also play a crucial role in the rest of Romans, radically reshaping the stark and seemingly unresolvable contrasts of Galatians.

Chapter 5 of this study deals with the second major section of the letter (Rom 3:21–4:25). The structure of this section is similar to that of the first. As in 1:18–20, Paul begins with the statement of the subproposition in 3:21–22c. He claims that the righteousness of God has now been manifested apart from the Mosaic law. In addition, the Jewish scriptures witness to this righteousness, which is through faith in Jesus Christ for all who have faith, both Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul then explains the meaning of this subproposition in 3:22d–26 by citing and then commenting on a traditional Christian creedal formula that he shares with his Roman Christian audience. In 3:27–4:25, Paul's tone once again becomes argumentative. He claims that, in taking these positions, he is actually upholding the law (3:27–31). In support of this, he interprets the example of Abraham's faith (4:1–25).

Paul is especially dealing with two underlying issues in 3:21–4:25. Both are rooted in what he wrote earlier in his letter to the Galatian Christians. The first issue is the relationship of faith in Christ to observance of the Mosaic law. Because of its polemical intensity, Paul's arguments in Gal 3:1–4:31 consistently contrasted faith in Christ with observance of the Mosaic law, to the great detriment of the latter. His arguments were of an either-or sort, in which one alternative (faith in Christ) was accepted and the other (observance of the Mosaic law) rejected. The second issue is the significance of the patriarch Abraham. As mentioned earlier, Paul seemed at points in Galatians to exclude the Jewish people from the promises made

by God to Abraham about them. Paul's positions on both of these issues deeply troubled the Roman Christians.

Paul argues very differently on both of these issues in Rom 3:21–4:25. In 3:21, the righteousness of God is now manifested apart from the law. This is very different from the position he took in Galatians in two significant ways. First, instead of the stark contrasts between faith in Christ and observance of the law so prominent in Galatians, Paul's perspective in this section of Romans is again temporal or historical. This allows Paul to maintain his basic conviction that, through faith in Christ, righteousness is *now* apart from observance of the law, without denigrating the divinely ordained role of the law in the past. Second, in 4:1–25, Paul uses the example of Abraham to show how righteousness through faith apart from observance of the law includes Jews as well as Gentiles. Abraham is the father, in faith, of both. More specifically, in 4:13, 16, Paul again appeals to the promises to Abraham and "to his seed." But he takes "seed" as a collective noun referring to Abraham as the father of "many nations." Here Paul clearly means both Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish people are now included in, rather than excluded from, the promises to Abraham.

Once again, as in 1:18–3:20, Paul crafts his arguments by appealing to what he and his Roman Christian audience have in common. In this case, the commonality is rooted in a traditional creedal formula they share and in the scriptural example of Abraham as the father in faith of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul maintains his basic convictions about the gospel. But the framework in which he places them and the arguments he uses to support them are very different from those he used in Galatians.

The next two sections of Paul's letter (Rom 5–7, 8–11) are much longer and more complex, and the same can be said of the issues that lie behind them. Chapters 6–8 of this study deal with Romans 5–7, whose structure is similar to that of the preceding two sections. Paul begins by stating the subproposition in 5:1–5. Made righteous through faith, believers should have peace with God through Jesus Christ, through whom they have access to "this grace" in which they now stand. In context, "this grace" obviously refers back to 3:21–26, to the righteousness made possible by Christ's death through faith apart from observance of the law for both Jews and Gentiles. In 5:6–21, Paul develops this view. First he again uses traditional creedal language that interprets Christ's death for sinners as bringing about a reconciliation with God (5:6–11). He then offers an elaborate comparison and contrast between Christ and Adam, the purpose of which is to show the incompatibility of this grace with sin (5:12–21). In Romans 6–7, his tone once again becomes argumentative. In Romans 6, Paul argues that believers cannot continue to live in sin. They have been baptized into the death of Christ and so have died to sin in order to live to God in Christ Jesus. Sin should have no power over them, but they should offer themselves to God in righteousness. Freed from sin, they are now slaves to God in righteousness. In Romans 7, Paul turns to the place of the law. He argues first that believers have now been freed from the law in order to serve God (7:1–6). In 7:7–25, he then uses the rhetorical device of speech-in-character, in which a seemingly unidentified person both defends the goodness and holiness of the law and, at the same time, confesses his inability to observe its commandments.

The issues behind Romans 5–7 are obviously ethical in nature. What Paul writes in these chapters can be understood only against the complex backgrounds of what he wrote earlier in Galatians and 1 Corinthians, the situation of ethical disarray in the Corinthian Christian community, and the reaction of the Roman Christian community. The Roman Christians were deeply troubled by Paul's insistence that believers were no longer obligated to observe the ethical commandments of the law. They found his alternate view in Gal 5:1–6:10, that Christians were to live ethical lives by the practice of various virtues under the guidance of the Spirit, misguided and troublesome. The law was not a yoke of slavery, as Paul claimed, but a way to live orderly, ethical lives pleasing to God. The ethical disarray of the Corinthian community, which Paul himself described in 1 Corinthians, was clear proof that their suspicions were fully justified.

Paul's response to these concerns is equally complex. Paul continues to insist that righteousness and salvation are apart from observance of the Mosaic law. He does this especially in Romans 5 on the basis of traditional creedal language that he shares with the Roman Christians. He interprets the language of Christ's death for sinners in such a way as to persuade his Roman Christian audience that "this grace" in which they all stand is incompatible with sin. This grace, which is apart from observance of the law, is a new and adequate basis for ethical living. But Paul also has come to recognize that some of his earlier views of ethics and the law expressed in Galatians were misguided and, to some extent, contributed to the ethical disarray of the Corinthian Christian community he himself was forced to deal with in 1 Corinthians. Because of this, he now significantly rethinks some of his earlier views in three significant ways. First, he changes the emphasis of his language about freedom and slavery. In Galatians, Paul claimed that believers were freed from the yoke of slavery to the law (Gal 5:1) and were to be guided by the Spirit in their practice of virtue (Gal 6:16–26). In Rom 6:15–23, however, believers are freed not from the law but from sin in order to become slaves to God in righteousness. The emphasis of his language has changed from freedom to slavery. Second, Paul reinterprets the meaning of baptism. In both Gal 3:26–28 and 1 Cor 12:12–13, he interpreted baptism as the ritual through which believers were united to the risen body of Christ through the power of the Spirit. Paul came to see that this interpretation of baptism, in which believers were united with the risen Christ, also unintentionally contributed to some Corinthian believers' views that they were no longer bound by normal ethical constraints. In Rom 6:1–14, Paul no longer interprets baptism as being united to the risen Christ but as dying with Christ to sin. He is very careful not to claim that in baptism believers have also risen with Christ. That remains in the future. It is also striking that in all of Romans 6 Paul never appeals to the Spirit as a guide to living ethically. Finally, in Romans 7, Paul turns to the role of the law. For the first time in his letters, he writes about the goodness and holiness of the law. This is very different from what he wrote about the law and its observance in Galatians. In 7:7–25, the speaker's problem with the law is not its goodness or holiness. He admits that it is both good and holy. The problem is with his incapacity to observe it. As we shall see, the speech-in-character in 7:7–25 is actually an appeal to the experience of the difficulties Paul thought the largely Gentile Christian community in Rome must have found when trying to observe the ethical commandments of the law. Paul

intends the Roman Christians to see themselves in the speaker. In Romans 5–7, even more than in the previous two sections, Paul not only maintains some of his central convictions; he also significantly rethinks and revises some of his earlier views that he now understands as misguided.

Chapters 9–13 of this study treat the longest and by far the most complex of Paul's arguments, that in Romans 8–11. These chapters of Romans belong together for a variety of reasons. From a literary perspective, they reflect the same structure as the three earlier sections of the letter: an explanatory section (8:1–30) followed by a much longer argumentative section (8:31–11:36). They also belong together because they are all concerned with issues of eschatology.

The explanatory section is, for the most part, similar to the three preceding explanatory sections. In 8:3–4 Paul once again draws on traditional creedal language that he shares with the Roman Christians, and he builds on it in the course of 8:5–30. In addition, the style and tone are explanatory in the sense that Paul hopes his Roman Christian audience will recognize what he writes as a legitimate development of what they have in common. Paul is especially concerned here with the role of the Spirit and the question of who are "children," "sons," and "heirs" of God. The much longer argumentative section (8:31–11:36) is the most sustained, complex scriptural argument in any of Paul's letters. It is also one of the most misunderstood. Although Paul's arguments are extremely complex, the overall structure of the passage is fairly simple. After a transitional passage (8:31–9:5), Paul presents an elaborate scriptural interpretation of the promises made to Israel. He does this first by interpreting God's relation to Israel in the past (9:6–29), then by interpreting Israel's present situation of unbelief (9:30–10:21), and finally by expressing his firm convictions about Israel's ultimate inclusion along with the Gentiles in God's mysterious plan for the salvation of all (11:1–36).

To understand Romans 8–11 properly, one must always keep in mind two primary issues with which Paul is struggling. Both concern eschatology. The first issue again has to do with what Paul now considers some of the ill-conceived arguments he made in his letter to the Galatians. Especially in Gal 3:26–4:11, he seemed to argue that those who observe the law, Jews and those Galatians who wanted to observe it, are excluded from being either sons of God or heirs of God's promises. They are also excluded from the possession of the Spirit poured into their hearts in baptism, by which they would become sons and heirs. Paul even equated circumcision and observance of the Mosaic law with enslavement to the beggarly elemental principles of the universe in his exclusion of them. Given that their own eschatological hopes were deeply rooted in Judaism, the Romans Christians found Paul's seeming exclusion of Israel from believers' eschatological hopes incomprehensible. A second issue, broader and more personal, also concerns Paul in Romans 8–11: his own anguish over the present situation of most of his fellow Jews. This anguish may have been provoked by the misgivings of the Roman Christians, but it goes well beyond them. Romans 8–11 is the part of the letter in which Paul himself is most deeply invested and in which he is most clearly struggling to think through issues in significantly new and very different ways. In 9:3, he writes that he could wish himself accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his fellow Jews. And in 9:6, he claims, "it cannot be that the word of God has failed." But then how does one rec-

oncile these promises with the reality that most of his fellow Jews have not come to believe in Jesus as he and a small number of his fellow Jewish Christians have? What does this say about the reliability of God's promises to Israel in the past? What does it say about the future fate of Israel? Especially in 8:31–11:36, this second issue is even more crucial for Paul than the first.

Paul's concentrates his attention in 8:1–30 on the first issue. In 8:1–17, he first builds on traditional creedal language shared with his Roman Christian audience and subtly reinterprets what he wrote especially in Gal 4:4–7, about the role of the Spirit and the meaning of sonship and inheritance, in such a way that the ultimate inclusion of Israel is no longer ruled out. Paul then develops this in Rom 8:18–30 into a universalizing eschatology that would make ample room for the inclusion not only of both Jews and Gentiles but also of all creation. He does this especially by developing the universalizing strains of eschatology he wrote about earlier in 1 Corinthians 15.

In Rom 8:31–11:36, Paul turns his attention to the second issue. This section is marked by several characteristics that need to be kept in mind if they are to be interpreted properly. First, here is the issue in which Paul himself is most personally invested and over which he struggles most. This is clear from the number of first-person-singular passages in this section (8:38–39; 9:1–5; 10:1–4; 11:1–2, 11–14, 25–27). Israel's fate and its relation to God's promises are far more than academic for Paul. Second, it becomes clear here how crucial Paul's change in framework is from the stark contrasts of Galatians to the historically or temporally oriented perspective of Romans. Paul struggles, by means of scriptural interpretations of God's promises to Israel in the past and of Israel's present situation of unbelief, toward an interpretation of a future in which "all Israel" is included along with the "full number of the Gentiles" in God's overall mysterious plan for salvation. Third, Paul does this, however, in such a way that he also integrates his basic convictions about the salvation of the Gentiles into his arguments. For Paul, the present situation and future fate of his fellow Jews cannot be understood apart from his basic conviction that salvation is now for all, Jews and Gentiles alike, through faith in Christ and apart from observance of the Mosaic law. Because of this, Paul's rethinking of the issues of the present situation and future fate of Israel also forces him to rethink how he understands the present situation and future fate of the Gentiles. For him, the two cannot be separated. Israel's present situation is due to its failure to recognize from the Scriptures that Christ is the goal of the law and that righteousness is now through faith rather than by observance of the Mosaic law and is meant for Jews and Gentiles alike. In addition, Israel's present failure is part of a larger, mysterious plan—to which the Scriptures again point—according to which the gospel comes to be preached to the Gentiles. Conversely, the ultimate inclusion of the "full number of the Gentiles" is what ultimately leads to the inclusion of "all Israel." Paul again develops his convictions about the inclusion of both "all Israel" and the "full number of the Gentiles" from the universalizing parts of his eschatology of 1 Corinthians 15. This emerges with particular clarity in Romans 11. The salvation of "all Israel" cannot but follow on the salvation of the "full number of the Gentiles."

Chapter 14 of this study treats the last major section of Romans, 12:1–15:7, an exhortation to the Roman Christian community. Although it is different in character

from 1:16–11:36, Paul clearly intended 12:1–15:7 to be part of his overall argument. Only in 15:8–13, after the exhortation in 12:1–15:7, does Paul offer a summary of his overall argument. This is Paul's first opportunity to present more specifically his own views on ethical practice to the Roman Christian community.

Three issues underlay Paul's exhortation. The first is the issue of how believers are to live their everyday lives in a way pleasing to God apart from observance of the Mosaic law. The second issue is Paul himself or, more specifically, his reputation as a sower of discord and dissension. Both these issues are rooted in the Roman Christian community's misgivings about Paul and his ethical views. The third is an issue that caused division among the Roman Christians themselves. Apart from a minority, such as Priscilla and Aquila, who sided with Paul, most Roman Christians (the "strong"), whether of Jewish or Gentile origin, thought they should continue to observe the ethical commandments of the law but not its ritual and dietary laws. For them, "nothing is unclean" and "everything is clean." But there was also a minority (the "weak") of both Jewish and Gentile believers who thought they should also continue to observe the sabbath regulations and the Jewish dietary laws. The issue of observance of the Jewish dietary laws in particular was divisive because it affected how community gatherings were to be conducted. Did the food, particularly the meat served at such gatherings, have to be ritually pure?

Paul's response to the first two issues takes up most of 12:1–15:7. He tries to offer specific ways of living ethically and pleasing God without appealing to observance of the Mosaic law. He does this by drawing on the wider tradition of Jewish wisdom instructions, in which he emphasizes the moral obligations and responsibilities believers have to one another. He also draws on the specifically Christian image of believers all forming one body in Christ. In both ways, Paul emphasizes the values of love, harmony, orderliness, accommodation, and the common good of the community over the particular good of the individual. He does all of this without appealing to commandments of the Mosaic law. At the same time, he claims that believers, by loving their neighbor as themselves and doing no harm to their neighbor, "fulfills" the purpose of the law even though they are not as such "observing" it (13:8–10). Equally important for Paul, however, is the portrait he presents of himself to the Roman Christian community in advocating these practices. He wants to portray himself as someone who is not the sower of dissension and division, as they may think, but an advocate of love, harmony, orderliness, accommodation, and the common good of the whole community.

Based on these values, Paul then turns in 14:1–15:7 to the issue of the division between the strong and the weak over observance of Jewish dietary laws at community gatherings. In 14:1–12 Paul urges the Roman Christians to show each other mutual respect. He urges the strong not to despise the weak and the weak not to pass judgment on the strong. In 14:13–23, on the basis of this mutual respect, Paul turns to offer a more specific solution. Although his own position is that of the strong, Paul nevertheless takes the side of the weak. He urges the Roman Christians not to place stumbling blocks in each other's way. More specifically, if serving food and drink that the weak think are unclean becomes a stumbling block, then such food and drink should not be served at community gatherings. The good of these

weak believers is more important than maintaining the admittedly correct principle that “nothing is unclean” and “everything is clean.”

In taking this position, Paul is reacting very differently than he did in his earlier confrontation with Peter and the other Jewish Christians in Antioch in the fall of A.D. 49 (Gal 2:11–14). There he strongly opposed accommodation to Jewish dietary laws at community gatherings. Here he urges it. Yet this accommodation, as we shall see, is possible only because it does not affect his bedrock convictions. In his exhortation in Rom 12:1–15:7, Paul still maintains that believers, whether of Jewish or Gentile origin, are no longer obligated to observe the Mosaic law. Their ethical practice is rooted in their baptism and their love for their neighbor and not in observance of the law. What they do fulfills the purpose of the law, but it does not, at least in his mind, entail its observance. In this sense, Paul’s exhortation in 12:1–15:7 is of a piece with the rest of his argument in Romans.

With this basic orientation in mind, one final introductory remark is called for. Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians as well as the contexts in which he wrote it are complex. This also means that any interpretation of the letter will inevitably also be complex. My task is not to simplify this complexity but to clarify it insofar as possible. The persuasiveness of the interpretations that follow will depend on whether the complexities of the letter and its contexts are brought together in the most plausible way. The various strands of these arguments are inevitably interwoven, and their cogency depends on whether this interweaving forms a consistent and coherent portrait that seems to answer best the relevant questions about the text and its contexts.