

# *The Letter to the Romans*

A Scripture Study Course at St. Cyprian Parish  
Fall 2008

## **Part Two - Justification Through Faith in Christ**

### I. Romans III:21-31.

#### A. Introductory Notes

1. Some terms ought to be set forth here in order that we can apply them later on.

a. **Justification** - it will be noted that Paul says we are justified by faith. He does not say "saved by faith" although salvation is the final destination of the action of God if we remain faithful. Justification is the passing from a state of injustice to a state of justice by the grace of God. By the grace of justification we are restored to a right relationship with God. The essential effect of this is that we become a "new creation in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). Christ likened it to a re-birth (cf John 1 & 3). Luther's interpretation does injury to Paul by reducing the act of justification to a merely extrinsic matter. He said that the justice of Christ is only imputed to us incurables. We are a dung hill covered by snow; but still a dung hill. The Catholic view is that we are actually transformed. No longer a dung hill, we are made a child of God not just in name but in fact. Justification is life - new life - supernatural life. The Council of Trent taught against Luther in the following way, *Justification...is not merely the remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man through the voluntary reception of grace...[God] himself makes us just...we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and not only are we reputed [as just] be we are truly called and are just...the charity of God is poured forth by the Holy Spirit in the hearts (Rom 5:5) of those who are justified and inheres in them.*<sup>1</sup> Again, the best shorthand for all this is, **justification is new life.** *I live now, no, not I, Christ lives in me..."(Gal 2:20)*

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<sup>1</sup>The Council of Trent, Chapter 7. DS 1529.

b. **Salvation** - is the final and irrevocable reception of the effects of justification enjoyed by the blessed in heaven. Since it is the culmination of God's work it cannot be said to be fully possessed in this life which is, by its very nature, a pilgrimage toward final salvation. Paul has a rather nuanced position regarding salvation which might best be stated, "salvation is already but not yet." A brief survey of the following quotes selections from Paul can help us see his highly nuanced sense of the word and also help us to realize that the question "Are you saved?" is really not a very Pauline way of speaking.

- (1) *We are saved but in hope. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see we wait with endurance.*<sup>2</sup>
- (2) *Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.*<sup>3</sup>
- (3) *Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation.*<sup>4</sup>
- (4) *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*<sup>5</sup>
- (5) *For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>6</sup>
- (6) *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory.*<sup>7</sup>

c. **Saved** - To state that the question "Are you saved?" is un-Pauline is not to say that Paul never uses the word "saved." In fact the word saved appears in Paul's letters 24 times. Most of the time the word is strongly modified. We can break his uses down into the categories listed below. Only the last category really interests us since the other categories have the word "saved" modified so that it does not refer to a merely to a past event and certainly not to a done-deal. Of the 24 occurrences of the word therefore the following categories are seen with the number of times they are used:<sup>8</sup>

- (1) As a future perfect (will be saved) - 8 times
- (2) As an infinitive "to be saved" - 3 times
- (3) As a wish "may be saved" - 4 times
- (4) As a present passive participle - "being saved" - 2 times

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<sup>2</sup>Rom 8:24-25.

<sup>3</sup>Rom 13:11.

<sup>4</sup>2 Cor 7:10 Note that Paul speak to fellow Christians here and does not therefore refer to an initial repentance that leads to an act of faith.

<sup>5</sup>Phil. 2:12.

<sup>6</sup>1 Thess 5:9.

<sup>7</sup>2 Tim 2:10.

<sup>8</sup>I have included a list of the occurrences of the word "saved" in appendix 1 of this paper. But note that the occurrences are listed only in their verse context and not the full context. I have cautioned before that it is always good to read a verse in context and quite dangerous to read it out of that context.

- (5) Other uses needing contextual analysis - 7 times. These occurrences do place salvation in the past tense but a reading of them in their context reveals that in each case the past tense is somehow modified by a clarification or further exhortation. Each verse needs to be looked up and studied in context. This will be done in class.
- (a) Romans 8:24 - qualified by the phrase "saved but in hope.
  - (b) Romans 10:10 - the phrase occurs in the context of two future perfects (will be saved) in verses 10 and 13. In 13 Paul quotes Joel 3:5 which is a prophetic description of the last day - the Day of The Lord.
  - (c) 1 Cor 15:2 - the Greek word *sozesthe* is actually a present passive participle "being saved" it is only listed here because the RSV translated it, "saved." But in the Greek it really doesn't qualify for our list. But even if we take the RSV translation, note how quickly Paul qualifies the past tense by the phrase, "if you hold to the word I preached to you." (Verse 2).
  - (d) Eph 2:5 - The context is eschatological. Note how Paul says was is not yet true in the literal sense: "raised up with him and seated with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus." This describes something not yet true, we are not now in heaven though in Christ, our head, we are there in an anticipatory way. Verse 7 then says, "in the ages to come." Verse 8 then reiterates but the context as we see is anticipatory. (By the way, note the fascinating description of our good works as having been prepared in advance for us as fruits of our faith in verse 10).
  - (e) Eph 2:8 - sicut supra
  - (f) 2 Tim 1:9 - again Paul seems to move away from and otherwise clear past tense in his exposition in the verses that follow. Note especially verse 12: "...he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day."
  - (g) Titus 3:5 - again, Paul seems to clarify and modify the sense. In verse 7 he says we "become heirs in hope of eternal life.
- d. **Judgement** - the account for one's own life which every person must render after death to God, Lord and supreme judge, to receive reward or punishment according to deeds. One is either saved, damned or receives a judgement of correction whereby he is consigned to the purification of purgatory. The concept of

Judgement is twofold: the particular (i.e. individual) judgement which takes place at a person's death and the and the Universal judgement which takes place at the end of the world. What particularly concerns us here is the individual judgement. What is Paul's use of the term "judgement?" Basically stated, Paul says we are justified by faith - clearly. But he also says we are judged by our deeds. We have already seen this in Chapter 2. Paul will develop the theme in chapter 4 with the example of Abraham who believed God and God credited to him as righteousness. It helps to anticipate the example here to see how judgement and justification are related. Paul says Abraham was justified by Faith. But the example of Abraham's faith means nothing unless we examine his life. Paul says, in effect, look at Abraham's faith. In other words, look at his life; look at what he did; look therefore at his deeds. How do we know Abraham had faith...? By looking at his life story and what he did. Thus, his faith is discerned and judged by his deeds. He is not saved or justified by those deeds but he is judged by them to have had faith. Therefore it is not enough merely to say, "I believe." These words must be judged to be either true or a false. The criteria of the judgement is deeds. To sow this up it is worthwhile to look at Paul's proclamation of the truth that God will judge us; not only at our death but even daily. Here are some quotes given with the caution that "one-liners" must be read in the fuller context. Thus these ought to be looked up and read -

- (1) *God will judge people's hidden deeds through Christ Jesus.*<sup>9</sup>
- (2) *Therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose it will bring judgement upon themselves.*<sup>10</sup>
- (3) *For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of God...so then each of us shall give an account of himself to God.*<sup>11</sup>
- (4) *I am not conscious of anything against me, but I do not thereby stand acquitted, the one who judges me is the Lord.*<sup>12</sup>
- (5) *For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.*<sup>13</sup>
- (6) *For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the*

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9Rom 2:16.

10Rom 13:2. From the context it is not absolutely clear that Paul does not mean temporal judgement by civil authority. He may mean that or he may refer to God's judgement or both.

11Rom 14:10,12.

121 Cor 4:4.

132 Cor 5:10.

*body eats and drinks judgement upon himself...but since we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.*<sup>14</sup>

- II. It is instructive and challenging and a necessary foundation to examine two texts from sacred scripture which deal with the relationship between faith and works. Here they are:
- A. St. Paul in Romans - *For we consider that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Indeed, if Abraham was justified on the basis of his works, he has reason to boast; but this was not so in the sight of God. For what does scripture say? "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness."*<sup>15</sup>
  - B. St. James in the Letter of James - *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with works, and faith was completed by the works. Thus, the scripture was fulfilled, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called, "the friend of God." See how a person is justified by works and not by faith alone...For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*<sup>16</sup>
  - C. How do we reconcile what *seems* to be a contradiction in Sacred Scripture? Paul seems to say "A" and James says "not A." The problem is compounded when we meditate on the fact that both letters are the inspired word of God. Thus it is not merely the differing opinion of two fallible men. Rather, God himself is the author of both texts by the power of the Holy Spirit. This shows us the dangers of the fundamentalist approach to Scripture.
  - D. Martin Luther tried to deal with the problem by trying to remove the Epistle of James from the New Testament. However, friends prevailed upon Luther that he could not eject a book of holy writ from the Bible simply because he did not like its teaching. Luther gave in but always called James "an Epistle of Straw" to illustrate his low regard for the letter. Basically he held that there was a contradiction in God's Word and that he chose the authority of Paul over that of James. But this position is untenable since it clearly does harm to the dogmas of the inerrancy and inspiration of the bible.
  - E. The most authentic approach to the issue is to say that the problem is not in holy scripture, it is in us. The problem centers around a modern (post 16th Century) truncated view of both Paul's and James' position. As shown in the reflection about Abraham above Paul does not put works at a polar opposite from faith. Rather, deeds are the sign of a faith that is living and operative. How do we know Abraham had faith? From his deeds. James makes the same point but from a different angle. His basic point is this, faith without works is not faith<sup>17</sup> at all

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141 Cor 11:29,32. Here Paul speaks of a judgement that is not a person's last judgement put part of the on-going judgement of God who in his mercy judges our deeds and sends us warnings so that we may avoid a final judgement of condemnation.

15Romans 3:28, 4:2-3.

16James2:22-24,26.

17In a certain sense we can say, faith *is* what faith *does*. If I go to a doctor in whom I have great faith and he gives me prescriptions, suppose I fail to get them filled. A few days later

because faith, by the very fact that it is infused in the person, will have good deeds - works. Without these works there is no faith and hence no justification. Works are a *sine qua non* of faith. Paul teaches that we are justified by faith but he does not say faith alone. James also teaches that we are justified by faith but not faith alone since works are the infallible sign and fruit of faith. You can tell a tree by its fruit. The fruit of faith is works; if there is no fruit, it is not a fruit tree, if there are no works, there is no faith.

- F. To carry the analogy of the fruit tree further we can see that faith is the tree and good works, the fruit of faith tree. Paul states rightly that we are justified by faith apart from works of the law just as the tree is brought given life before it has any fruits. It is obvious that a tree exists before its fruits so the tree is not given life as a reward for its fruits. But is given life to bear fruit. So it is with faith. We are justified by faith and justification is life, the life of God within us. This is given not by because of any good works (fruits) but it is given for unto good works, that we may do the works of God (cf John 6:28-29). There must be good works that flow from faith for it is impossible that the Grace of God shed forth in a human person would be fruitless. God could not permit this. Just look at some of the "fruit" imagery used by our Lord. He declared that we could tell a tree by its fruit and that Ever tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.<sup>18</sup> Our Lord also told us that *Whoever remains in me will bear much fruit.*<sup>19</sup> In addition we see the story of our Lord who came upon a fig tree that bore no fruit, only leaves. He cursed it and it withered immediately.<sup>20</sup> In Luke's Gospel our Lord also told a parable that described God's patience in this regard. The owner of a field points to a fruitless tree asking "Should not this be cut down?" But the gardener recommended to the owner that it be fertilized and cultivated. But next year, if there is no fruit, the axe will be laid to it.<sup>21</sup> Recall too the parable of our Lord of the seed which is the word of God, much of which fall on unfitting ground, *But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word of God and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.*<sup>22</sup> Paul picks up on this whole theme in Romans, *They [unfaithful Jews] were broken off because of unbelief, but you are there because of faith. So do not become haughty, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you either...provided you remain in his kindness [you will be spared, otherwise you will be cut off].*<sup>23</sup> In 1 Tim 1:5 Paul speaks of love as the fruit of Faith.<sup>24</sup> And far from declaring that faith alone is sufficient to save he

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the doctor calls and inquires about the prescriptions, and I say "I have so much faith in you I don't need the prescriptions!" The doctor will reply, "I don't know in whom you have faith but it isn't me! How can you say you have faith in me and not do what I say?" Thus we see here too how faith and works are related.

18Matt 7:19.

19John 15:5b

20Matt 21:19; Mk 11:14.

21Luke 13:6.

22Mat 13:23.

23Romans 11:20-22.

241 Tim. 1:5.

declares, *If I have faith enough to move mountains but have not Love...it profits me nothing.*<sup>25</sup> **Therefore and in conclusion!** Faith and works are not separated and when the Bible treats of faith works are included in the way that fruit comes from a tree. Faith is the tree, works the fruit. Without the fruit there is a curse and in the end no more tree.

- G. An additional and important bit of knowledge to have here is that scripture scholars have commented that Paul and James were addressing opposite heresies. Paul was addressing the wrongful notion that we can earn salvation merely by good works and following the Law. James was battling the wrongful notion that internal faith was all that matters and good works were unnecessary as a part of the Christian life. Thus both Paul and James are in the service of the one truth: that faith and works cannot be artificially separated. Neither one says we are saved or justified by works for, *without faith it is impossible to please God.*<sup>26</sup> Neither one says we are saved by faith alone. Martin Luther added the word "alone" to Rome 3:28 even though he admitted it was not in the original Greek text. This was a grave dis-service to Paul and to Christians everywhere. Since it cannot be that the Word of God contradicts itself, we must see the highly nuanced quality of the arguments advanced and strictly avoid over-simplifications. In regard to faith and works it is not a case of "either-or" but "both-and." Consider the testimony of the following texts and see that it is absurd to claim we have faith (that we are faithful) without works:
1. *Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.*<sup>27</sup>
  2. *Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord" and not do what I tell you? The good man out of the treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man, out of his evil treasure produces evil.*<sup>28</sup>
  3. *He who hears [my words] and does not do them is like the man who built a house on the ground without a foundation; against which the stream broke, and immediately it fell and the ruin of that house was great.*<sup>29</sup>
  4. *If we go on sinning wilfully, when once the full knowledge of truth has been granted to us, we have no further sacrifice for sin to look forward to; nothing but a terrible expectation of judgement, a fire that will eagerly consume the rebellious.*<sup>30</sup>
- H. Conclusion: It is simply unbiblical to say that, "all that is needed is faith." The biblical position is one of balance and nuance not simplistic formulas. This is the necessary and ultimate way to resolve the seeming conflict between James and Paul. Simplifications and slogans will not do, what is needed is an inclusive and holistic notion of the biblical message regarding the intrinsic relationship between faith and works.

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251 Cor 13:2-3. N.B. I have paraphrased here so it is best to read the full passage, look it up!

26Heb 11:6.

27Matt 7:21.

28Lk 6:46,45.

29Luke 6:47.

30Heb 10:26.

- I. Lastly it must be emphasized that we are not saved or justified by works. This is clear. We do not earn salvation. It is a gift but once this gift is received in an true sense it confers life with has effect. Any living body has effects on the world around it. So therefore does a lively faith. But we must not boast of good works for they are the work of God, an infallible effect of his grace.
- J. Thought with which to conclude: what is faith? Is it
1. merely an event?
  2. a mere trust or frame of mind?
  3. a human response?
  4. No, it is a transformation by the supernatural gift of God of our entire person that profoundly affects how we live, think and exist. We become a new creation in Christ.



III. The Text:

A. *<sup>21</sup>But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, <sup>22</sup>the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; <sup>26</sup>it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. <sup>27</sup>Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith. <sup>31</sup>Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.*

B. Outline - I have reworked the order of verses for the sake of clarity

1. REVIEW vv. 22b-23 *For there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*
2. RIGHTEOUSNESS vv. 21-22a, 25b-26 - *<sup>21</sup>But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, <sup>22</sup>the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; <sup>26</sup>it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.*
3. RECOURSE - vv. 24-25a - *<sup>24</sup>they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*
4. RECIPE - v. 28, 30 *<sup>28</sup>For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law....he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith.*
5. RAMIFICATIONS - vv. 27,31
  - a. *<sup>27</sup>Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith.*
  - b. *<sup>31</sup>Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.*

IV. Commentary - Verses 3:21-27. So far St. Paul has developed the theme of man's condition without the Gospel and without grace. The whole condition can be summed up by the one word, "wrath." Now he will show a new period in the history of the human race with the coming of Jesus. With the death and resurrection of Christ there is a new power given to man, the power of the cross. This power is proclaimed in the Gospel which is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone one who believes" (Rom 1:16). This saving power is grasped by faith in Jesus Christ.

A. **But now** - the adverb "now" is temporal proclaiming the new era that has been inaugurated. The period of wrath gives way to the period of uprightness. The now is emphatic and is called the "eschatological now" by theologians. Paul uses the "now" in several other places in this epistle: 3:26; 5:9-11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1,18; 11:5,30,31. In all these cases "now" is not just said in passing, it is emphatic: *now* (strongly opposed to then). This is a whole new era.

B. **the righteousness of God has been manifested** - Once again, we must not let an artificial break in the text (a break not made by Paul but by commentators) cause us to miss the flow of thought. To understand the full meaning of this text read 3:20-21. In verse 20 Paul quotes Ps 143:2 and he clearly has that psalm in mind in this present verse. Read Psalm 143 again. It is evident that Paul says in effect that this psalm has been fulfilled by the saving act of Christ who brings power and justification. Recall too our previous discussion of God's Justice. It is not *per se* only about punishment for sin. The primary definition of God's justice is "his fidelity to his promises." See how psalm 143 pleads for this justice and how Christ, by the power of cross and resurrection, brings that justice forth. Therefore Christ shows the divine attribute of God's justice; not his vindicative or commutative justice but his bounteous and salvific uprightness whereby he delivers salvation in fidelity to his promises. Two questions ought to be asked in relation to the fact the justice (righteousness) of God has been manifested:

1. to whom has this justice been manifested? We ought to personalize this, "Has the justice of God (his fidelity to his promises) been manifested to me? Do I understand what Paul means in this verse? Is it just some long distant historical act which has little real bearing on my daily existence or do I experience the power of the Cross and resurrection as a living reality? This question is critical especially today since most people have at least implicitly accepted the notion that grace is something that transpires only in the unconscious part of the human being. Whereas, the ancients and up to the "enlightenment" era, almost unanimously accepted and taught that grace always brought with it a change of consciousness. How can it be that things like death, addiction, crime etc. can all be so real and the truths of faith are so unreal! It must not be so. Jesus did not die on the cross so we could just have a vague idea about the glory of grace. Faith is a way of knowing and gives a prophetic vision of reality that is totally new and more penetrating than the darkened intellect without faith. How many of us are ready to assert this? *Be ready to render an account for the hope that is within you* [1 Peter 3:15]. Can I? Has the justice of God been manifest to me?

2. How has it been manifested? How is manifested to *me*? When I consider the death and resurrection of Christ is that act by which God is faithful to his promises, is that act manifest to me? How is it manifest to me? - by faith. Faith is that work of God in me by which the Cross of Jesus Christ becomes manifest to me as the Justice of God. No longer is it just an historical event with little direct relevance to me, now it is the life, the power and the justice of God. To know this in more than just a theoretical way is a fruit of the faith God works in us and with which we must cooperate. And this work is not just manifest to me but to the whole Church who preaches this reality down through the ages through her preaching, prayer and sacraments. Thus this manifestation of the justice of God is a work of God to the individual and the Church as well as through the individual and the Church to the world. Thus, it is not a private little manifestation but must be proclaimed and revealed to all the world.
- C. ***apart from the law*** - Paul insists that the Mosaic Law had nothing to do in bringing about this manifestation of God's uprightness. This is grace - pure gift. Man could do nothing to earn this as a reward. It is purely God's initiative, his gift. Paul has shown in the previous two-and-one-half chapters that far from earning anything from God, the history of both Jew and Greek shows only that we were utterly indebted to God.
- D. ***though testified to by the law and the prophets*** - Paul allows however that the Old Testament was privileged to prepare for this manifestation of God's uprightness. Actually the Greek word *martyroymene* (being witnessed) is a present participle so Paul also means that they are still bearing witness; it is an on-going action. The "law and the prophets" is another way of saying what we have come to call the Old Testament. Another insight here is to see how Paul also indicates by this phrase that this plan of God in the new dispensation is in conformity with God's will. This is not a radical departure from what God always planned. The whole of the Old Testament attests to this Justice of God which has now been made manifest in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- E. ***the righteousness of God through faith in Christ Jesus*** -
1. Regarding the righteousness (justice) of God see "A" directly above.
  2. ***Through faith*** - Again, faith is a work of God, not of man. Faith (or belief) is that act which God works in us by which we come in contact with the power of God unto salvation. This power has its cause precisely in and because of the cross of Jesus Christ who is now risen in glory and seated at the right hand of the Father. But notice especially that faith is a work of God. Too often what faith has come to mean since the 16th century (and because of our modern preoccupations which are very individualistic and very psychological) justification by faith has come to mean: "safe through confidence in God." In other words, "I'm safe because I have confidence in God." Whereas what Paul is saying is, "I'm justified because of the faith God works in me." That's a very different outlook. The problem with the "safe through confidence" definition is that it once again makes justification the result of a human work, viz "my confidence." But this is not the case. Faith is a work of God of which I can be aware and that is the source of my confidence and assurance. St. Thomas Aquinas comments on these words as follows, *The justice of God is described as being through faith in Jesus Christ, not as though through faith we might merit to be justified, (as though faith itself came from us*

*and through it we might merit the justice of God, as the Pelagians<sup>31</sup> say). But rather, in that very justification by which we are justified by God the first movement of the mind towards God is through faith. "The one coming to God must believe" as it is said in Hebrews 11:6. Thus, faith itself is, as it were, the first part of justice which is in us from God. "You are saved by grace through faith" [Eph 2:8-10; Gal 5:6]<sup>32</sup> This faith from which there is justice is not a faith without love but is a faith informed by love. What St. Thomas says in effect, is that we ought not so easily separate out faith from justification. Rather, faith, which is a work of God in us, is the first act of one who is justified. Later in the same commentary (on Romans) St. Thomas takes up the same theme in Commenting on Abraham's faith (Rom 4:5) We will see that comment there in context but it is worth anticipating the reflection here as well. St. Thomas comments, *This faith of his [Abraham's] was credited to him as justice. Not, certainly, that justice is merited by faith. But rather, that believing itself is the first act of justice which God works in him. By the fact that he believes in God, the one who justifies, he submits himself to the justification of God and thus receives its effect.* See how different all this is from "safe because I have confidence in God." Thomas' view is that we know, experience, and receive the justice of God because God in his mercy has offered us faith and worked faith in each of us. This shows as well how faith is always a way of knowing; a way of grasping the reality of what God has done for us and who he is as he has revealed himself. Thomas' view is particularly valuable because it predates by some 300 years to debates of the 16th century which the polemics surrounding this text have made a deeper appreciation of it difficult.*

- a. A question may come to mind here, "If God does everything then what do I do?" Answer: agree to it. The human will cannot approach God through faith without God's gift but the human being can turn away from this free gift of God and leave it unwrapped. The key to justification and salvation is total dependance on God with no human resources. Now we must behold how this kills us by putting to death the flesh.<sup>33</sup> This attitude of faith and total dependance on God is meant to "kill" us. Another way of putting the question in this context is, "You mean all I have to do is believe?" The answer is yes. But if we really do believe it will kill us! It will put our flesh to death because what we want is "salvation under my control." I will do what I want and I will declare whether it's good or evil. And this is what's wrong with us. Law and achievement put things under our control. We must confess it is under God's control and that all our good works flow from God's work in us and we do those works in total love; not because we are trying to earn God's love, we've already got it. Rather they are done in response to God's love. Most people do not think this way. And, frankly, most people do not want this kind of

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<sup>31</sup>Pelagians held that man could save himself by his own virtues and deeds. This was a heresy condemned by the Church.

<sup>32</sup>Recall our description of this verse above in the section dealing with the uses of the word "saved."

<sup>33</sup>"Flesh" in Pauline terminology is that which roots me in the earth making me depend on human resources and proudly refusing to acknowledge my total need for God.

scenario because it really means God is in total control. It is this that Paul rails in his insistence of justification by faith apart from works.

- b. Another question, does this faith just fall out of the sky and hit me over the head? Answer, Not usually. The scriptures do speak of a certain remote preparation of the mind and heart that God works in the person to prepare him for the gift of faith. The remote stages are: fear of God's punishment of sin (Sir 1:28; Heb 11:6); hope of his forgiveness (Matt 9:2 Mark 2:5); hatred of sin (1 John 3:14); repentance (Lk 13:3, Acts 3:19); the resolution to receive the sacrament of Baptism and keep the commandments (Mt 28:19, Acts 2:38). These prepare the soul for the gift of faith and through these remote stages the Lord leads the soul to faith and justification.

F. ***For there is no distinction*** - i.e. the distinction that Paul has been discarding (that between Jew and Greek) is what is meant here. He uses the same phrase in Rom 10:12 but there supplies the clarifier "between Jew and Greek."

G. ***all have sinned*** -

1. remember, this is not merely a negative or pessimistic statement. As has been the case all along Paul is underscoring sin to emphasize the glory of the salvation we are offered. But this offer is not sought if one does not acknowledge the need for it. What does the offer of freedom mean to an imprisoned man if he refuses to acknowledge that he is in prison? Will he not laugh and reject the offer as absurd and even "judgmental" if he refuses to acknowledge his incarceration? When he acknowledges his imprisoned state freely he then seeks, finds, and joyfully receives his freedom when the amnesty is offered.
2. **All** - when Paul uses the word all he means primarily the two historic groups of humanity: Jews and Greeks. However he does not exclude the secondary sense that every individual has also fallen and this is evident from the Greek verb *hamartano* which is translated here "have sinned." The Greek sense of the verb is "missing the mark" or "failing to achieve a moral goal." But in classical Greek and in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) the word also has the connotation of transgression against divinity, custom or Law and denotes personal, individual actions.

H. ***and are deprived of the glory of God*** - the Greek is more literally rendered "fall short of the glory of God. But our translation stresses the result of this falling short: all remain without a share in God's glory because of their sin. This text actually seems a bit surprising to the reflective reader. Why? Well, when Paul announces that "all have sinned" he would be expected to say next "and need the mercy of God." Why does he not say this? Why does Paul zig when he should have zagged? It is a question that can lead to a fruitful reflection of the understanding of "glory." See # 2 just below.

1. **are deprived** - the Greek verb *hystero* means "to come too late, to miss through one's own fault." Thus most translations render it "fall short." But again our translation seems to regard that the verb is in the middle voice and thus emphasizes the result: i.e. that we are *deprived* of glory through our own fault.
2. **Glory** - the Greek word is *doxa* which translates the Hebrew word for glory: *kabod*. *Kabod* is the resplendent manifestation of God's glory and holiness. The Hebrew word carries a connotation of weightiness. God's *kabod* is His weightiness, his power. When man lacks a share in God's

*kabod* he becomes a lightweight, insignificant, trivial, easily tossed about by the winds etc. This poor state comes about as the result of sin. Often we are deluded by the "glamour" of sin. It is presented to us as making us powerful. Consider the presentation of sinful characters in movies (e.g. "The Untouchables"). The wicked are often presented as powerful and rich. But God says they lack glory, weightiness or significance, they lack *kabod*, they are lightweights. This is worth meditation but must be seen with the eyes of faith. With holiness comes glory: weightiness; sinners are lightweights. For Paul glory is something communicated to us as we draw closer to God. It is worth consulting 2 Cor 3:18 to see how he develops the theme positively. It is also good to note the Old Testament roots in Ezekiel 10,11 and 43. There is described how, on account of the sins of the people the Glory of the Lord literally rose up from the temple on the wings of the Cherubim and departed Israel. The temple was soon destroyed. But in Ez. 43 there was a prophecy that the Glory would return.

3. ***They are justified*** - as stated above justification refers to a right relationship with God. Paul uses a legal language here largely in because he writes in a climate of the Judaizers who thought very juridically. However Paul does not mean that man is merely declared just or righteous by a legal declaration. Luther's position that man was *simul justus et peccator* (justified and yet a sinner at the same time). Luther likewise held that we were declared (i.e. "said to be") righteous but not actually made so. But this waters down the fuller Pauline teaching of man as a new creation in Christ. See 2 Cor. 5:17-21 for a succinct summary of Paul's teaching on the New creation of everyone who is justified. See also Rom 5:19.

I. ***freely by his grace*** - the Christian dispensation is wholly due to the merciful and gratuitous benevolence of God himself. This is the notion of Grace emphasized here: grace=gift or favor. Paul underscores the concept by adding the word "freely." The gift is free, that is, un-earned. Man does nothing to merit the gift. It is therefore no achievement of human beings. Free means free and we do not merit the gift of justification by faith because then the gift is no longer free. Sometimes with all the debate about the role of works etc. we forget that we are not justified by faith if "by faith" refers to a human work; as if to say, "I believe and so now I am justified." What this mentality does is to turn faith into a work by which we "earn" salvation. It must be remembered that faith is a work of God, and a gift of God. The Council of Trent made this very point in commenting on these verses: [*We are*] *said to be justified gratuitously, because none of those things which precede justification, whether faith or works, merit the grace itself of justification; for, "if it is a grace, it is not now by reason of works; otherwise grace is no more grace."* [Rom 11:6]<sup>34</sup> Such is God's goodness to us that he wills that his gifts be our merits and that he will grant us eternal reward for what he has given us. All this may lead to the question, "What role do I have in all of this? If God does everything what do I do?" The answer is: agree to it. We must accept the gift we are offered by God. We are free and God does not force us to be justified. We accept this gift by a conscious, deliberate and free act which at least implies an admission of personal insufficiency to save ourselves and submission to the work of God. Thus we must freely accept this gift from God. And we must accept it as a gift it is not something we do or earn. To further the description of all this it must be added that our acceptance of the gift of justification is itself a

gift from God. This should lead us to the humility evident in the notion that the only thing I can say I did all by myself, without the help of God, is my sin. Anything else I do which is in any way good or pleasing is not my gift to God it is his gift to me. All that is good is gift. This must not give way to a quietism which says that I don't need to do anything and that nothing really matters or affects my salvation. Remember the principle stated above: Justification is life. When God's grace touches a soul, fruit will be brought forth. God will not permit that the grace of justification would be fruitless. You can tell a tree by its fruit. Thus, good works are the necessary result of this life-giving salvation and the sign that one has been justified.

- J. ***through the redemption in Christ Jesus*** - the Greek word *Apolytroisis* (translated here as "redemption") had the significance in the ancient world of buying back of a person sold into slavery. The redemption was a sum paid to purchase the freedom of the enslaved. However one must be cautious in applying the theme entirely to what Jesus did. He did not in any sense pay the devil for our freedom. The "payment" might be better understood as the fact that God acquires a people for himself (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 6:20) and as a restoration and involved the rebalancing of the scales of Justice which had been severely imbalanced by sin, original and personal. This is the work of Jesus in redeeming. The redemptive work of Christ is also more than just a restoration for it far exceeds what was needed merely to restore the original state of grace. Now we are not only returned to grace but also become the children of God, sharing in divine nature. There is here a new deliverance that carries on, fulfills and far exceeds the freeing of Israel at the Exodus from Egypt. Notice too that in the freeing of Israel from slavery there was no payment made to Pharaoh but it was a complete work of the sovereignty of God who owes nothing to anyone. There is also a family connotation to this concept. It was the duty of a next of kin to rescue, if possible their kin from slavery. If a person got in trouble and was thrown in jail to pay his debts or was captured and enslaved by an enemy it was up to the next of kin to go and pay a ransom and get him out of trouble and slavery. The next of Kin was called the Go'el. The act by which the Go'el gets his kin out of trouble is called Ga'al. All throughout the O.T. God says I will Ga'al my people. As if to say, I as next of Kin will Ga'al my people, I will go and save, redeem my people. For other examples of the concept that Christians have been bought for a price see: 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Gal 3:13; Rev. 5:9 and also: Matt 20:28; Mk. 10:45; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 1:18ff.
- K. ***Whom God set forth*** - the exact sense of the Greek word *proetheto* is not clear. However, is stress is laid on the pro then it would mean "God set him forth" as in our translation. Put in more modern terminology the phrase can be rendered "whom God displayed" and thus the phrase refers specifically to the crucifixion.
- L. ***as an expiation*** - (*hilasterion* = propitiation) in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, (the Septuagint) this understanding of expiation refers to God's forgiveness of sin or to the removal of impurities that hinder a person's communion with God. Thus, some translations render the phrase, "as a means of atonement." Note the root understanding of the word atonement: at-one-ment. Whereas sin separates a person from God, the removal of that sin restores unity and makes a person to be one with God: at-one-ment. The term expiation is also deeply rooted in the Old Testament. The expiatory (or propitiatory) was the cover of the Ark which stood in the middle of the Holy of Holies in the Jewish Temple. Another title for the expiatory was the mercy seat. It had two functions. First, it was to act as God's throne from which he spoke to Moses during the exodus from Egypt. Secondly it was central in imploring God's mercy on the feast of Yom

Kippur (the Day of Atonement). On that day the high priest sprinkled the mercy seat with the blood of animals sacrificed as victims to obtain forgiveness of the sins of the people. John the Baptist picks up this theme when he pointed to our Lord and declared, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World." Paul too taps into this rich imagery by this phrase and asserts along with the rest of the New Testament that the expiatory sacrifice on Yom Kippur was but a figure of the actual and real expiation of Jesus on the Cross. We no longer sacrifice lambs in atonement for Christ, the true Lamb of God has been sacrificed one and for all. He is the new and final mercy-seat through whom God himself expiates the sin of his people. Other texts where this notion of propitiation is set forth Matt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:24ff; 15:3; Eph 1:7; 5:2; Col 1:20; Heb 10:12-14; 1 Peter 1:18f; 3:18.

- M. ***through faith*** - See D,2 above. The law-fulness of the Old Testament has given way to the faithfulness of the New Testament.
  - N. ***to prove his righteousness*** - Christ's crucifixion makes public and convincing the Father's saving love, uprightness and fidelity to his promises (i.e. his justice). He promised to save his people and he does.
  - O. ***because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed through the forbearance of God*** - the phrase is difficult in the Greek. Perhaps it is better understood is translated in this way - by the remission of men's former sins committed in the time of God's forbearance. Thus Paul sets up a contrast. Whereas God before only overlooked man's sin (through forbearance), now he actually wipes it out by the power of the cross. Forgiveness is real not merely juridical. We are not just declared innocent, we are actually made so by the blood of Christ. See Hebrews 9:12-22 to see a further development of this theme: forgiveness announced and then actually done.
  - P. ***to prove his righteousness in the present time*** - just as he proves his righteous by the forgiveness of sins formerly committed so too does he show it by justifying in the present time those who approach him by accepting the gift of faith. The proving of his righteousness is the fulfillment of his promises. See for example, Is. 59:15-20 & Ez 34:10-17.
  - Q. ***That he might be righteous and justify the one who has faith in Jesus*** - he basically sums up and repeats what he has said in vv 21-26a.
- V. Verses 27-31. Now Paul will set forth the practical consequences of the manifestation of God's faithfulness which he has just described. The consequences he sets forth are these: there is no room for boasting; God is not solely accessible to the Jews or by any chance of birth. Rather he accessible to all by faith; The law, far from being annulled is fulfilled.
- A. ***What occasion is there then for boasting?*** - people cannot boast of their own holiness since it is God's free gift. Remember the understanding of grace set forth above. Our good deeds and personal holiness are not our work or our gift to God. They are his work in us and his gift to us. This includes the gift of faith which is God's gift to us and his work in us by which he justifies us. Uprightness then is not achieved but received, *What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it?* (I Cor. 4:7). Paul will allow boasting only in the Lord himself and his glorious Cross (Gal 6:14). It will be noted in that event, Christ did all the work. Paul takes up the theme again in chapter 11 of not boasting particularly in reference to the Gentiles who are not to boast that they have grafted on to the tree, *do not boast against the branches [i.e. the Jews]. If you do boast, consider that you do not support the root; the root supports you. Indeed, you will say, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." That is so. They were broken off because of unbelief, but you*



are there because of faith. So do not become haughty, but stand in awe. (Rom 11:18-20). The bottom line is this, the way of obedience to the law is concerned with what man can do for himself; the way of grace is concerned with what God does for the believer.

- B. ***On what principle is it<sup>35</sup> ruled out, that of works? No, that of faith*** - I have taken the liberty of reworking the phrase a bit here since our translation does not easily convey Paul's flow of thought. Paul's point here is to recall his premise, we are saved not by works but by faith, which is the work of God in us. Hence, by this premise there is no room for boasting. If one were to entertain the notion that we are saved by works then there would be room for boasting but Paul rules that notion out. Likewise, if one reduces faith to a human work, there is room for boasting, but again, this notion is also ruled out based on what we have discussed about the nature of faith as a gift of God.
- C. ***For we consider that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the Law*** - Paul reiterates the teaching and the premise of his argument. In fact, one can say that this is main tenet of Paul's teaching on justification.
1. An historical note is important here. Martin Luther in his translation of 1521 added the word "alone" to the sentence so that his version read, "*For we hold that a man is justified by faith alone<sup>36</sup>, apart from works of the Law.*" Luther admitted that the word "alone" was not in the original Greek but insisted that it helped clarify what Paul actually was saying. In and of itself, the addition of the word "alone" does not give great offense to Paul's thought but in the context of the Reformation it became a distorting slogan. Martin Luther was far less nuanced than Paul who does not deny the role of good works and keeping the commandments in the Christian life. Though we are not saved by works, they are a constitutive part of the faith through which we are justified in the same way as a pulse and brain waves are essential and constitutive parts of what it means to be a live human person though they themselves do not cause life but are the result of it. Thus works are the result of justification though not its cause. This was discussed above and if there is need for review it is good to consult the beginning of Part two of these notes. Again, slogans and quick phrases will not do here, clear and highly nuanced, and prayerful thought is essential to understanding the relationship between faith and works. Martin Luther was not the first to trip over the delicate nature of Paul's teaching. Even in the Bible it is clear that some erred in understanding Paul. For example, James in his epistle (2:24) protests not Paul's teaching but an exaggeration of Paul's teaching.<sup>37</sup> Likewise Peter describes the confusion caused by Paul's teachings in general and lays the blame not a Paul's teaching but at the feet of those who distort them, *...our beloved brother Paul according to the wisdom given him wrote to you, speaking of these things, as he does in all his letters. In them there are some things hard to understand that the ignorant and unstable distort to their own destruction just as they do other scriptures...be on your guard not to be led into the error of the unprincipled and to fall from your own stability.* (2

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35"it" refers to boasting.

36"allein durch Glauben" in Latin *Sola Fide*. The Church did not actually condemn the translation but the interpretation give the phrase. The interpretation which was condemned was that all works before or after justification are of no account

37This error is called antinomianism which is an anti law attitude. The error is also addressed in Matt. 5:17-20.

Peter 3:15ff). Although Peter was speaking more particularly of Paul's teaching on the second coming, it is a good reminder for us here to recall that Paul's doctrinal teaching must be examined very carefully. We have to put on our thinking caps. This also points to the error of assuming that every one is capable of interpreting scriptures individually and infallibly. In fact, we need the Church to assist us in reading them for the Scriptures are the Church's book and an expression of the faith which the Church is commissioned by Christ to proclaim.

- D. ***Does God belong to the Jews alone? Does he not belong to the Gentiles too?*** Here Paul sets up a statement that would be hard for the Jew to deny. No Jew denied that God was the God of all who had come into the world. Still, Jews thought of themselves as favored and that God's salvation was directed toward Israel. Paul wants to make progress in his argument with this admission.
- E. ***Yes, also to the Gentiles for God is one*** - now Paul links this salvation offered to all with the monotheistic nature of God. Since God is one, he does not act with duplicity in this ultimate saving act. The argument is basically this, if there be only one God then He must be the God of all peoples. If that is true then it is difficult to think of him as having a fundamentally different attitude toward Jew and Greek with regard to their ultimate salvation. True enough, God chose Israel for special favor but this was to prepare the way for the Lord who would come and save all nations. For example, from Jeremiah, *At that time they will call Jerusalem the Lord's throne; there all the nations will be gathered together to honor the name of the Lord at Jerusalem and they will walk no longer in their hardhearted wickedness.* (Jer 3:17). See also Ps 67, Isaiah 25:6; 56:7; 66:18.<sup>38</sup>
- F. ***and will justify the circumcised on the basis of faith and the uncircumcised through faith*** - Paul has made this point earlier in Rom 2:25-29 and now restates it in this context.
- G. ***Are we then annulling the law by this faith? Of course not! On the contrary, we are supporting the law.*** Here the law (*nomos*) seems to refer to the whole Old Testament. Paul emphatically denies the notion that the Law is annulled by this teaching of justification through faith. Although he does state that Christ has done away with the precepts of the law (Eph 2:15) he means it more in the sense that the Law has been fulfilled and confirmed through Christ. Paul insists that this teaching affirms the basic message of the whole Old Testament which promises and points to salvation. All are to be admitted to salvation by the justification grasped through faith. In chapter 4 Paul will now show that this principle is more ancient than the Mosaic Law. He uses the example of Abraham to show that, far from this being a change in divine policy, it is quite well rooted in the Old Testament. This phrase taps into the tension that exists between the radical newness of what God has done and its continuity with what was revealed of Old.
- H. Basic summary of the characteristics of human salvation
1. It is a justification that does not come by way of any Law (3:21,28,30)
  2. It is obtained through faith in Christ Jesus (3:22)
  3. Hence it is opened to all without distinction (3:22-23,29-30)
  4. It has its ultimate origin in the propitiatory death of Christ (3:24-26)
  5. It is attested to by the Old Testament. (3:31)

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<sup>38</sup>Especially this last one is worthy of reading in class.

VI. Chapter 4 - The example of Abraham as scriptural description of the Christian doctrine of justification.

A. Outline

1. Whence? - *What then shall we say about Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."*
2. Wages? - *<sup>4</sup>Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup>And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. <sup>6</sup>So also David pronounces a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:<sup>7</sup> "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; <sup>8</sup>blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin." <sup>9</sup>Is this blessing pronounced only upon the circumcised, or also upon the uncircumcised? We say that faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.*
3. When? *<sup>10</sup>How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup>He received circumcision as a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.*
4. Why? - *The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, <sup>12</sup>and likewise the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but also follow the example of the faith which our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. <sup>13</sup>The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.*
5. What of it? - *<sup>14</sup>If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup>For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. <sup>16</sup>That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants—not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup>as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup>In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, "So shall your descendants be."*
6. Well...? - *<sup>19</sup>He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup>No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>fully convinced that God was able to*

*do what he had promised.*

7. Who? - <sup>22</sup>*That is why his faith was “reckoned to him as righteousness.”* <sup>23</sup>*But the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup>but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, <sup>25</sup>who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

B. Basic observations

1. Paul turns to the Old Testament and the example of Abraham to demonstrate that justification by faith (and not observance of the law) is a doctrine which is not against the Old Testament but is in complete agreement with it.
2. Paul also wants to correct Jewish thought on Abraham as an example of justification through works. Contemporary Judaism based salvation on the principle of distributive justice: a promised reward for upright conduct. Thus the call of Abraham was a reward for his devotion to God. Popular Jewish piety also held that Abraham knew and obey the precepts of the Jewish Law and Torah even though he lived centuries before God revealed these to Moses. There was no scriptural basis for this, it was just a pious thought. Paul does not concur and will challenge this view on the basis of Scripture itself (using Gen 15:6 and Ps 32:1-2). In citing the two passages Paul in effect argues according to Jewish rules<sup>39</sup> by bringing two witnesses to support his view: Abraham and David. The use of the example of Abraham is no accident. Abraham was not just any person from the O.T. he was the one whom the Jews considered the initiator of their race. Paul also uses another rabbinic technique. To refute a current and widely held Jewish norm he goes to a more ancient principle. In effect he says, *Current views depart from the original and more pure view. Thus, don't tell me about present piety, let's look at God's original intentions.* Our Lord Jesus uses the same technique when refuting the Jewish practice of divorce. The Jews quote Moses, Jesus quotes God (cf Mk 10:2ff)
3. Paul's argument has the following four points:
  - a. (Verses 1-8) The presentation of the central text from scripture by which he will make his point: *Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness* (Gen 15:6).
  - b. (Verses 9-12) Abraham's justification took place *before* his circumcision. Circumcision, a work, was not the cause of justification but a fruit of it as well as its sign.
  - c. (Verses 13-22) Abraham is the father of the faithful. Just as he received his justification by faith, so too do his children receive it according to the model of Abraham. They are children by faith and grace and not human works just as Isaac was not a child by a mere human work (Abraham and Sarah were in their 90's!) but by the work and intervention of God. So it is with all Abraham's children.
  - d. (Verses 23-25) The application of the example of Abraham's faith to the present situation of justification by faith in Christ Jesus. Abraham's example applies to us and so he is a "type" of the

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<sup>39</sup>cf. Deut 19:15 which requires two witnesses in order that any testimony might be considered valid and convincing.

Christian faith.

- C. ***What then can we say that Abraham found, our ancestor according to the flesh?*** The Greek text here is difficult.<sup>40</sup> Our text tries to render it rather literally by retaining the (problematic) infinitive *heurekenai*. Other translations render this phrase "what then shall we say about Abraham?" In effect they omit the infinitive. What Paul seems to be saying is "Regarding Abraham, our Father according to the flesh, what sort of uprightness (justice) was his lot?"
1. According to the Flesh (*kata sarx*) - Abraham was the Father of the Jewish Nation. From him, every Jew was descended. One was born a Jew and there were, technically, no converts to the Jewish race. Some may have embraced the faith of the Jews<sup>41</sup>, but they were not of the Jewish race.
  2. The whole phrase elicits pride for the Jewish hearer for whom descent from Abraham was a source of pride. Thus Paul leads the Jewish hearer to look at the most significant Jewish figurehead. If Abraham is the First and finest example of a faithful Jew (which he is) then we must learn from his example and do as he did.
- D. ***Indeed, if Abraham was justified on the basis of his works, then he has reason to boast*** - the Greek phrase *ex ergon* is literally rendered "from works" or "by deeds" but Paul seems to have in mind here specifically the deeds that the Law (the Torah) prescribes rather than good deeds in general. This interpretation is based on the fulness of his argument. One of the important facets of that argument is: if Abraham was justified by works of the Law (as Jews held) the only problem was that he lived hundreds of years before the Law was given through Moses. This might seem an astonishing and devastating defeat of the Jewish position but the Jew did have an answer. The answer was that although it was true that Abraham lived long before the promulgation of the Law but he still kept its precepts; he was an observer of the Law in advance. The logic was this, the pious Jew kept the Law, Abraham was pious, therefore Abraham kept the Law. The most extreme form of this was that he even kept the liturgical feasts (such as passover) even though those feasts commemorated events that would not take place for hundreds of years. He did this by a special insight given him by Almighty God. Paul rejects this speculative position and essentially takes this position: Abraham lived before the promulgation of the Law but was justified anyway as scripture says. Thus God justified him apart from the Law and apart from deeds of the Law.
- E. ***but this was not so in the eyes of God*** - Paul's rejection of the notion of Abraham as an observer of all the precepts of the Law in advance. How can Paul claim to know what was so in the eyes of God? He shows us how in the next verse; scripture tells us how God regarded Abraham.
- F. ***For What does scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.*** It was his willingness to take God at his word that put Abraham into a right relationship with God. Recall that the essence of justification is "a right relationship with God." An extended sense of this text would read, "Abraham believed in God's promise of a numerous progeny and this faith was booked to his credit." By faith is meant here an acceptance of the work of God

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<sup>40</sup>Paul is frequently difficult even for Greek scholars. A problem with the text is where to put the comma. One way is to place it as it is above. Another way is this, What then, can we say we found our Father Abraham according to the flesh? There are theological justifications to go either way. Again, it may be that Paul means both.

<sup>41</sup>For example the God Fearers were those who embraced some of the Jewish Law and Faith but they were not Jews.

within him by which he took the Lord at His word and was willing to abide and live by it. It involved a deep confidence and included hope in a promise that no mere man could guarantee. The promise was astonishing since, due to advanced age, both his own and Sarah's bodies were dead insofar as procreation was concerned.

1. Although already discussed above, St. Thomas' comment on this passage is worth recalling here. (See page 36 for a more detailed analysis of Thomas' remarks). *This faith of his [Abraham's] was credited to him as justice. Not, certainly, that justice is merited by faith. But rather, that believing itself is the first act of justice which God works in him. By the fact that he believes in God, the one who justifies, he submits himself to the justification of God and thus receives its effect.*
2. **believed** - in the Old Testament text that is quoted the word is *Aman* from which we get the word Amen. In the Hebrew it is a causative form of the verb which means that the verb causes the reality described by the verb to exist. Thus, *Aman* literally mean that "he made God firm." Now, nobody makes God firm, he is already firm. Thus, what it means is that Abraham made God firm in his (Abraham's) regard. The pictorial quality of the verb is that Abraham leaned so far over on God's word that if God didn't come through he (Abraham) would fall flat on his face. There is a total leaning on, a dependence on God. He doesn't have something to grab hold of just in case God doesn't come through.
3. **it was credited** - the Greek word is *elogisthe* and is a bookkeeping term here figuratively applied by Paul as it is in other places in the Old Testament (Dt 24:12-13; Ps 106:31). Scripture speaks of good and bad deeds as being recorded in a book and this notion carried over into the New Testament. (Est 6:1ff; Dan 7:10; Rev 20:12)
4. Regarding the faith of Abraham it is important not to oversimplify what that faith was. Again, many fundamentalist do oversimplify the matter since they project their own concept of faith on to the citation of Paul. Since they see faith as an event wherein one accepts God as their personal Lord and savior, they figure the same is true of Abraham and that this is all that Paul means and all that the phrase in Genesis means. But the story of Abraham's faith is much richer than the description of Gen 15:6 which serves more to describe a whole life of loving trust rather than merely a specific event. Remember or principle, when Paul quotes from the Old Testament, it is not merely the isolated line he means, but the whole context, in this case the whole story. Thus he wishes us to consider the whole story of Abraham. So, let's look at the story of Abraham! Go back to Gen 12:1ff. The Lord said to a 75 year old Abraham, *Go forth from the Land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you.* . He was not going to show it to him right away. He had to trust God, to have faith in God. Hebrews 11:8-9 declares, *By faith Abraham obeyed when he set out to a country that he was to receive...he went out not knowing where he was to go.* This is well before Chapter 15:6. So he leaves. Gen 12:4 *Abram went as the Lord directed him and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran.* He goes to the land and what does God do? Welcome him? Is there a big party and a wonderful land to behold? No, there is a famine that is so bad he goes to Egypt. Then he comes back out of Egypt (in Gen 13) and his own nephew, Lot, turns on him. They both realized that the land could not support them both so Abraham in a humble trusting sort of way asks Lot which part of

the land he wants. Lot chooses all of the choicest lands leaving Abraham with the barren land. All through this Abraham is building Altars and praying to the Lord publicly to show forth his faith. In Genesis 14 Lot is captured by 5 foreign kings in a war and Abraham goes to claim him back and in the process defeats the 5 kings and becomes King of kings. But, in humility and despite his huge victory he submits to the King of Salem, Melchizedech who is called the priest of God most high. He pays tithes to Melchizedech. (Gen 14:17). Thus, the phrase in Gen 15:6 *Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness* is so much richer than one mere event or the answering of an "altar call." See therefore how many fundamentalists project their own view of what it means to have faith (faith=at some particular moment I accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and savior) on to this text which is really so much richer given the context of Gen 12-15? There are a few of conclusions to be drawn from this analysis of Abraham's life.

- a. The faith described in 15:6 is not an event but the description of a life-disposition. It is not a legal act in a courtroom.
- b. The description of Gen 12-15 shows how faith and works are quite intertwined, works being always the fruit of justification and the sign of faith.
- c. Again, deeds did not merit Abraham justification. The point here is that the phrase "Abraham believed God" is richer than many first realize. This is not surprising since God's grace is usually much richer than most initially realize. Remember all of Abraham's fidelity was God's work in him and it was not an event, it was a life.
- d. Thus it is also true that faith is not some static quality in a person it can grow and diminish, wax and wane. Nor is faith just an event it is a life.
- e. Thus we see that Abraham had his ups and downs. Abraham had lapses of his faith even after scripture describes him as justified. He doubted God would fulfill his promise of numerous offspring and so he turned to his slave-girl Hagar and fathered a child, Ishmael, by her. In so doing he sinned against faith and this prompted a strong reaction from God and led to later trouble in Abraham's family. Then Abraham repented and re-embraced the promise of the Lord. But see how God continued to demand faith from Abraham. Again, this belies the fundamentalist notion of faith as an event of acceptance. God works an on-going work of faith in us and bids that we walk by faith and persevere in his ways. **Note this very important point as well**, although God made the promise of a numerous progeny to Abraham in both Gen 15 and 17 it was not until Gen 22 that he entered into an oath with him. It was at that moment that Abraham's faith can be said to have come to a fruition. What had just happened that brought the oath about? Abraham, obedient to God's word, went forth with the command that he offer Isaac in sacrifice on Mt. Moriah at Salem.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>It is interesting to see that the Name of Salem is changed at this event. The town was called Salem. The word in Hebrew for provide is "Jira." After this incident where Abraham declared that God would provide (Jira) it was called Jira-Salem thereafter. Today we spell it a little differently: "Jerusalem" but the meaning is the same. It was there that God did provide the

His faith is evident not only by his obedience but also by his answer to Isaac's inquiry, *Where is the Lamb for the holocaust? Son, Abraham responded, God will provide the Lamb.* (Gen 22:7-8) Here is strong faith and in the aftermath of this event God enters into a oath (not just a promise) with Abraham. In Gen 15:6 God promises Abraham numerous progeny in Gen 22:16 he swears it to him.

f. Now read James Chapter 2:14 again. In the light of this reflection see particularly how these lines have special significance.

(1) *Show me your faith without works and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.* (v. 18b)

(2) *Even Demons believe and tremble* (v. 19b)<sup>43</sup>

(3) *Do you want proof that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works and completed by the works.* (vv. 21-22)

(4) *See how a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*<sup>44</sup> (v. 24)

(5) *Just as a body with a spirit is dead so also faith without works is dead.* (v. 26)

g. Thus, the whole distinction between faith and works is quite delicate and must be understood not as an "either-or" situation but a "both-and" Works are an essential fruit and part of faith and justification though not its cause.

G. ***A worker's wage is credited not as a gift, but as something due.*** Here Paul wants to illustrate the point he made in verse two. The laborer who has worked has a strict right to payment for his services. But this was not so with Abraham. God was never indebted to Abraham; God never owed Abraham a thing. Abraham did not receive a salary, rather, he received a free gift. The traditional thought of the Jews was that man must earn God's favor. The basic Christian view is that all we can do is receive the gift to take God at his Word. This line is also to be understood in the context of the promises made to Abraham. A wage depends on a contract, (if you don't fulfill the contract I can sue) but a promise depends on faith.

H. ***But when one does not work, yet believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.***

1. ***one does not work*** - see how Paul contrasts faith from work. Faith is not our work, but a gift freely worked in us by God who justifies. This is another insight against any misconception of faith as a human work. Paul

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Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>43</sup>Paul makes a similar point regarding the inadequacy of faith alone in I Cor 13:2b *If I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing.* In the next verse he also shows forth the inadequacy of works alone: *If I give away everything I own and hand my body over to be burned but do not have love, I gain nothing.* Thus love is essential for salvation. How often does this fact get mentioned in the great faith-works debate? The greatest commandment thus gets overlooked in all the fighting: that we should Love the Lord our God with our whole mind, heart and strength and soul and our neighbor as ourself.

<sup>44</sup>The phrase "faith alone" is used only one in all of Holy Scripture, here and the concept is condemned. Hence Luther's conception of justification by faith alone, as he understood the phrase is not only unbiblical, it is condemned by the bible.



says, when one does not work, yet believes..." Thus we cannot say, "I was good, I believed and so God gave me credit for my goodness." Such a sentiment is erroneous.

2. ***who justifies the ungodly*** - this is a generic phrase Paul uses. It does mean that Abraham was ungodly in the sense that he was godless or unvirtuous. Rather, it is a generic description of God "who justifies the ungodly." In one sense, the phrase can apply to Abraham in that he was called from paganism. But here again, our notion of the word pagan is pejorative (pagan=sinful). But pagan<sup>45</sup> can also be merely descriptive (in a neutral sense) to describe those who have never heard the Word of God.

I. ***So also David declares the blessedness of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: Blessed are they...*** Now Paul, in obedience to Jewish practice brings forth his second witness, King David. He quotes David, the author of the psalms, by quoting Psalm 32:1-2. Whereas the example of Abraham was an argument from a positive development, this one is from a negative development, sin and its forgiveness. Paul's point is that the forgiveness of sin described in the psalm is not earned or the result of deeds. Rather it is fully gratuitous - a free gift of God. It is essentially an argument from silence to which Paul points. Nothing is said in the psalm about the sinner's good works, but still he is made blessed (justified) by God. The sinner is justified because he trusted and believed in the God of righteousness. A premise to the argument seems to be that repentance is integral<sup>46</sup> to faith.

1. Again remember, Paul does not quote the whole Psalm, just the first two verses, but he means the whole psalm. Thus, we must read the full psalm to get the full impact (esp. v 10).
2. ***Blessed*** - Paul, by his argument implicitly equates the notion of blessedness with justification or righteousness.
3. ***whose sins are covered...*** remember that Martin Luther had a notion of imputed righteousness. His view was that we were merely declared righteous, not actually made so. We were like a dung hill covered by snow. God covers our sin but it is still there, he overlooks it. We are still a dunghill. Thus, he made much of Paul's use of this psalm verse. But it does not follow that Paul teaches from this a merely imputed or declared righteousness. We have already discussed this above but recall especially 2 Cor 5:17-21 *Whoever is in Christ is a new creation...that we might become the righteousness of God in him.* In this context too, see again the importance of reading the whole Psalm. For, though verse 2 says *whose sins are covered*, verse 5 says *you took away the guilt of my sin.* Thus, the classical protestant view is that we are an acquitted criminal in a courtroom. The Catholic teaching is that we are a child of God by grace. The context is not the courtroom or Law but the Covenant and the Family of God. This is not to say that there is no legal context to Paul's thinking.

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<sup>45</sup>The word pagan comes from the Latin word paganus - referring to those in the remote country region; "country dwellers." Because Christianity was, at first, a cosmopolitan religion, and only slowly found its way to the hinterlands, "pagan" became synonymous with "godless" or "lacking in religious knowledge."

<sup>46</sup>Integral - an adjective meaning "essential to completeness" or "a constitutive part of something." Depending on the context of the discussion repentance can be seen as: 1. Preliminary and preparatory to faith, 2. Part of the Act of Faith itself, or 3. an on-going fruit of faith. In all cases however, it is always a grace (gift) and work of God in the will of the individual.

But say that this is all Paul has in mind is a courtroom strips away the fuller meaning of being the children of God.

4. Part of the likely reason Paul makes use of this passage from the Psalm and links it with the Genesis text is that forms of the verb *logizomai* (charge, count, credit) are in both passages. There was a rabbinic practice that identical words occurring in different places in scripture were the basis of a mutual interpretation.

J. ***Does this blessedness apply only to the circumcised, or to the uncircumcised as well? Now we assert that "faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness." Under what circumstances was it credited? Was he circumcised or not? He was not circumcised, but uncircumcised and he received the sign of circumcision as a seal on the righteousness received through faith while he was uncircumcised***

1. Now Paul draws the conclusion based on the evidence he has presented. If Abraham was justified apart from circumcision and before that sign was inscribed in his flesh then he was justified not by the circumcision (which was a sign of the keeping of the whole law) but, as scripture says, by faith.
2. ***circumcised*** - we defined what circumcision was above. But here note how many times Paul uses the word. Between vv 9-12 he uses the word (or some direct form of it) 11 times. This is a Semitic way of arguing: the word is repeated over and over so that there is absolutely no mistake about what point is being made.
3. ***he received the sign of circumcision as a seal on the righteousness received through faith*** - thus circumcision is the sign, not the cause of the justification. This is the same point made by our Catholic faith in regard to works: they are the sign, not the source of faith and the justification received.

K. ***...thus he was to be the father of all the uncircumcised who believe, so that to them [also] righteousness might be credited, as well as the Father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but also follow the path of faith that our father Abraham walked while still uncircumcised.*** The qualities in Abraham's justification are thus not only a model for the Jew but also for the Gentile. Thus, justification is open to all not by physical descent from Abraham but by spiritual affinity to Abraham. It is this that makes him the Father of all the faithful, Jew and Gentile. What is significant is not that Abraham is physically our forefather (according to the flesh) but that he is our father according to the Spirit through faith. Since, at the time of his justification Abraham was uncircumcised as was any Gentile, his paternity was thus established with all believing Gentiles. Paul makes the same point more succinctly in Gal 3:7 *The real children of Abraham are the men of faith.* Thus, Abraham is not the father of those who have been circumcised; he is the father of those who make the same act of faith. Jews must follow the example of their forefather by imitating his faith if they are to be regarded hereafter as his children. They should imitate not just his circumcision but the faith that underlies and brings about his circumcision. Thus, they must look to heart of what he did not just the external sign.

L. ***It was not through the Law that the promise was made to Abraham and his descendants that he would inherit the world, but through the righteousness that comes from faith.*** We must remember that circumcision was not merely considered in itself. It was the sign of the whole mosaic law and one who was circumcised was obliged to keep the whole Law, all 613 precepts. Thus Paul's flow of thought is clear. He does not refer to the act of circumcision alone but to all it symbolizes - the Mosaic Law.

1. ***not through the Law*** - He means the Mosaic Law and clearly assails the

pious view that Abraham kept the Mosaic Law even though he lived centuries before it was given to Moses. (See Above). Thus Abraham did not merit justification because he kept the Mosaic Law as pious Jews usually held.

2. ***the promise -***

a. There are two Greek words for promise:

(1) *Huposchesis* which means a promise entered into upon conditions.

(2) *Epaggelia* which means a promise made out of the goodness of someone's heart quite unconditionally. It is this word that Paul uses here. This goes back to the notion of grace which is always something undeserved. Abraham did not earn the good favor and love of God; neither do we. It is not what we have done for God it is what he has done for us.

b. the promises made to Abraham were

(1) that a son would be born to him and Sarah (Gn 15:4; 17:16,19)

(2) that he would have a numerous posterity (Gn 12:2; 13:14-17; 17:8; 22:16-18)

3. ***that he would inherit the world*** - the Rabbis, and Paul it seems too, interpreted the promise to include that the whole world would be Abraham (and his descendants) inheritance.

M. ***For, if those who adhere to the Law are the heirs faith is null and the promise is void. For the Law produces wrath, but where there is no law, neither is their violation. For this reason it depends on faith, so that it may be a gift, and the promise may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not to those who only adhere to the Law but to those who follow the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us, as it is written, "I have made you the Father of many nations."***

1. ***faith is null...void*** - it is an either/or situation. Either we are justified by works of the Law or by faith. It is not a case of two alternative paths. Since justification by the Law and justification by faith cannot exist side by side, Law must yield. If the Law can justify and save us, then there was no reason for Christ to come and there is no need for faith. As Paul says in Gal 2:21 - *if justification comes through the law then Christ died for nothing.*

2. ***For the law produces wrath*** - it is too lengthy to develop here but the essential insight is this, the Old Law prescribed what was to be done but did not give the grace to do it. Thus it rather emphasized Man's sinfulness by way of a constant reminder. The law itself was not bad but taught man just how sinful and inadequate he was and how Holy God is. St. Augustine says, *The law was given that grace might be sought and grace was given that the Law might be fulfilled.* See how Paul develops this theme in Galatians 3:19ff.

3. ***but where there is no law, neither is there violation*** - he clarifies what he means by wrath. When there is knowledge of the wrongfulness of something through the natural law there is guilt but that guilt is increased when the knowledge is clarified by something so clear as the law. There is also the additional violation of committing a personal violation against God himself who is the author of the Law.

4. ***it depends on faith, so that it may be a gift-*** Paul picks up the theme developed above. If it is earned through observance of the Law, then it is a

wage and we are under contract with God. But, in fact, it is a promise made by God grasped through faith not by a contract to provide a wage for services rendered. No it is a gift. Paul insists that to speak of justification as being earned by works of the Law reduces it to a wage and totally destroys the notion that it is a promise. This is also implicitly disrespectful of God since the Judaizer essentially takes the free gift of God and says to God, "you owed me this because I earned it."

a. **a gift** - again see how faith is linked again with the understanding of a gift. Faith too is not a work of man which binds God. If it were we would be back to the notion of a wage: "I have faith so God must reward (i.e. pay me back) for what I have done." But this is not so, faith too is a gift of God so that justification may be a gift, not a wage.

5. **the father of many nations** - here is quoted Gen 17:5. The very name "Abraham" means "father of many nations" and this is discerned through the complex etymologies of Hebrew names. Thus the name Abraham is seen to refer to the Hebrew phrase *ab+hamon+goyim* (=father of a host of nations). When God made the promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations he declared, *No longer shall you be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a host of nations*. Most Rabbis of Paul's time interpreted this to refer to Ishmael's descendants but Paul clearly interprets it to refer to the Gentiles as well who are children of Abraham by faith.

N. **He is our Father in the sight of God, in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into being what does not exist. He believed, hoping against hope, that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "Thus shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body as [already] dead (for he was almost a hundred years old) and the dead womb of Sarah. He did not doubt God's promise in unbelief; rather, he was empowered by faith and gave glory to God and was fully convinced that what he had promised he was able to do. That is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."**

1. **who gives life to the dead and calls into being what does not exist** - The phrase is a formula familiar to Jewish ears. The phrase is used to refer to God in most context but here Paul seems to specifically have in mind:

a. life to the dead = the womb of Sarah (recall she was in her nineties)

b. calls into being what does not exist = Isaac (and by extension Abraham's entire progeny)

2. **he believed, hoping against hope** - literally the Greek reads "contrary to [all human] expectation, in hope he believed [in God]." Our modern use of the word hope is impoverished and weak. It has come to mean a vague wish that something might be so; as in, "I hope it doesn't rain." But for the theological and scriptural world hope is a strong and confident expectation of God's assistance and fidelity based on His word. Hope is not vague but is clear and confident.<sup>47</sup> Hope for a Christian is waiting for that which has

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<sup>47</sup>Paul seems to gloss over Abraham's faults regarding the Ishmael incident. There his hope and faith seemed to flag. Likewise he overlooks the incident in Gen 17:17 when Abraham on hearing the promise of God again fell on the ground and laughed. Yet this glossing over is likely not disingenuous since Paul assumes a knowledge of Abraham's full life which, despite some weak moments, was generally one of profound faith and hope. This reinforces the point

been promised.

3. ***did not weaken when he considered his own body as already dead -***

- a. Paul does not seem to mean specifically Abraham alone for he clearly fathered a child by Hagar and six other children by Keturah (Gen 25:1ff). Rather Paul seems to mean his body was dead in relation to Sarah who was in her nineties and thus barren.<sup>48</sup>
- b. Abraham was also "dead" in the sense that he was totally powerless to conceive a child by Sarah. It had to be the complete and total act of God. Thus the description of Abraham's body as dead refers also to his powerlessness; it was unthinkable that a ninety year old woman could ever conceive.
- c. This verse is really the bullseye of Paul's argument. The essential point is this. Abraham's fatherhood could not be natural. So the Jews have completely misunderstood their own sonship by claiming Abraham as their father and seeing it natural biological terms. They have missed something as plain as the nose on their face. Abraham's fatherhood was not natural but supernatural fatherhood. It is not through genes and chromosomes but through faith, hope and charity. Paul's argument is well summarized and extended in the letter to the Galatians 4:21ff: *Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman was born naturally, the son of the freeborn through a promise. Now this is an allegory. These women represent two covenants. One was from Mount Sinai<sup>49</sup>, bearing children for slavery; this is Hagar.<sup>50</sup> But the Jerusalem above is freeborn, and she is our mother. For it is written: "Rejoice, you barren one who bore no children; break forth and shout, you who were not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the deserted one than of her who has a husband."<sup>51</sup> Paul then goes on this passage from Galatians to address the Gentiles and say, *Therefore, brothers, we are children not of the slave woman but of the freeborn woman.* Thus see what Paul does! He turns the Jew's whole argument on its side. Like this:
  - (1) You say you are the descendant of Abraham according to the flesh.<sup>52</sup>
  - (2) Well for Abraham and Sarah the flesh was useless for the womb of Sarah was dead.
  - (3) It was faith that brought about Isaac's birth by the*

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made earlier that Paul, in quoting Gen 15:6 seems to have more than just that one incident in mind; rather he intends the verse to recall all of Abraham's life.

48Abraham was also in his nineties but men do not always lose their fertility as a result of age.

49Recall, Sinai was where Moses received the Law.

50He plays on the notion that Ishmael when he was driven out settled to the south in the Arabian desert where Mt. Sinai was located.

51Isaiah 54:1.

52The word flesh here has several layers of meaning: 1. Geneological; 2. That the sign of being Jewish was literally inscribed on the flesh; 3. Circumcision was also the source of entry into the law; 4. Thus, the observance of the Law is also "flesh" since it is human effort by which the observant Jew thought he earned God's favor. In many places Paul distinguishes the flesh from the spirit but it is too involved to detail at just this point.

supernatural power of God.

- (4) And if it was so for Isaac then it was so for all the children of Abraham.
- (5) Thus, fleshly descent, circumcision and the Law are of no avail. Why? Because all human effort in the conception of Isaac was fruitless. The conception of Isaac required a total and supernatural act of God. It was not human achievement but the fulfillment of God's promise grasped through faith.
- (6) As it is with Isaac so it must be for all of us. Any talk of descent according to the flesh or human achievement points not to Isaac but to Ishmael.
- (7) Thus the keeping of the Law, a human achievement, is not modelled on the birth of Isaac but of Ishmael, born of the slavegirl through a human work and natural conception.
- (8) Therefore you Judaizers who claim sonship through Isaac would be better to use Ishmael for your patron.<sup>53</sup>

O. ***But it was not for him alone that it was written that "it was credited to him;" it was also for us, to whom it will be credited, who believe in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who has handed over for our transgressions and was raised for our justification.***

1. ***not for him alone...also for us*** - The story of Abraham has been recalled by Paul to apply to his readers. In so doing he uses a common rabbinical technique and view which is "All that is recorded of Abraham is repeated in the history of his children." Abraham is not just a model in the sense that "we ought to try and imitate him." Rather he shows us the required path for every person. Abraham lay hold of the promise and justification through faith, not law. So it is with us: we lay hold of the promise and justification by faith.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Abraham's story is not about one way to justification. It is the only way and we must be conformed to it.
2. ***our Lord*** - the Greek word *Kyrios* (Lord) was the word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to translate "Yahweh" Thus Paul in using this word in reference to Jesus gives him the divine title. Jesus is our Lord: our Yahweh. Jesus Christ is God. He used the same title in Rom 1:4 (see the notes on that verse on page 3 of these notes). In fact vv. 24b-25 ring like a statement from an early creed or catechetical statement and Paul is probably repeating a formula familiar to early Christian ears. Just as "through Jesus Christ our Lord" is quite familiar to our modern ears.
3. ***believe in the one who raised Jesus our Lord*** -
  - a. Paul ascribes the work of the resurrection to the Father. There are two traditional formulations regarding the resurrection. One is that Jesus was raised by the Father. The other is that Jesus rose up by his own power. The two are not contradictory. In terms of his human nature Jesus must be raised up in the passive sense. In terms of his divine nature Jesus rises by his own power. Thus the context of the passage will determine which formulation is used.
  - b. Notice too how Paul transfers the requirement of faith. Faith in God's promises are not the only scope of Paul's description of

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<sup>53</sup>At this point, tomatoes, eggs, rocks and other projectiles would be hurled at Paul by Jews who would find such talk offensive. But Paul looks into their philosophy and draws the proper conclusion.

<sup>54</sup>Again, remember that faith is a work of God in us to which we are submitted.

belief, now it includes the fact of the resurrection and the description of Jesus as *Kyrios* (Lord, Yahweh). Thus a significant allusion to the divinity of Jesus is made here.

- c. Finally notice the parallelism in these last reflections of Paul. Both Abraham and we believe in God who can bring life out of death. For Abraham, God brought life out of Sarah's dead womb. For Christians, the Father raised Jesus from death and thereby restored life.

VII. Romans 5 - The experienced effects of Justification

- A. Shalom - *Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- B. Access - *<sup>2</sup>Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.*
- C. Vision - *<sup>3</sup>More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. <sup>6</sup>While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. <sup>8</sup>But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.*
- D. Preparation - *<sup>9</sup>Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*
- E. Reason to Rejoice - *<sup>11</sup>Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation. <sup>12</sup>Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned—<sup>13</sup>sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup>Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. <sup>15</sup>But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. <sup>16</sup>And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. <sup>17</sup>If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. <sup>19</sup>For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup>Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,*
- a. We had inherited a sinful nature due to Adam's Transgression
  - b. Now through the saving work of Jesus we receive, freely, the grace of reconciliation, righteousness and justification (new life).
  - c. Not just acquittal but Life!
- F. Summary - *<sup>21</sup>so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*



G. Introductory notes:

1. Having established his point that we are justified by faith Paul now goes on to describe the experience of that justification and explain how salvation is assured to the upright man. Whereas we might say that up to this point Paul has been more juridical and rhetorical in his style, now he turns more ethical and mystical.
2. Looking down the road a bit we see that in Chapters 5-8 Paul explores the effects of justification along the following lines
  - a. he who is justified enjoys a triumphant hope of heavenly glory (5:1-21).
  - b. has ceased to live under the domination of sin (6:1-23).
  - c. is free from the Law (7:1-25).
  - d. possesses the life and rights of an adoptive child of God (8:1-39).
3. If we look in more detail now at Chapter five we see again that the basic theme of this section is: once justified, the Christian is reconciled to God and experiences a peace that the distresses and trials of the world cannot, hope that does not disappoint and a confidence of salvation. Paul's argument is broken into three basic sections:
  - a. the hope of heaven is the fruit of justification (5:1-4)
  - b. the certainty of this hope is proved from God's love for us in the redemption through Christ (5:5-11).
  - c. a second proof for the certainty of this hope of heaven is that Christ is the anti-type of Adam (5:12-21).

VIII. The text

- A. ***Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access [by faith] to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God.***
1. ***Therefore, since we have been justified by faith*** - a summary of the point set forth and proven in the last four chapters.
  2. ***we have peace<sup>55</sup> with God*** - here is the first effect of justification described by Paul. Reconciliation replaced estrangement.
  3. ***through our Lord Jesus Christ*** - the phrase describes the mediatorship of Jesus in Father's plan. Paul uses this phrase often.
  4. ***through whom we have gained access*** - more literally the Greek reads, "through whom we have secured an introduction." The peace the Christian experiences is derived from his introduction into the sphere of divine favor and grace by Christ. There is recalled here that at the death of Jesus on the cross, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. As if to say that the veil, the barrier between God and man was removed by this act of Jesus. We are taken up into Christ and made "sons in the son." We are made members of the Body of Christ and the whole body shares in the guidance, blessings and leadership of the head. Thus, in Christ, we are taken into the Father's presence.
    - a. The Greek word here is *prosaagōgē* which can be analyzed in two ways
      - (1) It is the regular word for introducing or ushering one into the presence of royalty and it is the regular word for the

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<sup>55</sup>Many ancient manuscripts have the Greek word *echōmen* (let us have) instead of *echomen* (we have). Most modern commentators concur that the proper understanding of Paul here is not a wish or an exhortation (i.e. let us have peace with God) but an effect (i.e. we have peace with God).

approach of a worshipper to God. And so it is that Christ gives us access to the Father and secures an introduction for us.

- (2) The word has a secondary meaning as well: it is the harbor where ships come in. Thus, this points to the security of peace Paul mentions in the previous verse. The harbor was a place of rest and safety from storm-tossed seas. Christ leads us forth into this.
  5. **by faith** - many ancient Greek manuscripts lack this phrase. It is not harmful here to the meaning nor is it absolutely necessary. It is understood. Thus, many translations leave the phrase out while others include it.
  6. **to this grace in which we stand** - recall the concept of grace<sup>56</sup> as "gift." This is especially important in understanding the next phrase.
  7. **and we boast in the hope of glory of God** - the use of the word "boast" is a typical Pauline paradox. Since all is gift how can boast? Yet we do boast but it is in God and what He has done.
    - a. hope - is one of the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, & Love) Sadly the word has taken on a rather fluffy, and empty meaning in modern English where it seems only to express a vague wish (as in "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow"). But the theological definition of hope is vigorous: "Confident assurance of God's help in attaining eternal life." There is nothing vague about hope at all. It is confident, strong and quite clear.
- B. ***Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.***
1. ***boast of our afflictions*** - more literally the Greek reads boast in our afflictions. (I am not sure why our NAB translators decided to render it as they did). Because of the vision which faith supplies and the perspective which follows the Christian can boast. Why? Because as Paul writes in Rom 8:28, *We know that all things work for good for those who love God.* Likewise, Paul also develops in the words that immediately follow, other reasons as to why the Christian can boast.
  2. ***affliction produces endurance*** - Paul does not mean this literally, that affliction, of its own power produces endurance. Rather endurance is the result or product of affliction but endurance is God's work not affliction's.
    - a. The Greek word Paul uses here for affliction is *thlipis* which literally means pressure.
    - b. The Greek word he uses here for endurance is *hupomonē* which means more than endurance. It is the spirit which can overcome the word; a spirit that does not just passively endure but which actively overcomes the trials and tribulations of the world.
  3. ***and hope does not disappoint*** - a vague allusion to Pss 22:6 & 25:3,20. Merely human hope can deceive but this hope, because it is founded on God will not fail for God is faithful and true and well as omnipotent.
  4. ***the love of God has been poured out into our hearts*** - note how specific

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<sup>56</sup>The word "grace" comes from the Latin word *gratia* meaning "gift." Therefore the word grace means, gift. The Greek word is *Charis* from which we get the word "charism" which also means gift.

Paul is here. It is not our love of God but God's love of us which causes all this to be. Thus again, the gift is not the result of some human achievement which binds God, it is all His initiative, His work, His gift.

5. ***through the Holy Spirit*** - it is interesting how Paul here and in other places uses the presence of the Holy Spirit as the proof of a point or at least its premise. He presumes that his readers are profoundly aware of the reception of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In Galatians 3:1-2 a similar argument occurs where the whole presumption is that the Galatians are aware they have received the Holy Spirit. Paul's argument here is, that we know that hope does not disappoint. How? Well just look at your experience of the Love of God and the Holy Spirit. It all seems to presume a far greater and more widespread familiarity with the indwelling Holy Spirit that is possessed by the average Christian today!

C. ***For Christ, while we were still helpless, yet died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How much more then, since we are now justified by his blood will we be saved through him from the wrath. Indeed, if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will all be saved by his life.***

1. ***While we were still helpless*** - this theme should be familiar to us by now. Paul insists that the unjustified man was incapable of doing anything to achieve uprightness before God. Here again, then, is the teaching of grace: that justification is grace, that is it is gift. It is received not achieved.
2. ***only with difficulty does one die for a just person*** - Paul here uses a type of argumentation arguing *a fortiori*. What this form of argument does is to state if this situation is unlikely even in an optimal situation, how much more unlikely is it in another less optimal situation. Yet it happens even in the unlikely circumstance and thus it is most astonishing. Paul is simply underscoring the gratuitous and astonishing qualities of what God has done.
3. ***God proves his love for us*** - see how Paul has essentially painted a Trinitarian teaching in these last few verses. God the Father pours forth his love through the Holy Spirit (v. 5b) and He proves it through the death of his Son. Each person of the Blessed Trinity then is involved in this saving act which manifests the love of God.
4. ***While we were still sinners*** - just in case we would think, even for a moment, that God was repaying us for any goodness we had achieved on our own Paul reminds us, we were still sinners. There is a parallel set up with verse 6: We were helpless / we were still sinners. Thus again see the devil's lie (that sin makes us free and powerful) demolished. By sinfully doing our own thing and pretending we have power because "no one tells *me* what to do" in fact I am helpless and powerless as a sinner. The true state of the sinner is wretchedness and weakness - he lacks *Kabod* (weightiness or glory). He may be king of the hill but it is an ant hill.
5. ***by his blood*** - it is interesting to compare this verse to Chapter 4 verse 25. There our justification was ascribed to Christ's resurrection here it is ascribed to his death. But this alternate way of speaking ought to clue us in on the interdependent nature of the death and resurrection. The death without the resurrection is meaningless for if Christ is not raised from the death our faith is in vain (I Cor 15:14,17). Likewise, the resurrection with

the death is also meaningless for how can there be a resurrection if there is not a death. The resurrection is also powerless of its own to bring about justification for *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin* (Heb 9:22).

6. ***How much more then...will we be saved*** - a still greater favor will be given the just man at the last day in the great judgement that is to come. By the word *wrath* Paul clearly has the Last Judgement in mind. Those who have been justified, saved and thus counted among the sheep will rejoice on that day at the great justice and holiness of God while those who have refused God's offer and call to holiness (the goats) shall see it as a day of wrath (Matt 25:31ff). Notice too how Paul uses the word *saved* in the future tense. Here and now through the grace of faith we are justified and we will be saved as a fruit of the justification if we *hold out to the end* (Matt 10:22). Regarding some of the important distinctions in Paul's use of the words "saved" and "justified" see the introductory section to part one of these notes.
7. ***enemies*** - whereas before Paul called us sinners and helpless now he uses a stronger image - enemies. The benefit of the word is twofold. In the first place, lest we make light of sin, it helps to see what sins does; it makes us enemies of God. It is not that He hates the sinner but that sinner constitutes himself an enemy of God and all that God is: holy, sinless, just, and loving. The unrepentant sinner makes himself the enemy of God. The second value is to show the astonishing quality of the gift. It is unthinkable for one to give his own life for his enemy yet Christ does this and bids us to love our enemy: *Love your enemies...pray for your persecutors.* (Matt 5:44)
8. ***reconciled by his death...saved by his life*** - there is an interesting dichotomy here when we line the phrases up this way. In particular we have been justified by the blood of our Lord but our salvation is from his life. Recall the point made in the introduction to part two of these notes: "justification is life." Thus, since we are justified by the Lord through the grace of faith, there is placed within us the principle of the very life of Christ and by His living grace we will be saved if we hold fast to his saving hand and living grace. This phrase also helps us to move away from the concept of faith as a static quality (brand mark) or merely an historical event (altar call etc.). Rather, faith is a living, dynamic force within us enabling us, by God's grace to live a whole new life as a child of God. It is the new life of grace that draws us to the salvation of eternal life. *...The water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.* (John 4:14)

D. ***Not only that, but we also boast of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through who we have now received reconciliation.***

1. ***we also boast of God*** - here is the third boast to which Paul refers. We can boast of the hope of Glory of God (v. 2) we can boast of our afflictions (v. 3) and now here Paul says we can even boast of God himself! Whereas before he stood in fear of the wrath of God, now the justified Christian can boast, that is exult, in the very presence of God.
2. ***Through our Lord Jesus Christ*** - lest the reader think for an instant to boast without humility he is reminded that this is a word of Jesus Christ our Lord and God. Thus again the word "boast" must be understood in the very specific context of grace. *Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.* (2 Cor 10:17).

3. ***we have now received reconciliation*** - again see that the verb received is passive. We have not achieved this reconciliation we have *received* it. Only because we have received this can we boast. Thus it is obvious that our boast is in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Henceforth may I never boast in anything save the Cross of my Lord Jesus Christ* (Gal 6:14).
- E. Introduction to 5:12ff
1. As we enter into verses 12 and following we encounter the groundwork for an important dogmatic teaching of the Church: the teaching of Original Sin. The teaching can be summarized as follows:<sup>57</sup>
    - a. Our first parents in paradise sinned grievously through the transgression of God's commandment.
    - b. Through this sin our first parents lost friendship with God and the sanctifying grace they had.
    - c. They became subject to death and the evils associated with it as well as the domination of the devil. This was transferred to their descendants. (Ecclesiastics 25:33, Wisdom 2:24).
    - d. The sin of Adam is transmitted to his descendants not merely by imitation but by descent. We are born into this sinfulness. (cf Ps 51:7, Job 14:4 and Romans 5:12).
  2. The teaching of the Church is rather specific on how this passage of St. Paul must be understood. For example see the solemn decrees of two Councils of the Church ratified by the Popes at the time:
    - a. The Council of Carthage (418 AD) *...What the Apostle says "Through one man sin entered into the world (and though sin death) and so passed into all men, in whom all have sinned" [Cf Rom 5:12], must not be understood otherwise than as the Catholic Church spread everywhere has always understood it. For on account of this rule for faith even infants, who themselves thus far have not been able to commit any sin, are therefore truly baptized unto the remission of sins, so that that which they have contracted from generation may be cleansed in them by regeneration.*<sup>58</sup>
    - b. *For what the Apostle has said "Through one man sin entered into the world (and though sin death) and so passed into all men, in whom all have sinned" [Cf Rom 5:12], must not be understood otherwise than as the Catholic Church spread everywhere has always understood it. For by reason of this rule of faith from the tradition of the Apostles even infants, who could not as yet commit any sins of themselves, are for this reason truly baptized for the remission of sin so that in them there may be washed away by regeneration what they have contracted by generation.*<sup>59</sup>
  3. The essential insight of the teaching given us by God through the Holy Scripture and Holy Church is that What our parents do effects us. Consider by way of analogy the following parable: Consider Rebecca who is in the womb of her mother. Her parents are fabulously wealthy having everything that this world offers. In three months Rebecca will be born into this splendor. But, one month before she is born, Rebecca's parents loose everything through gambling. One month later Rebecca is born into the poor house. Is this her personal fault? No. Is she in the poor house?

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<sup>57</sup>See DS 787-791 for the full decree on Original Sin.

<sup>58</sup>Db 102; DS 223.

<sup>59</sup>DB 791.

Yes. Thus what her parents effects her and so it is with us. What Adam and Eve did effects us. That had paradise and friendship with God. But they lost it and thus could not share it with us. This is why we can only regain this wealth (and more besides) by adoption into the new family of God. Thus by baptism we have bestowed upon us a new and more priceless heritage - the glory and the freedom of the Children of God.

4. Now we turn to the text itself.
5. An additional insight is that of solidarity. We tend today to think of ourselves as isolated individuals. But there remains the fact that we share a common humanity. Thus there is a common glory we can share and a common sorrow or shortcoming. Thus there is a certain common project regarding we human beings. This helps to put to flight the common error: "I can do what I want so long as no one gets hurt." Everyman's sin effects the community because of our shared humanity. If one man chooses to degrade or undervalue himself, all of us are affected. For example, permitting individuals to take their own life or to make it merely a private decision is a direct threat to the value of my life especially when and if I fall ill. Our decisions affect others.

F. ***Therefore, just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned -- for up to the time of the Law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law. But death reigned from Adam through Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come.***

1. ***Therefore*** - literally the Greek is *dia touto* which normally means therefore. This would imply a conclusion or some kind of bridge to what has gone before. But the link is lacking. Paul seems to launch into a whole new reflection. Thus why Paul uses the word is a bit of a mystery.
2. ***through one person*** - the phrase *one* or *one person* occurs 12 times between verses 12 and 21. The contrast between one and all brings out the universality of the influence involved with Adam. The one person is Adam and through his transgression evil is set loose in the world which touches and effects not only every human being but all creation for as we see in the following verse "sin entered the world."
3. ***sin entered the world*** - sin (harmartia) is almost personified here - it is set loose. It strides upon the stage of human history at Adam's sin and it alienates human beings from God.
4. and thus death came to all - death (Thanatos) is also personified. It reigns and is another actor on the stage. It is a tyrant that dominates all men since Adam. Death should not be understood as merely the physical death that separates soul from body. It also denotes the spiritual death that separates man from God who is Life. Death is a cosmic force set loose through all creation and it is the last enemy to be vanquished (1 Cor 15:56)
  - a. *God did not make death nor does he rejoice in the death of any living thing. Rather he formed all things that they might have life. It was through Sin that death entered the world.*
  - b. *By the envy of the devil death entered the world* (Wis 2:24)

