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Abstract

Salvation requires that a person or group of people have a problem, a peril I am calling it, like disease, tyranny, eternal damnation, or the unbridled wrath of God. Paul's gospel promises salvation. What, exactly, is the peril from which one is saved in Paul's thought? The traditional response to this question is that believers are saved from the punishment of death, and from the wrath of God. The former is the legal consequence of Adam's transgression in Eden in the primordial past, and the latter is the legal consequence of a guilty verdict in a divine courtroom in the future. Thus, the perils from which believers are saved are legal in aspect. This view of the peril is wrong. I will argue that the primary peril from which one is saved is not legal at all, but is instead relational. Paul would say to a Gentile that she needs to be saved from a life apart from God. The apostle does not claim that the reason to be saved is to avoid punishment. Because assumptions about the peril are incorrect, so are models of justification. Acquittal via faith in Christ does not accurately describe justification in Paul's thought, nor do some New Perspective models of justification. Instead, justification signifies that proper relationship with God has been restored.

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CONDEMNATION, DEATH, AND JUSTIFICATION:
FROM WHAT IS ONE SAVED IN PAUL'S THOUGHT?

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver
and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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November 2015

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Introduction

My hometown, Orange, California, is about 15 miles from the beach as the pelican flies, and we spent a lot of time there swimming and tramping around the cliffs and tide pools of Dana Point, a large rock outcropping that juts out into the Pacific Ocean. My mom liked to read books while lying on the beach. I was a confident and very strong swimmer, and when the surf rolled in eight or ten feet high I was excited to go in, while most others stayed out.

One day when I was about 12 or 13 the surf was particularly high, and the red warning flags were up, indicating hazardous surf and rip tides. I made my way out into the cold Pacific Ocean. A huge set of waves came in, catching me off guard a little, so I swam as fast as I could out to sea, under the breaking waves into deep water where it was safe. Bigger waves break farther out, so by the time I was past the surf break I was out much farther from shore than I had ever been, even to the kelp beds. The water was very deep and I could not see or touch the bottom. I did not mind, as treading water was easy with fins. Turning around toward shore, I watched my mom there on her towel, reading. Suddenly the lifeguard leapt off his tall white chair, grabbed the life preserver, and started swimming out to sea. A rescue! Which helpless swimmer would be rescued today?

It was me. It took the lifeguard several minutes to get out to where I was, and he was winded from the swim. Against my protests, he ordered me to wrap the life preserver

about my waist and swim back to shore. The life preserver was a long belt, similar in shape to the old fashioned foam neck braces, except longer and bright orange and with metal fasteners that pinched my skin. Wearing it made swimming cumbersome, and, to my mind, brought the likelihood of drowning that much closer. Nonetheless we both muddled our way back through heavy surf to the beach where a small crowd had gathered, including my mom. Horribly embarrassed, I quickly fumbled the bright orange belt off my waist and tried to melt into the crowd.

I was saved, I guess, but against my wishes. Sure, the surf was high and I was a quarter mile out to sea, and the rip tides might have pulled me even further out. But I did not feel endangered, despite the warning signs—the red flag waving above the life guard tower, indicating high surf and hazardous rip tides; the fact that few other swimmers ventured out that day; and the loud crashing waves and heavy white foam. But the lifeguard was a grown up and had legal authority. Had I asked my savior what I had been saved from, he might have said, “Isn’t it obvious? High surf and drowning.” And he would have been right, and I would have been a fool to have asked the question. The perils were visible and obvious.

Salvation requires a peril from which one is saved. A person, a group of people, perhaps a nation or even the whole world might need to be saved from drowning, an IRS audit, eternity in hell, climate change, or the unbridled wrath of God on the Last Day. Paul’s gospel promises salvation, but from what? What exactly is the peril from which one is saved? Imagine Paul pacing up and down the streets of Corinth, ringing a bell, a sandwich board draped over his shoulders, with this painted on it:

HAVE YOU BEEN SAVED?

A logical response to the question is, “From what?” Imagine that the person responding to Paul is healthy, prosperous, and happy, and that her entire family is just as well off. There are no visible signs of peril in this imaginary person’s life. Paul had to have had an answer to the question—he had to convince the passerby that she is in peril to the extent that salvation is needed. This imaginary encounter, and in particular the question, “From what is one saved in Paul’s thought” are the starting point of this dissertation.

The traditional view of the human plight claims that people are in legal trouble for sins; it is taken for granted that salvation is foremost from a judging and wrathful God. According to this view, all people are sinners and will stand condemned before God in a divine law court. The righteousness of God compels him to punish the unrighteous, just as he punished Adam (and Adam’s progeny) for disobeying the command to not eat of the Tree of Knowledge. Adam’s transgression brought the punishment of physical death, and, because he is a corporate figure in whom all of humanity participates, condemnation and guilt are due to every person. The peril from which one is saved is divine punishment. In fact, God has already punished the human race with death because of sin, and when then Day of the Lord comes, he will punish the unsaved again with wrath. Therefore, Pauline soteriology is framed fundamentally in forensic categories, like judgment, punishment, and guilt in a divine court room.

To be sure, Paul warns of the coming wrath and universal judgment in the context of salvation. That cannot be denied. However, I will argue that Paul’s gospel is not

primarily oriented toward the avoidance of physical death or punishment; rather, the purpose of the gospel is to save a person from the hopelessness of existence apart from God. The thesis of the paper is: *The primary peril from which one is saved in Paul's thought is estrangement from God; it is not punishment from God.* The human peril in its most basic terms is not a judicial one, but a relational one. Paul's response to the question, "From what am I saved?" is "From estrangement from the one true God." He would not say that salvation is from the wrath of God.

The reader may wonder why it matters if salvation is from estrangement from God, or from the wrath of God. The distinction is critical because if we do not understand the problem, we cannot understand the solution. The peril is functionally compatible with salvation. If the peril is legal in aspect, then salvation and all of its components must also be legal in aspect. So, if the peril is the coming wrath as a consequence of guilt in a divine law court, then salvation must function to remove guilt and wrath. But if the problem is not guilt, then salvation does not need to redress guilt—it must redress something else. As the peril goes, so goes the purpose and function of salvation. This means that the death and resurrection of Christ, and the grace of God, must also function to solve whatever problem people have. Thus, if the primary peril is relational—if the answer to the above question is, "You are saved from estrangement from the one true God," then Christology and theology and divine grace must function to solve the problem of estrangement. How we think of the problem that gives rise to the need for salvation has everything to do with how we think of the system of salvation. Therefore, if our presumptions about the peril are wrong, it follows that the conclusions about salvation are wrong too. My approach is to consciously set aside the traditional views of Pauline

soteriology, and examine the peril as Paul thinks of it. In other words, I am deliberately working from plight to solution, not the other way around.¹ We shall see first what the problem is, and then develop a model of justification that is compatible with the problem.

A History of the Human Plight

In Western Christian thought, the human plight has been defined or derived in large measure from interpretations of Paul's letters, and from interpretations of Gen 2-3. Paul himself interpreted the Eden narrative to define the human plight, and so did early Christian writers who came after him. Not long after Paul, Christian writers conflated their interpretations of the Eden narrative and their interpretations of Paul's references to the Eden narrative. Opinions about the human peril, taken from Paul and Genesis, have a long history. A brief summary of that history follows.

For the first 400 years of the current era Gen 2-3 was the locus for understanding the capacity of human will for many Christian interpreters. Indeed, freedom of will was believed to be the primary theme of the Eden story.² It was assumed that the point of the story was to give warning not to misuse the divinely given capacity of free will. One of the earliest Christian writers to interpret the Eden story was Irenaeus (early 2nd C.-c.200). The Fall³ of humankind was seen by Irenaeus as a childish error, but not a catastrophic one. Eve and Adam were created morally immature, and when they disobeyed, they grew

¹ As Sanders is famous for doing: "For Paul, the conviction of a universal solution preceded the conviction of a universal plight." E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 474.

² Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 25-26.

³ From this point forward I refer to events in the Eden narrative described in Gen 2-3 as "the Fall," for the practical reason that calling them "the so-called fall" is cumbersome. I do not think Eve and Adam fell, so to speak, and I do not concede any of the theological and/or doctrinal assumptions attributed to the Fall all and its consequences made by Christian scholars and theologians.

up too soon and lost the opportunity for greatness.⁴ The problems created by the Fall are solved by recapitulating atonement, but atonement is not the payment of sins; rather it means that God restores creation to its original intended order. Humanity is similarly redeemed; peace and harmony are restored to all of creation.⁵ Tertullian (mid 2nd C.-220) saw the consequences more cynically—every soul descended from Eve and Adam has its nature in Adam and is unclean until it is born again in Christ.⁶

Origen's (c. 185-c. 254) view of the human drama begins with the creation of rational natures, which were incorporeal, eternal minds.⁷ The rational natures were like pupils in a divine school house, who gave their attention to the Word, the image of God. As long as they did so, primordial unity was maintained. But this did not continue forever; instead, the rational natures turned their attention away from God. Origen likens the fall of the rational natures to the loss of skill, and in terms of neglect and forgetfulness. Once fallen, the journey back to God is driven by the force of the freedom of the soul, which is the same freedom that caused the fall in the first place. But the will of the soul alone cannot be the only force that enables ultimate reunion with God. Instead, it is the providence of God working with the freedom of the soul that draws people to God.

⁴ Jonathan Hill, *The History of Christian Thought: The Fascinating Story of the Great Christian Thinkers and How They Helped Shape the World as We Know It Today* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2003), 28f.

⁵ W. Brian Shelton, "Irenaeus," in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy: Engaging with Early and Medieval Theologians*, ed. Bradley G. Green (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), 46-47.

⁶ Gerald Bray, "Tertullian," in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy: Engaging with Early and Medieval Theologians*, ed. Bradley G. Green (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), 92.

⁷ Rowan A. Greer, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 7-28.

The function of the body is critical in Origen's drama of the human experience. When the rational natures turned from God, they were given a body, which is an outward sign of the fallen soul. The greater the depravity of the soul, the more grotesque the body. The body is in fact a sign of the punishment that the soul has inflicted on itself. But it is more than that. On the one hand, the body alienates the soul from God. On the other hand the body is the "vehicle whereby God reveals Himself and through which the soul moves toward God."⁸ The Incarnation is the perfect revelation of God. Through the Incarnation God reveals himself to humanity, and redirects the attention of the fallen soul to Himself. Once the believer comprehends Christ crucified, he gains a deeper understanding of the Word, and begins his journey back to God. Origen believed that the soul can pay attention to God and participate in the Divine Light, or it can move away, just as the rational minds did before they turned from God. Each person has within himself the capacity to be holy or wicked.⁹

Augustine's (354-430) interpretation of the Eden story, and of Adam in Paul's letters, was in some ways radically different from that of his predecessors. Instead of gaining moral freedom Augustine thought that Adam had lost moral freedom. The fallen person is not free; she is a slave to sin and multiple vices. True freedom comes when God heals the nature, and right relationship with God is restored.¹⁰ Had Adam obeyed God, he

⁸ Greer, *Origen*, 15.

⁹ John Clark Smith, *The Ancient Wisdom of Origen* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1992), 40-42. Elizabeth A. Dively Lauro, "The Fall," in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004). Stephan Thomas, "Anthropology," in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine: An Introductory Guide to His Most Important Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 127.

and Eve would have attained blessed immortality, but their failure instead brought the punishment of death.¹¹ After the Fall, Adam was not able to not sin (*non posse non peccare*).¹² The concept of free will, then, is itself somewhat of an illusion.¹³ By denying the power of the will, Augustine was repeating what Paul had supposedly said in Romans: “For that which I am doing, I do not understand; I am not practicing what I want to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.” (7:15). Augustine took Paul to say that even a baptized Christian believer has no will whatsoever. Self-mastery is impossible; the less one loves oneself, the more one can cleave to God.¹⁴ But, Elaine Pagels has argued, “Augustine read back into Paul's letters his own teaching of the moral impotence of the human will, along with his sexualized interpretation of sin.”¹⁵

The lack of free will is attributed to Adam, who was a corporate personality in whom all people participate. Indeed, Augustine claims that the worst part of Adam is transmitted from generation to generation via semen; thus at conception all are depraved, in bondage to sin, and guilty, and subject to death.¹⁶ The Fall caused every person to be born with a mortal body and a carnal nature, and to the loss of harmony between Creator

¹¹ Augustine, *City of God* 13.1, 4 (NPNF¹ 2: 245, 246f)

¹² Hill, *The History of Christian Thought*, 89. Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 23.

¹³ Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, 106-10.

¹⁴ Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (London: Duckworth, 1987), 39.

¹⁵ Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, xxvi.

¹⁶ Bradley G. Green, "Augustine," in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy: Engaging with Early and Medieval Theologians*, ed. Bradley G. Green (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), 249-52. Reasoner, *Romans*, 46-47.

and person.¹⁷ Collectively, human nature sinned in Adam; “all were present in Eden; there all are justly punished.”¹⁸

About 600 years later, medieval theologians developed their own interpretations of the Eden story and Paul. Anselm (1033-1109) believed that after the Fall, the bodies of Eve and Adam became like the animals, subject to corruption, and their souls likewise were infected with carnal appetites.¹⁹ The whole of humanity was corrupted and burdened with Adam’s sin.²⁰ However, each individual also must bear his own sin.²¹ The Fall also created two obstacles to perfectly loving the Supreme Being, to seeing the face of the divine.²² One is the simple truth that God is beyond our imagination to behold; divine nature is incomprehensible. The second is the “loss of uprightness of will, blindness, weakness, and lack of emotional control,”²³ all of which are the consequences of Adam’s failure.

One of the most profound contributions of Anselm was his “satisfaction” model of atonement, which for the first time defined the God-person relationship in legal terms. Because God is concerned with justice, and because sin is a legal injustice, Anselm

¹⁷ Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine*, 127.

¹⁸ Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 170.

¹⁹ Anselm of Canterbury, “On the Virgin Conception and Original Sin,” in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and GR Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap 2.

²⁰ Anselm, “On the Virgin Conception” chap 10.

²¹ Anselm, “On the Virgin Conception,” chap 26.

²² Marilyn McCord Adams, “Anselm on Faith and Reason,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33.

²³ *Ibid.*

proposed that atonement was a means of righting a legal injustice. Anselm's views were a product of his social context: as vassals owed their lords for earthly debts, sinners owed God for sin debt. The relationship between vassal and lord, and between God and person, was legally oriented. Thus, to atone is to render God his due; a person who does not render to God what is due takes from God and dishonors God. But no person could adequately pay that sin debt to God. The solution was for God to send his son—who is both God and a person--as payment for debt owed.²⁴ People were justified to God via a satisfaction model of atonement in the same way vassals were justified to their feudal lords—by the payment of debt owed. But Christ is not punished in the transaction, even as he makes satisfaction to God on behalf of sinners.²⁵ Anselm's theory of atonement as payment addressed the estrangement of God and person,²⁶ and it paved the way for Luther and Calvin, who believed that the rift between God and people was legal in aspect.

Abelard (1079-1142) follows Augustine in that inherent guilt comes from Original Sin. Abelard maintains that the consequence of Original Sin is inevitable damnation and eternal punishment, noting in Ephesians that Paul calls people “children of wrath.” In further agreement with Augustine, he considers God to be fully righteous even if God condemns children for their inherited guilt, as the Flood and Sodom stories clearly demonstrate.²⁷ This rather grim view of God and the human plight is balanced by

²⁴ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1.11; 2:6 John D. Hannah, "Anselm on the Doctrine of Atonement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* Oct-Dec (1978).

²⁵ Hill, *The History of Christian Thought*, 138-40.

²⁶ Linwood Urban, *A Short History of Christian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 118.

God's love for humanity, demonstrated through the death of his son. God's love justifies by reaching out to and attracting people, bringing them close to the Lord and transforming them.²⁸ The supreme love that justifies is only possible by the redemption of Christ's suffering. "Our redemption through Christ's suffering is that supreme love in us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also acquires for us the true liberty of sons of God."²⁹ Peter Lombard (1096-1164) also framed the human condition in terms of justifying love, asking where justifying and saving love come from. "Is the love by which we are saved a created habit of our soul, or is it the very person of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us?"³⁰ Lombard opted for the latter, claiming that the saving love comes from the Spirit, working internally without the aid or will of the person.

Thomas Aquinas (c.1224-1274) pushed back on this view, saying that if the saving acts done by or through a person are done beyond the will of a person, then they are essentially involuntary; they are done by another.³¹ As to human plight, Aquinas departs from Augustine's notions of sin and Adam, claiming that people share the will of Adam, the propensity to sin, but not his guilt.³² The consequence of the Fall is that all people sin because of free will, and most will fail.³³ Also contra Augustine, Aquinas

²⁷ Reasoner, *Romans*, 47-48.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-29.

²⁹ Hill, *The History of Christian Thought*, 146.

³⁰ Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, Book 1, distinction 17; quoted in Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³² Mark W. Elliott, "Thomas Aquinas," in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy: Engaging with Early and Medieval Theologians*, ed. Bradley G. Green (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), 356-59.

argued against the passivity of the person in the salvation process, claiming that charity is voluntary, and that loving is our own.³⁴ Likewise Peter Auriol (c.1280-1322) argued that humans do have something to bring to the table of salvation--love. He claimed that as iniquity was alien and despicable to God, so love was agreeable and desirable to him. Because people and God are capable of love, salvation was a matter of like attracting like.³⁵ In Aquinas and Auriol, then, we begin to see a rift that is defined by the activity of God, and the activity and value of the human person in the course of salvation. We also see the origins of one of the great questions for Martin Luther: In the salvation process, can the person contribute anything toward her own salvation, or is justification and salvation entirely the work of God and the Spirit? Can a human being claim anything for himself that is acceptable to God, or is a person naturally depraved and condemned?

Martin Luther (1483-1546) believed, like Augustine and many others, that human beings were originally created good but are now in a fallen state, rebellious against God, and incapable of redeeming themselves. Original Sin is not the lack of righteousness in the will, but rather is a complete lack of righteousness in all parts of a person, whose predisposition is to commit evil.³⁶ Indeed, a person is incapable of doing any act of good by himself. The solution is justification by faith, which does not mean adherence to a list of intellectual propositions, but which does mean total trust in God.³⁷ Reading Rom 3:21-

³³ Jacob Haberman, *Maimonides and Aquinas: A Contemporary Appraisal* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1979), 193.

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Theological Texts*, no. 407, p. 214; quoted in Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 32.

³⁵ Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 32.

³⁶ Reasoner, *Romans*, 48-49.

³⁷ Hill, *The History of Christian Thought*, 192-94.

28, Luther understood justification to be imputed from Christ; righteousness is independent of human activity. “Alien righteousness,” as Luther called it, is ultimately a gift from without; it is the unification of Christ’s righteousness and the righteousness of God. Once one joins in faith to the righteousness of God, having received the righteousness of Christ by imputation, the striving for righteousness via piety--the customary method for obtaining righteousness in Luther’s time—is no longer necessary, and divine wrath was no longer inevitable.³⁸

The Enlightenment caused a major cultural shift away from ecclesiastical and theological authority.³⁹ The state and society began to emancipate itself from the power of the church, and socio-political values were no longer derived from biblical revelation or Church authority. Instead, sanctions of modern life were determined by an appeal to reason and social experience, and Western civilization began to distance itself from theological dogma. “Reason largely supersedes revelation as the supreme court of appeal.”⁴⁰ Consequently, Christian theologians could either adjust their thinking to the reality of new philosophical and social ideals, or isolate themselves altogether from the emerging culture and risk becoming ineffectual.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) did the former, and is generally considered to be the most influential Protestant theologian between the Reformation and Barth.⁴¹ He is well known for his defense of Christian ideals against the challenges posed by the

³⁸ Reasoner, *Romans*, 31-35.

³⁹ James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: Volume I: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997), 5f.

⁴⁰ Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 93-105.

Enlightenment. One of these ideals is sin.⁴² He claimed that the human person is consciously aware of his alienation from God, and that sin happens when God-consciousness is arrested or impeded. Awareness of sin is experienced as pain, and occurs when God-consciousness overwhelms self-consciousness.⁴³ Schleiermacher not only redefined the nature of sin, he also redefined the origin of sin. For example, he rejected the classic view of the Fall of Adam on two grounds. First, he claimed Adam did what his disposition compelled him to do, as all people can only act on their own nature. If Adam did not behave perfectly, it was because he was made imperfectly. Further, Schleiermacher found offensive the claim that one person's guilt could affect all other people, thus he rejected the view that Adam is a corporate figure. Instead, sin originates in the community, in the normal social development of each person. People are sinful because they grow up in and are influenced by a sinful world; consequently people are accustomed to satisfying the needs of the fleshy, lower consciousness long before they are introduced to the higher God-consciousness. Echoing Paul's conception of sin in Rom 7, where the apostle laments the struggle between doing what one should do and doing what the flesh desires, Schleiermacher calls sin the consequence of unequal development of God-consciousness and self-consciousness. Sin is not defined in terms of doing, but in terms of being. It is less an activity than a strained relationship with God.

Another ideal that Schleiermacher saw differently is redemption. Redemption is gained through Christ, who is both a perfect exemplar of God-consciousness, and the redeemer who stimulates humanity to seek and attain God-consciousness. Christ is the

⁴² Walter E. Wyman, "Sin and Redemption" in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher* (ed. Jacqueline Marina; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129-150.

⁴³ C. W. Christian, *Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1979), 114.

one in whom God dwells, but he is more than the manifestation of God.⁴⁴ Christ redeems by implanting God-consciousness in the person, which conquers the sensuous impulses and simultaneously restructures human priorities. Christ is thus a conduit for God-consciousness. The pain of sin consciousness and alienation from God are supplanted by “attunement of the soul in its relation to God and the world.”⁴⁵ Redemption is therefore internal, transformational, and ongoing; it does not necessarily happen in a moment in time in the present or the future.

Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) believed that the human condition is marked by a longing for the reconciliation of the flesh and the spirit, and “between infinite, free selfhood and slavish finitude.”⁴⁶ The conflict within the consciousness is depicted most powerfully in the Eden narrative, where humanity moved from innocence to self-consciousness. But that move away from innocence was not entirely injurious—in the transaction humanity gained not only knowledge of evil, but knowledge of good. Before the Fall humans had no knowledge, and were not different from plants and animals. After the Fall people became like God, knowing good and evil. Hegel seems divided on the impact of knowledge, on the one hand calling it evil because it cleaves the self by judging the self, and on the other hand implying that it is necessary to gain reconciliation with God. Fallen humanity is at once aware of its alienation from God and at the same time yearns for redemption via a steadfast Spirit.

⁴⁴ Christian, *Schleiermacher*, 122f.

⁴⁵ Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 103.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

In the first few decades of the 19th century in America, there was a renewed consideration of the nature of sin and redemption.⁴⁷ By the middle of the century the “New School” movement had raised questions about the origin and impact of sin, in particular questioning the supposed imputation of Adam’s sin to his progeny. Charles Hodge (1797-1878), a professor at Princeton, saw in the theology of the New School movement a return to Pelagianism, which he viewed as the cause of modern mysticism and rationalism. Hodge maintained that the heresy of the New School movement was in how they perceived the initiative of the person as she responds to God during regeneration. For the New School, especially one of its primary proponents Charles Finney, the person called by God exercises her own free will and actively changes herself from sinner to pious believer. God’s role is to persuade the sinner to change, and the sinner’s role is to change through behavioral preferences. For Finney, the human condition was a matter of poor choices which are correctable, and not a matter of condition that has primordial origins. For Hodge, human depravity goes back to Adam, who is a corporate figure in whom all people are born into. All people are children of wrath. The only solution is by way of divine grace, and not by way of human choice or free will. Following Calvin, Hodge believed that redemption is only possible via the judicial justification of Christ.

Albert Schweitzer, doctor, philosopher, musician, and Nobel prize winner, was convinced that early Christian thinkers were preoccupied with eschatology, and that the Christ movement began in a Jewish eschatological context.⁴⁸ He was further persuaded

⁴⁷ Ibid., 312-315.

that the Jesus story must be read eschatologically, because that is how Jesus spoke of himself and the world he lived in: the end of the world was near, and the kingdom of God would replace it, with Jesus reigning as Messianic king. Thus Paul's gospel is best understood as an appeal to Jewish eschatological convictions.

Schweitzer developed three models of redemption in Paul. The first is eschatological, where deliverance was from demonic beings who, with God's permission, ruled the world. Only at the end of time would the demons be finally vanquished. Jesus tried to hasten the drama by bringing about his own death, suffering for believers and atoning for sins. God would be forced to inaugurate the kingdom, in which the Law would no longer be valid. The second type of redemption is mystical. In this model, Pauline expressions like "dying with Christ," or "rising with Christ" are not taken metaphorically, but literally. These and other expressions signify that believers have passed from one sphere to another. Consistent with Schweitzer's eschatological perspective, the transition signifies the end of the believer's participation in the natural world, and an end to the power of the Law. The third model of redemption is juridical, and is closely related to the Lutheran view of justification. A believer is assured of a not-guilty verdict on the Day of the Lord by virtue of faith in Christ. However, this model is rooted in the mystical model--righteousness is a result of both having faith in Christ, and being in Christ. The center of Paul's thought is not justification by faith; it is instead the mystical and eschatological reality of being in Christ by participating in his death and resurrection.

⁴⁸ Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 108-116.

Karl Barth claimed that all of humanity is sinful, however, Adam's sin did not start a viral epidemic as Augustine claimed. Instead, Adam's sin is the great precedent that subsequent sinners imitate. Sin is defined as the assertion of human independence from God, the sovereign power in the world as we know it, and only becomes visible when it is illuminated by the righteousness of God through Christ. The human plight for Barth is more cosmic than individual, and is expressed in apocalyptic terms. Commenting on Rom 1:16-17, Barth writes: "The Gospel is the victory by which the world is overcome. By the Gospel the whole concrete world is dissolved and established."⁴⁹ The resurrection of Christ is the means by which the one God makes his power known, and it is the means also by which God affirms his sovereignty over the world. Thus, for Barth, justification is primarily about the first commandment—justification means that God gathers the world to himself, and simultaneously delivers idolaters (by this Barth means everyone) from imprisonment by lesser gods.⁵⁰

Krister Stendahl, whose ground-breaking essay "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West"⁵¹ sowed the seeds for what would later be called the "New Perspective" movement in Pauline studies, challenged Luther on two very important fronts. First, he denied that Paul's main concern was how a sinner can find a gracious God, noting that in Paul's letters he does not seem to suffer at all from a guilty conscience. To be sure, Paul is not naïve enough to think that even he is free of sin, but

⁴⁹ Douglas Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47f.

⁵¹ Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56.3 (1963): 199-215.

his sinfulness or even the sinfulness of others does not define the human plight. Instead, Paul's main concern is how to find a way for Gentiles to enter and participate in the family of God. Thus, the human plight is actually a Gentile plight, and the essence of the plight is broken relationship.

E.P. Sanders, who is also located in the New Perspective camp, claimed that Paul's soteriology worked from solution to plight.⁵² Because God provided a savior for the world, it follows that all other paths to salvation are insufficient. The only solution is Christ, and the starting point of Paul's gospel should be understood as the dispensation offered through Christ. Sanders avoids or elides the whole question of the human plight because he starts with the solution—there never was a “problem” for Paul; rather, the impact of Christ on him transformed him and he therefore manufactured a need for Christ as a rationalization.

The above brief history of the human plight brings forward three observations. First, the essence of the human plight has itself changed remarkably over the centuries. Generally speaking, one could say that it has some relationship to sin, and that sin in one way or another causes problems in the God-person relationship. But the intricacies of the natures of sin, redemption, and salvation have been and continue to be matters of debate. The precise definition of the human plight is not settled. Second, each thinker is a product of his social and cultural context, and that context was in some way determinative toward each person's views of the human plight. Third, many of the models of the human plight were developed in reaction to the views held by theological opponents. For example, Augustine's views of the human plight were formed in large part by his fierce debates

⁵² Westerholm, *Perspectives on Paul*, 160-163.

with Pelagius. Augustine believed that Pelagius was wrong, and his views of the human condition were honed in reaction to Pelagius' view of the human condition. Similarly, Luther pushed hard against the dogmas of the Catholic Church. Like Augustine, he thought his opponents were wrong, and his model of the human condition was a counterproposal to the status quo. The point is that oftentimes scholars of Christianity formulate their views relative to views they disagree with.

To be sure, I disagree with scholars in the Reformed tradition. But I am not arguing with Reformed interpreters of Paul only. I also disagree with many New Perspective scholars, including Wright and Dunn, Stowers and Eisenbaum, as we shall see. The New Perspective movement has done well to rescue Paul and 1st century Judaism from the clutches of the Reformation, but in many ways it has left anthropology to Augustine. Indeed, Augustine's grim view of the human plight still lingers in Pauline studies, and it is time for New Perspective scholars to re-evaluate the human condition, apart from Augustine and Luther.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one argues against the traditional view of the human plight, namely that the primary peril from which one is saved is legal in aspect; the reason to be saved is to avoid being punished. To be sure, Paul speaks of the wrath to come, but punishment per se is not the primary peril from which one is saved; there is a peril much worse than that. One of the ways the traditional argument is made relies heavily on the role of Adam in Paul. The conventional view rests on the presumption that Paul tapped into an "Adam tradition" that was prevalent in Early Jewish thought, a tradition that consistently portrays

Adam as the originator of sin, guilt, and condemnation. It is assumed that Paul echoes this tradition in Rom 5, and 1 Cor 15 (and elsewhere). I will argue against this assumption, because there was no Adam tradition for Paul to tap into—there were many, and their portrayals of Adam are far from consistent.

The final major section of the first chapter looks at punishment in Paul's thought. We shall see that punishment is not inevitable; God punishes *some* people, but not all people. People who are punished are punished for what they do, not for what they are. Retribution therefore cannot be the peril from which one is saved, because a person could save herself by being good.

Death is the topic of the second chapter. The traditional view of death holds that Eve and Adam were created immortal, but were punished with the loss of immortality for their failure to obey God. Supposedly, Paul reads the Eden narrative this way, and he thinks sin causes physical death. Against this view I will argue that Paul does not read Gen 2-3 this way at all; he does not think that sin causes physical death. However, there is a kind of death that follows sin, a mode of death I call moral death. A morally dead person lives apart from God. This is the peril from which one is saved.

Chapter three is about justification in Paul, and draws on conclusions of the first two chapters: punishment is not the peril from which one is saved, and moral death is. On the conclusion that moral death signifies a life apart from God, how can we think of justification in Paul? Here I will argue that that justification must have something to do with alienation from God, because that is how Paul sees the essential human problem. Following a survey of the major camps in the justification debate, and a critique of each, I

will offer my own model of justification. By comparing justification in the Abraham narrative in Genesis and Paul's attitudes about Gentiles and how they receive justification, we will see that justification is intimately related to relationship with God. It is not a legal matter as Reformers claim, and it has no connection to covenant, as some New Perspective scholars claim.

Stipulations and Assumptions

In closing, I have several stipulations. First, it is difficult to talk about death in Paul independent of punishment, and it is equally challenging to talk about divine punishment without bringing up the human condition, judgment, Adam, and so on. Some texts, like Rom 5 and 1 Cor 15, have in them allusions to death, condemnation, the human condition, etc. My approach is to look at Paul's thought across several themes, all of which relate to the question: "From what is a person saved?" Because some passages in Paul contain more than one theme, I will have to examine some passages more than once.

Second, I will consider only the seven undisputed Pauline letters. The scope includes Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon. Not all scholars hold that Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians and the Pastoral epistles are pseudonymous, and sometimes those scholars use portions of these letters in their arguments. In that case, I will quote or cite portions of the disputed letters so that the point of view of the scholar is properly represented. However, I will not base my own arguments on the content in the six disputed letters.

Third, in agreement with Pamela Eisenbaum, I approach my examination of Paul's soteriology assuming that his gospel is for Gentiles, not for Jews.⁵³ I take it for granted that the gospel according to Paul is a means of salvation for Gentiles, and not for Jews. Paul would say that Jews are already in relationship with God, as they have had a long history of relationship, and the means to maintain relationship. Jews are not estranged from God, but Gentiles are.

Fourth and finally, I recognize that Paul's thought can be very difficult if not impossible to systematize. I think of doing exegesis on Paul as akin to forcing an octopus into a plastic bag—when you get six arms in, another two or three come oozing out the other side. Paul's imagination and writing style compel him to think of one concept in a variety of ways, and sometimes he seems to contradict himself. For example, he describes Torah as leading to death, the cause of sin, and that which brings wrath. But Torah is also God-given, holy, and good. Sin is both an activity and a force that infects the cosmos. Death can also mean several things, depending on context. To that we must also acknowledge the spontaneity of letter writing, and the fact that his letters are addressed to particular situations in Galatia, Corinth, etc. Thus, it is a challenge indeed to build an argument about an element of Paul's thought that is one hundred percent airtight. Given the scope of this project, it is virtually certain that some passages may contradict the arguments I am trying to prove. But rather than try to force the octopus into the bag, so to speak, I reserve the right to concede that some texts just don't fit my argument. However, I will demonstrate that *on the whole*, if we place all the evidence on the table and look for

⁵³ Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian*, 242.

trends in Paul's thought, we will find that Paul is consistent with regard to the topics I will examine.

Chapter One: Condemnation and Divine Punishment

The Traditional view of Condemnation and Punishment

According to the traditional read of Paul, all unsaved people will be punished on the Day of the Lord, when the unbridled wrath of God will be unleashed against all of humankind, except believers in Christ.⁵⁴ Readers of Paul come to this view in two ways. One camp claims that people are simply born condemned because they are children of Adam, whose transgression caused the human race to be declared guilty and condemned before God in a divine law court.⁵⁵ People are “in Adam,” who is a corporate figure in whom all people participate. Somehow, the entire human race was present in Eden when he transgressed; consequently his punishment is ours as well. The other major camp claims that all people are sinners, and all sin merits perdition and punishment.⁵⁶ Punishment is inevitable because all people sin. Either way, all people will face

⁵⁴ Christian Stettler, "Paul, the Law and Judgment by Works," *EQ* 76 (2004).

⁵⁵ This view is very popular, especially among Reformed scholars. For example, Mark A. Seifrid, "'The Gift of Salvation': Its Failure to Address the Crux of Justification," *JETS* 42.4 (1999): 686f. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 88. Grant R. Osborne, *Romans* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity, 2004), 136. See also Frank J. Matera, *Romans*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 140. Emil Brunner, *The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 44. F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 119; Walter F. Taylor, *Paul: Apostle to the Nations, an Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 236. Traditional Orthodox theology does not accept that guilt was imputed from Adam to his progeny, but some dire consequences of the Fall are nonetheless share by all—an evil inclination, decay and death. Paul Ladouceur, "Evolution and Genesis 2-3: The Decline and Fall of Adam and Eve," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 57.1 (2013): 136f.

⁵⁶ Stephen Westerholm, "Justification by Faith Is the Answer: What Is the Question?," *CTQ* 70(2006): 207.

punishment; only the faithful are spared. The default trajectory for every person is penalty, and deliverance from it is the essence of salvation.⁵⁷ To those otherwise perishing, Paul brings a gospel of salvation from sin and the peril of punishment for all who believe the gospel message.⁵⁸

Both camps blame Adam in one way or another, and both camps come to their respective conclusions by reading Paul and the Eden narrative synoptically. The former camp claims that when Eve and Adam disobeyed God they changed the status of themselves and their progeny, from perfect to flawed, from immortal to mortal, from innocent to guilty. People are born with such status, because they are children of Adam. Because all people are born guilty, condemnation on the Day of the Lord is inevitable.⁵⁹ According to the latter camp, Adam brought sin into the world and passed on to his progeny sinfulness and its consequences, which are death and punishment. Thus, the main feature of the relationship between God and people is defined by enmity and hostility to the extent that salvation from the wrath of God is necessary.

Both views have a long history in Western Christian thought. Against Pelagius, who believed that infants were born sinless and guiltless and that a person could lead a sin-free life and thus escape judgment and the need for salvation, Augustine argued that even infants are born sinful *and* condemned. His anthropology is developed in large part

⁵⁷ “the gospel always means deliverance from wrath.” Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 35.

⁵⁸ Westerholm, "Justification by Faith Is the Answer: What Is the Question?," 204. Barret claims that Jesus reversed Adam's sin, and the consequence was the reversal of Adam's punishment—and more." C. K. Barrett, *Paul: An Introduction to His Thought* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 108f.

⁵⁹ Otfried Hofius, "'All Israel Will Be Saved': Divine Salvation and Israel's Deliverance in Romans 9-11," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 1.1 (1990): 20. Charles A. Gieschen, "Original Sin in the New Testament," *Concordia Journal* Oct(2005).

by his reading of Paul. Because all of humanity is derived from Adam, all his progeny inherit not only sinfulness, but guilt and condemnation as well.⁶⁰

Until, then, this remission of sins takes place in the offspring, they (newborns) have within them the law of sin in such manner, that it is really imputed to them as sin; in other words, with that law there is attaching to them its sentence of guilt, which holds them debtors to eternal condemnation. For what a parent transmits to his carnal offspring is the condition of his own carnal birth, not that of his spiritual new birth . . . When Adam sinned, he was changed from that pure olive, which had no such corrupt seed whence should spring the bitter issue of the wild olive, into a wild olive tree; and, inasmuch as his sin was so great, that by it his nature became commensurately changed for the worse, he converted the entire race of man into a wild olive stock.⁶¹

If Augustine were alive today, he might say that sinfulness and condemnation are in everyone's DNA; the darker side of being a person and its consequences are inescapable. Guilt and condemnation are in our blood; they cannot be removed. People stand condemned before God because of what they are, not because of what they do. Augustine and modern scholars derive these views in large measure by their reading of Paul.

Both of these views of the human condition suffer exegetical flaws. To be sure, Paul believes that humanity has a problem with God, and Adam had something to do with it, but interpretations of Paul's conceptions of the human condition are off base. It is taken for granted that Paul thinks human beings are sinful, and sin came into the world through Adam, however, that Adam created a legal crisis with God is not at all what Paul had in mind. Anselm and the Reformers who came after him, discussed in the Introduction, were wrong about the human plight.

⁶⁰ E.g., *City of God* 12.27 (NPNF¹ 2:392f).

⁶¹ Augustine, *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* 1.37 (NPNF¹ 5:552f); 1.35, 5:550-551.

One of the reasons Anselm and his followers were wrong is because the problem with the God-person relationship is not legally oriented. In other words, Anselm maintained that all people were in legal trouble with God; therefore all people are due punishment. It stands to reason that if all people are *not* due punishment, then all people are not in legal trouble with God. If punishment is not inevitable, then punishment is not the problem. In the present chapter I will argue that punishment is not inevitable in Paul's thought. Instead, punishment is due to people who "earn" it. Paul says that all are sinners, but he does not say all will be punished.

To prove my point of view, I will first demonstrate that the concept of inevitable punishment for all humankind was not a prevalent theme in Jewish tradition that preceded Paul. Further, against the claim that Adam in Paul is a corporate figure, in whom all of humanity is guilty, I will argue that Adam is not a corporate figure in Paul. Adam's transgression had effects on the human race, but Paul does not think all people are "in Adam." Thus Adam's guilt and punishment are not imputed to his progeny. Finally, it will be demonstrated that when Paul does speak of punishment, he is consistent that divine penalty is a reaction to certain behavior. God punishes, but punishment is not inevitable.

Condemnation and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible

In order to argue my position, I will show that the highly Christianized interpretation of the Eden narrative, where all people are on a path to eschatological wrath, and where wrath itself is the peril from which one is saved, is not common in

literature that precedes or is contemporary to Paul. It is supposed by many Pauline scholars that Eve and Adam's transgression set the human race on a course with eschatological wrath.⁶² The human condition is such that punishment by the Lord is inevitable, and universal in scope. All descendants of Adam stand condemned before the Lord, and the relationship between God and person is marked by enmity and legal issues. But this Christian view of the human plight has no basis in the Hebrew Bible, and this interpretation of the Eden narrative has no precedent in Jewish thought in Paul's time. Jews in the Ancient World did not read the Eden tale as later Christians would. Even the Eden narrative belies the claim that all people are due the wrath of God. For certain, there were immediate and long term consequences of the Fall, but the story itself reveals that those consequences were not legal. In the so-called curse speeches (Gen 3.14-19), God tells them what life will be like on the outside, but he does not say "You two are indicted and condemned, and so are your kids." To the contrary, God's speeches to the man and the woman are more like, "Now that you have disobeyed my suggestion to not run with scissors, you have poked your eyes out. Let me tell you how hard it is to be blind in the world I just created." God curses the serpent, the ground from which food is produced, and women who will bear children in pain. But these curses say nothing of the moral character of Eve and her husband, or their relationship with the creator. God's decrees to the woman and man foretell the loss of paradise and bliss, but they say nothing about

⁶² N. T. Wright reads Rom 5-8, the history of Israel, and the present human problem all through the myth of the Fall. The first man created a problem that Israel was called to solve via Torah and proper God worship, but it failed. However, Christ's death will rescue God's people from wrath on the Day of the Lord, and now the community of God includes Jews and Gentiles together. "Adam's trespass is finally undone." N.T. Wright, "Romans and the Theology of Paul," in *Pauline Theology, Volume III: Romans*, ed. David. M. Hay, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 44-48. N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 139. N.T. Wright, *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978-2013* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 105-08.

ongoing enmity between God and people. There will be friction and struggle between humanity and the physical world in which they live, but there is no hint of an enduring legal crisis between creator and creation.

After they leave the garden things go from bad to worse, the first siblings having a bout of jealousy that ends with the murder of Able. And from worse to total devastation—a few chapters in God is dismayed that he created the wicked human race, and he drowns them all but Noah and a few others. In the Flood story, punishment was indeed universal, and inevitable. However, *after* that story the problem of human wickedness is not the conflict that drives the narratives forward. The concept of human sinfulness, widespread in Ancient Near East literature,⁶³ is present in the Hebrew Bible, however, it is not *the* human problem; sinfulness does not define the “human condition.”⁶⁴ Sin was universal in that it is an activity common to all people, but it is not described in the Hebrew Bible as a hopeless condition, neither is it related to an abstract state of existence. Sin is related to individual, tangible activities.⁶⁵ Further, the God of the Israelites does not punish every single person for every single transgression. Sin in the Hebrew Bible was thought of as a debt to be paid.

⁶³ Robin C. Cover, "Sin, Sinners (OT)," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

⁶⁴ For this section, I am following a summary of the human condition in the Hebrew Bible in Heikki Raisanen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 134-53.

⁶⁵ Winninge sees sinfulness as common to all people in Gen 8:21; 1 King 8:46; Ps 14.1-3; 143.2; and Prov 20.9. Universal sinfulness is also found in Ps 155.8, and in some later Jewish apocalyptic texts: “For who among the living is there that has not sinned, or who among men that has not transgressed your covenant;” (4 Ezra 7:46). Philo also seemed to indicate that sinfulness was universal. *Mos.* 2:147; *Fug.* 157-60. Mikael Winninge, *Sinners and the Righteous: A Comparative Study of the Psalms of Solomon and Paul’s Letters*, Conbnt 26 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell, 1995), 211f.

In some wisdom literature, one could argue against the view that all people are inherently sinful and are thus due punishment. In some texts moral purity is a possibility. For example, one feature of the psalms is the view that the psalmist (and the person for whom he speaks) are free of guilt:

The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness; According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, And have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His ordinances were before me, And I did not put away His statutes from me. I was also blameless with Him, And I kept myself from my iniquity.⁶⁶ (Ps. 18:20-23; cf. Ps 17; 26)

Other texts support the view that sin and punishment were avoidable.⁶⁷ Noah and his immediate family were spared because he was good and avoided evil. Job also avoided sin, according to the narrator, Hasatan, and the Lord, all of whom described Job as “without blame.”

Most of the Hebrew Bible, however, acknowledges that people are sinful, but absolute perfection was not the expectation, as the end of the flood story implies. Before the flood, the Lord grieves over his creation and is sorry that he made humankind (Gen 6:5-7), but after the waters subside, the Lord consents that humankind is prone to do evil. He seems resigned to the nature of people: “and the Lord said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.” (Gen 8:21;

⁶⁶ Sometimes the psalmists acknowledged sinfulness while asking forgiveness: “Enter not into your judgment with your servant; for no person living is righteous before you.” (Ps 143:2). Barry D. Smith provides an extensive list of Jews who consider themselves blameless in Jewish literature: 2 Macc 7; *Jub* 23.14-31; *1 En.* 1-5; 85-90 (Animal Apocalypse); 91.1-11/94.1-104.13 (Letter of Enoch); 93.1-10/91.11-17 (Apocalypse of Weeks); *Pss. Sol.* 2.31; 3.11-12; 12.6; etc. Barry D. Smith, *What Must I Do to Be Saved: Paul Parts Company with His Jewish Heritage* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2007), 74n6.

⁶⁷ Raisanen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs*, 135.

NAS) By acknowledging that human beings are potentially evil, but allowing them to repopulate the earth after the flood, the Lord and the writer imply that a certain amount of sin is inevitable, and even acceptable.⁶⁸ That God gave the Israelites a system for expiating sin implies that God accepted a certain amount of sinfulness from his people.⁶⁹

This is not to say that God never punished evildoers.⁷⁰ To be sure, God punished a lot of people in the Hebrew Bible, sometimes his own. The cause of divine wrath is sin, the worst being idolatry (Deut 29:24-28), and was manifest in sickness, famine, and natural disasters.⁷¹ The Lord could smite Israel's enemies (Exod 15.7; 22.23; 32.10; Num 11.33; Isa 10.6), or even Israel itself (Lev 10.6; Num 1.53; 2 King 3.27; 1 Chro 27.24). After Sinai, God's wrath is kindled by violations of the covenant, which are most often idolatry, not living up to ethical norms, or failure to provide social justice to the poor.⁷²

⁶⁸ Some Jewish apocryphal texts support this view. Citing the righteous protagonist of Tobit and the pair of terms "righteous" and "sinner" in the Psalms of Solomon, Nickelsburg argues that a righteous person in Jewish texts is not perfect, but one "who acknowledges his or her sins and God's righteous judgment of them and who atones for them by means of prescribed rituals." George W.E. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 43. Yinger states it another way: "One's works of obedience (in Jewish scripture) are not viewed as *merits*, each to be recompensed in atomistic fashion, but instead are the observable manifestations of the covenant loyalty of the unseen heart." Kent L. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 62.

⁶⁹ Timo Eskola, "Paul, Predestination and "Covenantal Nomism" — Re-Assessing Paul and Palestinian Judaism," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 28.4 (1997): 394.

⁷⁰ Gary A. Herion, "Wrath of God (OT)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992). For a concise philological study of the Hebrew words for anger in the Hebrew Bible, see Bruce Edward Baloian, *Anger in the Old Testament*, vol. 99, AUS (New York: Peter Lang, 1992). See also Scott A. Ashmon, "The Wrath of God: A Biblical Overview," *Concordia Journal* 31. 4 (2005). R. V. G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God* (London: Tyndale, 1951).

⁷¹ Herion, "Wrath of God (OT)." Wrath is sometimes cosmic in the Hebrew Bible—mountains tremble, the earth shakes, and the stars and sun and moon no longer shine when God's anger is kindled (Ps 18.8; Jer 10.10; Isa 5.25; 9.18; 13.9-10).

There is always a reason for divine wrath, and it signifies that the relationship between God and people is taken seriously.⁷³ Wrath and righteousness of God are often viewed together.⁷⁴ If God's anger achieves righteousness, as in the destruction of evil nations or military victory, then wrath is appropriate. The anger of God can explain terrible events in the past (the destruction of the Temple; Ezra 5.12), and the threat of future wrath can deter bad behavior (Num 18.5; Deut 6.15; 11.17; Ezra 7.23; Psa 90.7-11, etc.), or serve as a call to repent (Jer 3.12-14).⁷⁵

The wrath of God comes to the fore in some of the later prophets, where the Lord God will punish those who displeased him.⁷⁶ The anger and indignation of the Lord will occur "on that day," at an appointed time when social and religious injustices are dealt

⁷² Baloian has determined that wrath in the Hebrew Bible is cause by an overwhelming margin (78% of the time) by a violation of covenant; in the remainder of occurrences wrath is associated with grumbling, apostasy, or some other violation of an explicit command by the Lord. Baloian, *Anger in the Old Testament*, 72. Fretheim, however, observes that while covenant and wrath are often linked in some texts (e.g. Lev 26.25), the bond between the two is not an adequate reference point to comprehend wrath, because the abundance of references to godly wrath are found in the prophets, who seldom mention the covenant. Therefore, we should consider wrath as a reaction to a violation of humanity's "relationship" with God, whether that relationship is bound by covenant or not. This point is especially evident when consider that, as mentioned above, God's wrath is sometimes turned out against the nations. Terence E. Fretheim, "Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God," *HBT* 24(2002): 9-10.

⁷³ Fretheim, "Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God," 7.

⁷⁴ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 76.

⁷⁵ There are several instances in the Hebrew Bible where the wrath of God is turned away or delayed by prayer, repentance, or by God reconsidering the situation. Fretheim, "Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God," 18-19.

⁷⁶ After the exile, wrath goes outward to the whole world, to those who harm God's people, and to those nations who do not realize that they are but tools in the employ of the Lord (Isa 10.5-19; Jer 25.7-14). Herion Schoonhoven claims that post-exilic Judaism represented wrath eschatologically, on the Day of Judgment or the Day of the Lord, and it was due to oppressors of Israel. Calvin R. Schoonhoven, *The Wrath of Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 33.

with by the Lord (Isa 26.20; Ezek 7.1-19; 22.24; Dan 8.19; Zeph 1.15, 18).⁷⁷ In Joel, the Day of the Lord is a day of fire, blood, and natural cataclysms. God's judgment would be against the nations who oppose Israel (4:2); those nations were challenged to make war with the Lord. Judah is not spared, and its sinners will also be punished, but the faithful remnant "who call upon the name of the Lord" will be redeemed (3:5). Amos also predicts the destruction of Israel's enemies, but he is less optimistic about the fate of Israel (3:2). In Isaiah, God's wrath will desolate the earth and destroy sinners (13:9). However, the full wrath of God, once complete, will give way to universal peace and harmony of all the people of the earth (19). In Ezekiel the target of God's wrath on the Day of the Lord is Egypt, because Egypt in part was responsible for the death of King Josiah. After the destruction of Egypt, the north and south kingdoms of Israel will be restored to their former glory. But that glory is temporary, for Gog and Magog will come up against Israel (38:16). God will eventually intercede, and fully vindicate himself as the one true God. The prophet Zephaniah sees the wrath of God going against the

⁷⁷ Herion, "Wrath of God (OT)." In Jewish apocalyptic literature, the wrath of God is also eschatological. In the Book of Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36), evil was caused by supernatural beings who corrupted the whole world and virtually the entire human race. Richard Bauckham, "Apocalypses," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. P. A. Carson, et al (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001). When the final judgment comes the righteous (who is the implied reader) will be saved and the threat of evil will be eliminated altogether. The opening chapters vividly evoke the coming judgment and prophesy salvation for the righteous and terrible doom for the unrighteous. Judgment is universal (1:7-9; Is 24:1-23). All evil will be eliminated and all people will serve and bless God. The righteous are not without sin, as they are promised sinlessness after judgment, as a result of God's wisdom (5:8-9). There are distinctions between those who live by the Law and those who do not, and between the righteous and the unrighteous. Boccaccini notes that the Book of Dream Visions (1 Enoch 83-90) lacks covenant theology. "The ideal of a righteous person who fulfills the law is replaced by the figure of the elect who is chosen and justified by God." Gabriele Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 B.C.E.-200 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 133. This distinction is carried through in The Epistle of Enoch (1 Enoch 91-105), but here the groups are described more in social terms. Sinners are powerful, wealthy and arrogant and they oppress the poor. George W.E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 141-62. See also Frederick J. Murphy, *Early Judaism: The Exile to the Time of Jesus* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2002), 149-52. Daniel M. Gurtner, ed. *This World and the World to Come: Soteriology in Early Judaism* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

leaders and false prophets of Israel, and to the nations who oppose Israel (1:15; 2:11) God's fury can be avoided for those who repent. Finally, in Zechariah, on the Day of the Lord Jerusalem will be conquered and half the people will be carried off to captivity. In contrast to the other prophets, the Day of the Lord actually ends well, as on that day "living waters will go out from Jerusalem" (14:8) Thereafter, all the nations will worship the Lord.

Virtually all of the later prophets see the wrath of God in the same way--as a reaction to bad behavior, which is focused narrowly and explicitly on nations or people who offend the Lord.⁷⁸ Eschatological wrath tended to be collective, and not individualistic, and was provoked by certain knowable and avoidable behaviors. "Wrath is a contextualized reality;"⁷⁹ it is local and rarely affects the entire human race. As we shall see, Paul's views of divine wrath are in line with the Hebrew Bible.

Adam in Early Jewish Literature

If the Hebrew Bible does not speak of the wrath of God or the condemnation of the human race as being inevitable, then where does Paul (supposedly) get the idea that all people are in need of salvation from the wrath to come? Where does the notion of inevitable punishment come from? Some scholars maintain that there was in Paul's time an Adam tradition that portrayed the effects of the Fall in terms of universal sinfulness,

⁷⁸ In some earlier texts, the Lord's wrath is aimed at the nations who do not recognize his sovereignty (Exod 15:7; Ps 2:1-6), and sometimes at Israel for failing to honor the covenant (Ex 32:10; Num 11:1, 33) GL Borchert, "Wrath, Destruction," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers grove, Illinois: Intervarsity, 1993).

⁷⁹ Fretheim, "Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God," 14.

guilt, and condemnation. According to this claim, some early Jewish thinkers like Paul thought of the Fall as the first cause of inevitable condemnation and punishment. Adam's transgression was the beginning of the arch of human history that would ultimately and inevitably lead to eschatological judgment and wrath. Many scholars assume that Paul tapped into the Adam myth when he mentions Adam in Rom 5, 1 Cor 15, etc.⁸⁰ When Paul mentions Adam he is echoing sentiments of the myth. His allusions to Adam automatically evoked a certain narrative, just as today allusions to Martin Luther King evoke ideals like peaceful protest and the Civil Rights movement. The consequences of the Fall were so well known that they did not need to be explained. Paul's readers simply knew who Adam was, and they knew that the major consequence of his transgression was guilt and condemnation for all people. In short, dropping Adam's name in the context of salvation was a short cut for explaining inevitable condemnation.

This particular version of an early Jewish Adam myth has two problems. For one, there was no such Adam tradition in early Jewish tradition either before or during Paul's time--there were many, and they were far from consistent. Writers thought of Adam in a variety of ways, and they expressed the effects of the Fall in diverse ways. John Levison has determined that Early Jewish writers interpreted Adam and the Eden narrative according to their own *Tendenz*; there was no reliable Adam tradition in Paul's time.⁸¹

⁸⁰ For example, James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 272. Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical, 1996), 174f. Matera claims that there were two tendencies in the Adam tradition, one that exalted Adam, and one that expands on his transgression, sometimes blaming Eve. Matera, *Romans*, 127f.

⁸¹ John R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch*, JSP (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988). On the Adam myth in Early Jewish literature, see also Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2004), 167. cf. Charles H.

His approach was to look at the theological, historical, and literary roles that Adam played in several Early Jewish texts, as well as the variety of ways in which the writers altered the Gen 1-3 narrative.⁸² He concludes that the generation of scholars who came before him (his book was published in 1988) approached the study of Adam with preconceived notions of Adam that they took from Paul. Then they confirmed in the Adamic literature what they presumed in the Pauline literature. In so many words, scholars found what they were looking for in the Genesis account of the Eden story, as well as in Adamic literature that was contemporary to Paul. Their own theological assumptions about Adam in Paul caused them to force the data mined from Jewish literature into preconceived notions about Adam in Paul. Levison concludes that a more accurate way to assess Adam's role in Jewish literature is to recognize that each of the Jewish texts have their own *Tendenz*. Indeed, Jewish interpretations of Adam are far from homogenous; thus Paul could not have tapped into a stream of thought about Adam, because there was no such stream of thought.

The second major problem with claim that Adam automatically evokes inevitable condemnation is that the consequences of Adam's transgression in Jewish literature were often not legal at all. The Adam stories do not reveal that Adam brought condemnation to the human race. To be sure, Adam's transgressions brought suffering to humanity, but

Talbert, *Romans* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 147. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 84-90.

⁸² Levison's examination includes Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira, *Jubilees*, Josephus, Philo, 4 *Ezra*, and 2 *Baruch*.

that suffering was not described in legal terms. Unavoidable condemnation as a result of the Fall was not a prevalent theme in Jewish Adamic literature.

For example, the author of Jubilees, writing in response to the religious tyranny of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BCE), interpreted portions of the Pentateuch creatively, making Jewish law superior to the Greek customs that threatened Jews of the time.⁸³ This led the author to exonerate Adam to the status of high priest, and to minimize the negative effects of his transgression.⁸⁴ At first the couple lived in paradise, tilling the land and keeping it. The encounter and dialogue between Eve and the serpent parallels the Genesis account, and when they eat the fruit of knowledge they discover their nakedness (3:15-22). However, Adam covers himself not out of shame, but out of propriety, as high priests were expected to do (Exod 28:42-43). The eating of the forbidden fruit does not lead to universal sin, but it does cause the animals the loss of speech (Jub 3:20-26). That curiosity aside, the effects of the Fall are limited to Eve and Adam. The human race is not affected. Later in the story iniquity comes to the human race by misbehaving angels of God, who take wives for themselves and introduce corruption and widespread wickedness (5:1-8) Angry at the angels, God separates them out and commits them to the depths of the earth. The corruption of humankind is not caused by the Fall, but by angels of God.

⁸³ John R. Levison, "Early Judaism Looks at Adam," *BT* 30.6 (1992): 372f.

⁸⁴ Levison, *Portraits*, 96.

Josephus wrote *Jewish Antiquities* (*Ant.*) after the first disastrous war with the Romans, in part to defend the legitimacy of Judaism to the Roman world.⁸⁵ Josephus told the history of the Jews to convey the lesson that the God of the Jews rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. He told the history of the Jews by appealing to Greco-Roman ideals about living. One of those ideals was living in bliss, the highest attainment in Greco-Roman life.⁸⁶ And bliss is what God intended for Eve and Adam. After he discovered that they had eaten the forbidden fruit, God tells them what he had in mind when he created the garden and placed them in it. He wanted them to have a happy life, without affliction, without labor and painstaking, the kind of labor and painstaking that would hasten old age and death (*Ant.* 1:4). But now all of that is lost and can never be regained. As in the Genesis account, the proclamations to the woman and man foretell the difficulty of growing food and giving birth. Also echoing the Genesis story, there is no hint that the moral character of the first couple will cause enmity between God and the human race. Adam and Eve stepped outside the path of virtue when they violated the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and they lost bliss, but they did not commence a legal crisis with God.

Because Philo is influenced by Greek philosophy and anthropology, he describes the human predicament in terms of Greek thought,⁸⁷ and in less than desirable terms, but the present plight of people has no relationship to the Fall of Adam in the traditional Christian sense. Adam could rule the mortal world and at the same time connect with the

⁸⁵ Levison, "EJ Looks at Adam," 376.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Levison, *Portraits*, 86.

heavenly world, because he was a “world citizen” who lived in harmony with nature, which is true virtue. This conception of harmony is taken from Stoicism, and is applied toward an interpretation of Gen 1-3 to explain the current suffering of humanity.⁸⁸ It also explains what Adam could have had--obedience to God's commands could have yielded blessings; failure to obey means being cast out by the Lord (*Leg.* 1.95) In line with Gen 1-3, Adam's transgression resulted in proclamations from God, who scourges the earth for Adam's transgression and closes off his bounty from people who lack virtue (*Leg.* 3.247).

Owing to the influence of Greek philosophy, Philo was able to interpret Gen 1-3 symbolically. Adam, Eve, and the serpent are portrayed as mind, sense perception, and pleasure respectively (*Opif.* 165).⁸⁹ The consequences of the Fall are framed in terms of conflict within the human self, not in terms of conflict with the Lord. For example, in an allegorical interpretation of Eve and Adam hiding from the Lord due to their nakedness, Philo considers how a wicked person conceals himself from God. The person who escapes from God flees inward, and in so doing asserts that God is the cause of nothing, while simultaneously claiming that the self is the cause of everything. Conversely, the wise and prudent person who flees from the mind of the individual flees to the universe—which is God—and confesses that things of the humankind are worthless (*Alleg. Interp.* 3; IX, 28-30). In the end, the mind, driven to attain things which are objects of the irrational outward senses, attains those things with labor, sweat, and toil, at the expense

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸⁹ Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts*, 170f.

of the soul. (*Alleg. Interp.* 3; XC, 251-253) The earthly mind, not humankind, was banished from paradise (*Plant.* 1:46).

Sirach interprets Adam and Gen 1-3 in several ways, depending on context. In one interpretation, Adam is the first Israelite who shares the glory of God; his transgression is not even in view: “Shem and Seth and Enosh were honored, but above every other created living being was Adam.” (49:16; NRS) In another interpretation of Gen 1-3, Ben Sira sees the first man as lacking Wisdom, but this may reflect the writer’s effort to lift up the superiority of wisdom, rather than to degrade Adam (24:28).⁹⁰

Another allusion to Adam is in chapter 15, where Ben Sira speaks of the benefits of obtaining Wisdom. Those who fear the Lord will be welcomed by her, and will be given the bread of learning. A wise person does not blame the Lord for having fallen away, as the Lord hates abominations. It is clear that falling away is a matter of choice, as it was in the beginning:

It was he (the Lord) who created humankind in the beginning, and he left them in the power of their own free choice. If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. (vv.14-15; NRS)

From the beginning God made humankind with a certain inclination, but that inclination was defined as having discretion, and was not considered evil.⁹¹

Finally, the writer recalls the creation in chapter 17. Here again Ben Sira states that people were made in the image of God, and that they were given discretion,

⁹⁰ Levison, *Portraits*, 48.

⁹¹ Dunn, *Theology*, 84-85.

knowledge, and understanding. They were given the capacity to choose between doing good or doing evil. And the presence of evil is not blamed on the Fall; it is part of the creation: "He (the Lord) filled them with knowledge and understanding, and showed them good and evil" (v.7). God told the first people to be aware of evil (v.14), with the understanding that a person's destiny was a matter of choice. Thus, while sinfulness is essential to the human experience (vv.25-32), the human condition is not marked by hopelessness and the inevitability of condemnation. Instead, Adam and the rest of humanity can, by keeping Wisdom, affect their standing before God.

In the Wisdom of Solomon, the writer blames Cain, not Adam, for spiritual death (10:3-4).⁹² In 2.23-24, the sage writes that humankind was created for incorruption, but through the devil's envy moral death came into the world. Sinfulness did not originate with Adam; it came from the devil. Chapter 10 is a history of the role of Wisdom from Adam to Moses. In the beginning, Wisdom delivered the "first-formed father of the world," which strengthened him to rule all things from his transgression (v.1; cf.7:1). In the remainder of the chapter, Wisdom rescues the imperfect but penitent from their own mistakes and transgressions. Though human beings are flawed, those who rely on and keep Wisdom will prevail. The human situation for those who practice Wisdom is not hopeless, but hopeful, because Wisdom has enabled defective human beings to flourish.

Two apocalyptic texts that come after Paul are very hard on Adam. *4 Ezra* was written in the late first century CE, just after the destruction of the Temple. The writer is pessimistic about the present state of Israel, even hinting that the Lord may have chosen

⁹² Levison, *Portraits*, 155.

another more righteous nation (3:31-36). He wonders why the conquerors of Jerusalem, who are even more wicked than the Israelites, are allowed by God to inhabit the city. He answers his own question by blaming Adam, the prototype man of an age that is full of torment and despair.⁹³ The world was made for the sake of Israel, but Adam's transgression brought death and an evil heart to the human race (3.7, 21). The disease of human sin and evil has infected even God's own people. That is why the holy city was sacked. So, Adam's transgression is blamed for divine punishment and the current suffering of Ezra and his people, however, the punishment was a divine reaction to sinfulness in a moment in time; God's wrath, an indirect consequence of Adam's transgression, is contextualized in the destruction of Jerusalem.

But Adam is to blame for even more than that. Adam's transgression is blamed for the near impossibility of attaining eternal life after death. Immortality is possible, but virtually out of reach because of human sinfulness (7:119-126). Ezra blames Adam, asking "what good are immortality, treasuries, the glory of the Most High, and paradise, if virtually no one can have any of them?" Human nature, passed on from Adam, prohibits the possibility of life after death. In a lament to Uriel, the messenger with whom Ezra dialogues with throughout the apocalypse, Ezra says of Adam:

I answered and said, "This is my first and last comment: it would have been better if the earth had not produced Adam, or else, when it had produced him, had restrained him from sinning. For what good is it to all that they live in sorrow now and expect punishment after death? O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants. (7:116-118; NRS)

⁹³ Ibid., 112-27. See also Dunn, *Theology*, 88-90; Martinus C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians and Romans 5* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 73-80.

This lament is a recapitulation of what Ezra has said before of Adam, namely that the consequences of his transgression are an evil heart and alienation from God and God's blessings. Adam sinned, bliss was lost, and life is hard. That is the common refrain of Adamic literature, and that in so many words is Uriel's response. But Uriel's response is not without hope: if a person obeys God, as difficult as that may be, she can have immortality after death. It is possible, through hard work and perseverance, to win the contest that is before each person. Thus, the penalty of eternal death is not inevitable. Even Ezra acknowledges the possibility of avoiding punishment from God, saying: "(what good is it that) the glory of the most high will defend those who have led a pure life" (7:122). In spite of his pessimism, Ezra acknowledges that one can obtain eternal life, and avoid the punishment of eternal death. Punishment is preventable, through piety and proper relationship with God, and the destiny of people is theirs to determine.

In *2 Baruch* the first man is blamed for many travails, like the loss of Paradise (4:3), shortened lifespan (17:2-4; 23:3), and much more.⁹⁴ Adam is the spiritual patriarch of the wicked (18:1-2; 48:46; 54:15; 17-19), not because Adam imputed sinfulness to them, but because his progeny choose to be wicked. So there is enmity between God and people, and Adam is blamed, indirectly. In an extended prayer to the Mighty One (48:1-47), Baruch petitions God to not be angry with people, and not account for the evil works of each person (vv.14-15). The prayer seems to be a petition for Israel, not for the human race, as Baruch asks the Lord not to give up on his people:

⁹⁴ Levison, *Portraits*, 142. A. J. M. Wedderburn, "The Theological Structure of Romans V.12," *NTS* 19 (1972-73): 345-46; Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 16-22; C. Clifton Black, "Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5-8," *JBL* 103 (1984): 415; de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians and Romans 5*, 80-83.

Behold the little ones that are subject unto you,
And save all that draw near unto you:
And destroy not the hope of our people,
And cut not short the times of our aid.
For this is the nation which you have chosen,
And these are the people, to whom you find no equal. (vv.19-20)

God is unmoved by Baruch's impassioned petition, and tersely responds that Israel has not remembered God's goodness and will be taken up. As the dialogue between Baruch and God continues, somehow all people are swept up into the coming judgment and destruction. Indeed, all of Adam's progeny are going to corruption, having sinned before God (48:43-44). However, punishment is not inevitable, as each person "prepares his own soul torment to come," or his own glory to come (54:15). The destinies of people are influenced by the transgression of Adam, but, as in *4 Ezra*, proper living can lead to blessings. Adam's transgression may have influenced each person negatively, but each person is the "Adam of his own soul." (54:19) Thus, *2 Bar.* emphasizes personal responsibility for wickedness, and it insists that if a person is impacted by Adam's transgression, it is because she has chosen to mimic his sin.⁹⁵ Sinfulness and its consequences are hereditary in *4 Ezra*, but they are voluntary in *2 Bar.*

The effects of Adam's transgression are listed once again in chapter 56, in an interpretation of a vision. As before, Adam is blamed for the advent of death, as well as a litany of human suffering: anguish, pain, trouble, disease, Sheol. In all, "the greatness of humanity was humiliated." (v.6). In other Adamic texts, Adam's legacy has doomed the human race to a life of toil and distress—the problems are mostly external to the person--but here the difficulties are more internal, with consequences in the present. But the

⁹⁵ Levison, *Portraits*, 143.

negative effects of Adam's legacy are surmountable, as they are in *4 Ezra*. In sum, *2 Baruch* says of Adam's transgression that we are prone to evil, which has consequences, but those consequences are not determinative toward each person's life. Punishment or reward are a matter of choice.

The Life of Adam and Eve (LAE) is an apocryphal text whose original composition date is debated, though it is likely contemporary to Paul, plus or minus 100 years. One of the basic components of *LAE* is the recollection of the Fall from the perspectives of Eve and Adam. Most versions of *LAE* share basic narrative structures and themes, such as the yearning for lost material blessings, and lamenting human suffering, pain, and disease. The cause of the Fall is explained in terms of naiveté: Eve and Adam were unprepared to fight deception.⁹⁶

In the Greek version, Adam recalls the immediate consequences of eating the fruit, saying:⁹⁷

And he (the Lord) saith to me: "Since thou hast abandoned my covenant, I have brought upon thy body seventy-two strokes; the trouble of the first stroke is a pain of the eyes, the second stroke an affection of the hearing, and likewise in turn all the strokes shall befall thee." (8:2)

The consequences of the Fall are, once again, mostly physical, and closely resemble the consequences in *2 Bar*.⁹⁸ Later in the story Eve recalls the sequence of events in Eden,

⁹⁶ John R. Levison, "The Exoneration of Eve in the Apocalypse of Moses 15-30," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 20.2 (1989): 148.

⁹⁷ Translations of *LAE* are taken from R.H. Charles, "The Books of Adam and Eve," in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, Volume 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 134-154.

⁹⁸ The consequences in the Latin version are also physical. Adam recalls God saying to him: "In that thou hast left behind my commandment and hast not kept my word, which I confirmed to thee; behold, I will bring upon thy body, seventy blows; with divers griefs, shalt thou be tormented, beginning at thy head and thine eyes and thine ears down to thy nails on thy toes, and in every separate limb." (24:1-2)

following the Genesis account. She was deceived by the serpent, ate the fruit, and convinced her husband to do the same. When God finds out, he foretells to Adam the struggles and hardships he is about to face in the world (24:1-4). There is no hint of an ongoing moral gap between Adam and God. Then, Eve continues, the Lord turned to her and warns her of pain in childbirth, and also this:

But thou shalt confess and say: 'Lord, Lord, save me (from pain in childbirth), and I will turn no more to the sin of the flesh.' And on this account, from thine own words I will judge thee, by reason of the enmity which the enemy has planted in thee." (25:3-4)

Eve begs God to remove the pain of childbirth, but God says emphatically, "Sorry, but no." Throughout *LAE* the first couple yearns to go back to the way things were, but the Lord does not capitulate. Lamenting current circumstances, and yearning to go back to paradise are common motifs in Adamic literature. However, lamenting an ongoing legal crisis with a judging God was not.

The remainder of *LAE* supports this fact. As the story continues, after Adam dies, there is forgiveness of his transgression. Adam is never punished. After her husband passes, Eve laments, confesses her sins, and implies that her sin has affected all of humanity. An angel of humanity comes to her as she mourns over the body of Adam, and affirms that the spirit of Adam has gone aloft to be with his maker (32:1-4). Adam's body is laid to rest in Paradise, per the Lord's command, and his spirit is lifted up to the seventh heaven. The Lord promises that Adam's body will be raised up on the Last Day.

In closing, Early Jewish writers interpreted Adam, the Eden narrative, and the consequences of the Fall in many ways. Adam is an ideal ancestor, the one who brought

present sufferings on Israel and the world, and a High Priest. Some of the portraits of Adam were influenced by Greek thought, and some were influenced by recent historical events. To be sure, the consequences of the Fall are consistently negative, however, beyond the general category of negative, the consequences are far from consistent. Universal and unavoidable condemnation and punishment is not a prevailing theme. The two apocalypses, written in response to disastrous historic events, hint that the threat of future punishment is real. This would appear to bolster the claim that Adam in Paul's time was thought to have brought divine punishment to all people. However, as Stowers argues, the negativity towards Adam in these two texts, and the greater emphasis on the effects of the transgression, probably stemmed from profound pessimism generated by the war with the Romans. Like other apocalyptic literature, *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* were likely written in response to current events, in this case the destruction of Jerusalem and the near extinction of Judaism. It is no surprise that the writers questioned the Lord's commitment to Israel, and sought scapegoats like Adam to explain the terrible devastation. "Paul," Stowers concludes, "lived on the other side of this divide. The Judaism of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* would have been unimaginable to the apostle."⁹⁹ Therefore, the Judaism that upholds the threat of punishment in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* should not be attributed to Paul. Eschatological wrath may be essential to these apocalypses, but we should be careful to attribute that idea to Paul. I conclude that the main consequence of Adam's transgression in Early Jewish literature was enmity between humanity and the world, not enmity between humanity and God. The Fall made

⁹⁹ Stowers, *Romans*, 88.

life much more difficult, especially compared to life in paradise, but it did not bring an indictment on all people.

Before we advance to an examination of Adam in Paul's letters, I stipulate that just because the classic Christian view of the human condition is lacking in literature outside of Paul does not mean necessarily that Paul cannot come up with radical new ideas. Paul was a creative thinker, and it is possible that he saw the human condition as being defined by the threat of future punishment. Maybe Paul departed from his scriptures, and perhaps he deviated from other Jewish writers that came before and slightly after him, and maybe he thought of the human predicament exactly the way Christen interpreters later would. That is possible. But it is not terribly plausible, to my mind, because punishment from God in the literature examined is virtually always in response to local events. The flood aside, the notion that God will punish all human beings except for a few is not supported, nor is the belief that the essence of salvation is from eschatological wrath. As we shall see, the evidence in Paul's letters does not support the traditional view of the human condition either. In the section that follows, I continue to pick away at the traditional view, this time by looking at the role of Adam in Paul's thought.

Adam in Paul: a Social-Science Perspective

One of the arguments for inevitable condemnation relies on the assertion that Adam is a corporate figure in Paul.¹⁰⁰ Adam is more than the father of the human race;

¹⁰⁰ On the corporate nature of the effects of Adam's transgression, or the solidarity of humanity in Adam, see William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Volume 1 Chapters 1-8*, NTC (Grand

somehow, though no one besides Eve was yet alive, all of humanity was mysteriously present in Eden with him when he disobeyed the Lord. This view is supported by the fact that conceptions of corporate solidarity, popular in the Ancient World and in the Hebrew Bible, held that actions of agents could be regarded as actions of principals. Adam's sin "could be regarded at the same time as the sin of all his descendants."¹⁰¹ All the problems that Adam created during the Fall apply to the entire human race.¹⁰² What Adam did we all did, and we are all accountable. We all transgressed against God, we are all guilty, and we are all due punishment. Because Paul's theology of sin is not individualistic, but corporate, there are just two modes of existence—one identified with Adam, and the other with Christ.¹⁰³ People are naturally condemned in Adam, and can be saved only through Christ.

I will argue against this view using methods developed by social-scientific scholars of Paul, and by comparing how Paul thinks of Abraham and Adam. Contrasting Abraham and Adam will demonstrate that Paul thinks of one man as a father whose

Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 178; Matthew Black, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 86; David L. Bartlett, *Romans* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 57. John B. Cobb and David J. Lull, *Romans* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 82-84; D. Stuart Briscoe, *Romans* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982), 121; Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 227f; Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 96. Dunn claims that Adam determined the character of the present age. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 289f. For Tobin, Paul is not interested in the propagation of sin from Adam, however, the purpose of Adam is to include all of humanity in Adam. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts*, 166f. Against the view that Adam in Paul represents all of humanity, see: C. R. Hume, *Reading through Romans* (London: SCM, 1999), 87; Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Westminster: John Knox, 2009), 139f.

¹⁰¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 323-29.

¹⁰² C. K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last: A Study in Pauline Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 12-21. Ben Witherington, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 22.

¹⁰³ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 99-100.

characteristics are shared by his whole family, and the other man as a person whose doings are his own. One man is a corporate figure whose interaction with God created a family, the members of which share certain qualities. The other man also interacted with God, but the consequences of his actions were in his alone. I will argue that Adam is not a corporate figure in Paul.

Social Structures and Kinship Construction in the Ancient World

People in Paul's time were "attuned to the values, attitudes, and beliefs of their in-group,"¹⁰⁴ seeing themselves and others in terms of stereotypes.¹⁰⁵ The most common in-group was the family. Familial values, attitudes, and identity resided "ultimately in the etiological ancestor of the extended family."¹⁰⁶ Larger groups also formed identity along similar lines—by alluding to a collective name, religious practices, and a common ancestry.¹⁰⁷ Paul defines ethnic groups this way. For example, he formulates Judean identity by alluding to stories from Israelite history that tell of the covenants and promises made between God and the Israelites. He describes Gentiles as rejecting God, doing wrong cultic practices including idolatry, and by a tendency toward moral failure.

¹⁰⁴ Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 16.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 159. Denise Kimber Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge, "The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul," *JBL* 123.2 (2004): 244f.

¹⁰⁷ Buell and Hodge, "The Politics of Interpretation," 244.

People within an in-group considered themselves kin, and ideals of kin were developed in a number of ways.¹⁰⁸ First, relationships were often constructed using familial terms. For example, Paul uses expressions like “brother” (ἀδελφός; 1 Cor 5:11) to imply that church members in Corinth have in common Christian fellowship, even if they do not have the same birth parents.¹⁰⁹ Paul often uses other familial terms to develop relationship between Gentiles and Abraham, between Jews and Abraham, and between members of a church body. He refers to himself as a descendant (σπέρμα) of Abraham (2 Cor 11:22), and to those who believe as children (υἱοί) of Abraham (Gal 3:7, 29). Abraham is a forefather (προπάτορα; Rom 4:1), father (πατέρα; Rom 4:12, 17, 18; 9:5), and progenitor of many descendants (Rom 9:7; 11:1, 16, 17; 2 Cor 11:22; Gal 3:8). The descendants of Abraham, even non blood-related Gentiles, inherit blessings (Rom 4:13, 16; Gal 3:16, 18; cf. Rom 9:7).

Second, ideals of kinship were developed via religious ritual. Religious ritual legitimized blood relationships between ancestor and descendant, and served as a mechanism for implementing kinship, even if a non-blood descendant is adopted into a new family.¹¹⁰ Sacrifice was sometimes used to initiate membership into a new family in some Greek and Roman religions. For Gentiles converting to Judaism, circumcision was required of males. Paul wrote that Gentiles become progeny of Abraham through

¹⁰⁸ Carline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 42.

¹⁰⁹ Mary Katherine Birge, *The Language of Belonging: A Rhetorical Analysis of Kinship Language in First Corinthians* (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2002), 1-72.

¹¹⁰ Hodge, *Sons*, 26, 42.

baptism, when they receive the Spirit and are transformed from slaves to sons.¹¹¹ The third component of kinship construction relates to the way a group imagines how members relate to one another. “A group imagines itself to be related and organized by a kinship of the mind, soul, or spirit.”¹¹² Paul constructs kin this way also. Perhaps the best example of this is Rom 8:14: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God, these are the children of God.”

The fourth component of kinship construction is through the use of discursive practices that delineated kin relationships, like an ancestral history, where an ancestor experienced something that would have effect on her descendants. This too is common in Paul. In Romans, he constructs kinship between Abraham and Gentiles by appealing to history:

For this reason 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 all of us, 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. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." (4:16-18; NAS)

Paul tells his readers that their kinship to Abraham has historical roots, predicted by God in scripture. He explains to the reader that, though she may not be by blood related to Abraham, she is nonetheless part of his family, because history and scripture say so.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 76.

¹¹² Ibid., 42.

Another discursive practice is a genealogy.¹¹³ In a world in which self-definition was determined by genealogy, Paul's claim that Gentiles are legitimate descendants of Abraham is highly significant.¹¹⁴ When a genealogical lineage was constructed in writing, it was common to use prepositions like ἐκ,¹¹⁵ or ἐν. The former preposition was common in the context of kinship, and could describe or connote lineage, from ancestor to descendant. Children come "out of" their father's seed, or "out of" their mother's womb. This grammatical construction is common in literature outside of Paul, including the LXX, Josephus, and Greek philosophy. Paul describes his own lineage as one who is "born of the lineage of Israel" (ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ; Phi 3:5). Christ's lineage is "from David" (ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ; Rom 1:3), and Christ comes from the Israelites (ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς; Rom 9:5).

The latter preposition functioned similarly. There is a range of translational possibilities for ἐν, but in the context of genealogy it is properly translated as "in." Being in an ancestor is not all that different than being out of an ancestor, and is also common in Greek, Roman, and Jewish texts. Like ἐκ, ἐν in the context of genealogy was a means of defining identity and kinship, and implied that the progeny shared the traits of the ancestor.¹¹⁶ For example, in Genesis God promises Abraham that "all Gentiles will be

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 203.

¹¹⁵ Hodge, *Sons*, 80-82.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 49-50. This way of thinking of ancestry is common in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 22:17-18; 26:4; 28:13-14)

blessed in you” (Gen 22:18).¹¹⁷ In Gal 3:8 Paul quotes that promise and thus forms the foundation of his argument: the Gentiles are “in Abraham” because descendants are “in” ancestors.¹¹⁸ And descendants share characteristics of the ancestor. Thus, Paul’s readers in Galatia should think of themselves as in Abraham (Gal 3:8; cf. Rom 9:7), and as heirs to the promise to Abraham: “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Gal 3:29)¹¹⁹ Being in Christ is similar to being in Abraham, but Christ should not be thought of as an ancestor; he is a same-generation brother.¹²⁰ Being in Christ also means sharing the same parents, and it implies to members of Paul’s churches the need to care for one another as if they were blood siblings.¹²¹ Gentile believers are not the seed of Christ, but they take a critical aspect of “Christness:” *pneuma*. Paul sees himself as in Christ (Gal 1:16; cf. 2:16, 20).¹²² Being in Christ is obtained via baptism, where the baptized believer is transformed and

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 97-100.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 100.

¹¹⁹ Buell and Hodge, "The Politics of Interpretation," 246. Philip Esler calls Abraham a “prototype,” or a person who typifies the group he represents. A prototype is the “image of an ideal person who embodies its character.” Philp F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of the Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 172. Those who believe share in Abraham’s blessing (Rom 4:13, 16; Gal 3:7, 9, 14, 16), and are considered his descendants (Rom 4:12-13, 16-17; Gal 3:7)

¹²⁰ Hodge, *Sons*, 109. Paul uses a variety of metaphors to connect people to Christ. For example, clothing metaphors (putting on the clothing of Christ/God; Rom 13:14; 2 Cor 5:2; Gal 3:27; Eph 6:11, 14; 1 Thes 5:8; cf. Rom 13:12; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10) signified a manner of dress. The “body of Christ” is at times used by Paul as a designation for the church. In some Greco-Roman literature contemporary to Paul, *σῶμα* is a metaphor for the state, with Caesar as the head; thus “body” in Paul’s thought was a “metaphor for civic and political unifying identity, with strong nuances of allegiance.” J. Daniel J. Daniel Hays, "Paul and the Multi-Ethnic First Century World: Ethnicity and Christian Identity," in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology, and Practice*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 86.

¹²¹ Birge, *The Language of Belonging*, 143.

¹²² Caroline Johnson Hodge, "Apostle to the Gentiles: Constructions of Paul's Identity," *BI* 13.3 (2005): 275f.

participates fully in the body of Christ (Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27; cf. 1 Cor 10:2).¹²³

In sum, in keeping with traditions in his time, Paul constructed kinship between groups of people by using familial terms, rituals like baptism, appealing to a common cohesiveness of a church body, and by using discursive discourses like history and genealogy. The last of these was done via the use of two prepositions that connected ancestor and descendant, who shared traits passed on by the ancestor. Most of these kinship development techniques explicitly tied Abraham to Jews, and Abraham to Gentile followers of Christ. As Abraham's faith lead to his own righteousness, so it is with Gentiles. As Abraham was the recipient of God's covenant, so it is with Gentiles, because they are members of his family. Abraham is a corporate figure in Paul, and his traits are assumed to be inherited by his descendants, even non-blood related Gentiles.

Paul's portrayal of Adam does not fit this pattern. Adam is mentioned in Rom 5:12-21, where the origins of sin and death, as well as the Christ response to sin and death, are explained. The legacy of sin and death, which started with Adam, is defeated by the legacy of Christ. Adam is an anti-type to Christ; his purpose is to explain the entry of sin and death in the world, so that Paul can then explain the gift of righteousness. The actions of two men, which have affected the whole world, are Paul's main concern.

Adam is the first cause of sin, which has spread to all of humanity. The human race is under the umbrella of sin; one might say all people have solidarity in sin. Paul's view of sin is "collective" in that sin has tyrannical power over all people. It is also

¹²³ Paul is not just declaring unity in Christ and the creation of an inclusive community. He is announcing that believers are a new ethnicity, and that their principal identity has changed. Hays, "Paul and the Multi-Ethnic First Century World: Ethnicity and Christian Identity," 84.

collective in the sense that it came from one ancestor. However, *how* the legacy of sin was passed from Adam to the human race, “Paul does not explain.”¹²⁴ Too often scholars explain the spread of sin (and death) on the basis that Adam is a corporate figure, in whom all people participate. However, we should not assume that because all people are under the tyranny of sin, and because Adam is the first cause of sin, that all people are in solidarity with Adam. Again, what Paul does *not* say in Rom 5 is telling: he is explicit that the actions of Adam have affected the whole human world, but he does not say that Adam represents the whole human world.

One way to demonstrate this is to compare how Paul speaks of Adam, and how he speaks of Abraham and Christ. Paul does not use familial language when he speaks of Adam in Rom 5; he does not make patrilineal references to Adam as he does elsewhere with Abraham. Adam is not a father, an ancestor, or a progenitor, as Abraham is. Nor does Paul describe the human race as children, heirs, or descendants of Adam, as he does with Abraham. People do not come “out of” Adam. Paul seems to deliberately terminate the genealogy of Jews and Gentile believers at Abraham, who is “the father of all of us” (Rom 4:16). On the basis of the complete lack of kinship language, Adam does not seem to be connected to anyone; his actions have affected everyone, but he does not seem to be a corporate figure in whom people participate.

One of the assumptions about the concept of corporate solidarity is that characteristics of the ancestor are passed to the heirs. As we have seen, this is true for Abraham, whose faithfulness is inherited by his descendants, even non-blood related Gentiles. While Christ is not an ancestor, his faithfulness too is inherited by those in

¹²⁴ Byrne, *Romans*, 176.

Christ. But a corporate person must have qualities to pass down. Abraham had faithfulness, and so does Christ; their “corporateness” allow for the transfer of characteristics from themselves to members of their body or family. But none of this is possible if the corporate figure does not have known qualities to pass down.

Adam has no traits at all in Rom 5. Paul says nothing about Adam, except for what he did. Abraham is a man of faith, obedience, and is declared righteous by God. If Adam was thought by Paul to have passed on his darker qualities to members of his corporate body, Paul omitted an account of those qualities. Again, Rom 5:12-21 is focused on what Adam did, not what kind of person he was. Paul does not say, (or even hint): “Adam your father was sinful and condemned, and so are you, his children.”

Adam is mentioned again in 1 Cor 15. Paul explains the historical reality of Christ’s resurrection, and how the resurrection of Christ is critical to the gospel (vv.1-20). Following this argument, Paul speaks again of the advent of death, echoing Rom 5: “For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being. For as in Adam all (πάντες) die, so also in Christ all (πάντες) shall be made alive (vv.21-22).” Many scholars see Adam as a corporate figure in this passage. William Hendriksen’s interpretation of the role of Adam in v.22 represents well the traditional view. He claims that scripture does not view people atomistically, like grains of sand on the beach. Thus, 1 Cor 15:22 when read with Rom 5:15 (“By reason of the trespass of the one many died”), indicates that the entire human race was included in Adam; his sin and death ruined the entire human race.¹²⁵ However, this view is not

¹²⁵ Hendriksen, *Romans*, 178. See also Clarence Tucker Craig and John Short, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1953),

supportable, because “all” in v.22 does not refer to all people, it refers to all things. Adam is not the corporate figure of the human race; he is a rhetorical figure who represents the beginning of the age of death.

In the subsequent verses Paul describes the end, when Christ delivers up the kingdom of God to the Father, having abolished all enemies of God. In verses 27-28 “all things” (πάντα) will be put in subjection under the feet of Christ is an allusion to Psalm 8, where the psalmist says that God has placed all things under the feet of the son of man (Ps 8:6). Those things are sheep, oxen, the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea (vv.7-8). All things in subjection in the psalm are not people, they are mortal creatures of all kinds. In 1 Cor 15:22 “all” does not mean people either. Instead, all things are put into subjection under Christ, who then hands over all things to God, so that God may be “all in all” (πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν). This last reference to “all” reveals Paul’s cosmological orientation—“all” means everything, literally--the entire created world. Verses 21-28 are together a reference to the beginning of the age of death, and the end of the age of death, where all things die, and all things will be subjected again to God. Πάντες throughout the passage refers consistently to the same idea: the entire world, which God made subject to death. “All die in Adam” does not mean that Adam was a corporate figure, it means that he marks the beginning of the current age of physical death.

234f. Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians*, NBC (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1999), 332f. Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 298. Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, SHBC (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 2009), 404f.

This conclusion is supported by the fact that twice when Paul speaks of Adam (the present text and Rom 5), he also speaks of Christ, using typology, a rhetorical device he uses with some regularity. Biblical typologies are predictable—“they always take a person or an event and, by a selective retelling, highlight some point or points that the author want to make to readers.”¹²⁶ The Adam-Christ typology is not an attempt at history, nor is an attempt to make Adam a corporate figure. Instead, Paul’s emphasis is the benefits of solidarity in Christ; the overall point in v.22 is that the age of death marked by Adam is overcome by Christ.

In closing, one path toward the conclusion that all people will be inevitably punished by God rests on the claim that Adam is a corporate figure. But Paul does not describe him that way at all. The passages where arguments for Adam’s corporate nature belie the assumption, and overlook Adam’s real purpose: to be an anti-type to Christ, and to introduce the idea that believers have solidarity in Christ. Believers are in Christ because of what he did and who he was, but we go too far to think that people have solidarity in Adam, even if Adam and Christ are mentioned together. We stretch the Adam-Christ typology beyond what Paul intended if we look past what Adam did. The effects of Adam’s actions, and the effects of Christ’s actions are the focus in Rom 5 and 1 Cor 15. Christ and Abraham are corporate figures, but Adam is not.

Divine Punishment in Paul

Some people will be punished by God in Paul’s thought. That is beyond debate. However, as in the Hebrew Bible, punishment in Paul is virtually always contextualized;

¹²⁶ J. Paul Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 981.

it is a response to particular behavior. Punishment from God is not inevitable; it is not universal or cosmic in scope. It is earned. One must do certain things to be punished. This will be demonstrated by appealing to simple logic, and by applying that logic to Paul's thought. Consider two statements:

- All people will be punished, except for believers in Christ.
- Believers in Christ will be spared punishment.

In a casual experiment, I presented these statements to friends of mine and asked them if they communicate the same idea. To my surprise, my friends said yes, they are the same. Everyone is due punishment, and the only way out of it is via salvation in Christ. (None of the people I asked are Christian, so they approach the logic independent of Christian doctrine). My friends are smart people, and they are wrong. The statements do not represent the same concept, because they delineate two different sets of people. In the first, which reflects the traditional view of the human condition, only believers in Christ will be spared punishment. Punishment is inevitable for all, except Christ followers. In the second, logically speaking, other groups of people beyond Christ believers can be spared punishment. The second statement allows for the possibility that pious non-believers will be spared punishment, like Jews for example. Just because believers are spared punishment does not mean all other people will get punished. Analogously, just because some survivors of a shipwreck have life preservers, and will not drown, does not mean everyone else will drown. There might be some strong swimmers in the group. The reader may accuse me of nitpicking, but the logical distinction between the two

statements is critical. Paul's views of punishment are more in line with the latter statement, not the former. Punishment is not inevitable.

Let us recall again the two statements above. In one punishment is inevitable, in the other it is not. My position is that punishment is not inevitable; it is earned by doing certain things. One way to demonstrate this is by comparing how Paul thinks of punishment to how other New Testament writers think of it. Exclusion from the Kingdom of God is one form of punishment common to Paul and other New Testament writers.¹²⁷

Consider the following passage from Matthew:

Enter (the kingdom of heaven) through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter by it. But the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. (Matt 7:13-14; NAS)

This Jesus saying implies that the path to life and to the kingdom of heaven is only found by a few, and that destruction is the default destination for all people. Divine punishment is inevitable; only the saved are allowed into the kingdom and are spared destruction. Matthew does not qualify who is "out," he qualifies who is "in." Elsewhere in Matthew, Jesus says that to gain entry into the kingdom of God one must be more righteous than scribes and Pharisees (6:33), and only the ones who do the will of the Father will enter (7:21). In Mark, the path to the kingdom of God is as narrow as it is in Matthew. Only those who receive the kingdom as a small child will enter it (10:15; Luke 18:17); a camel can sooner pass through the eye of a needle than a wealthy person can enter. (10:24-25).

¹²⁷ I acknowledge that Paul's conception of the kingdom is not identical to that of other New Testament writers, however, I consider them equivalent in that they are visions of an ultimate state of existence in the presence of God. Exclusion from the kingdom of God in all the New Testament is undesirable, and I consider it punishment.

The story appears in Luke 13:23-30, where “evildoers” (ἐργάται ἀδικίας) are shut out of the kingdom of God. Unlike Matthew, Luke qualifies who is out, not who is in; punishment is not inevitable as it is in Matthew and Mark. In the fourth gospel, only people who have been born from water and Spirit can enter (John 3:3-5). In James only the rich in faith are allowed into the kingdom (2:5). Finally, in 2 Peter, the kingdom of God is accessible only to those who confirm their call and election (1:10-11). In sum, with the exception of Luke, other New Testament writers qualify who gets into the kingdom of God, not who is denied entry. Luke’s account aside, a person must do one thing or another to get in; the rest are out.

Paul’s way of thinking of entry into the kingdom of God is unlike that of other New Testament writers.¹²⁸ He often describes entry into the kingdom of God in terms of *not doing* certain things, such as here:¹²⁹

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6:9-10)

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did

¹²⁸ Stephen Westerholm implies that no one can enter the Kingdom of God, except the saved. People are perishing because their deeds merit perdition: the “unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9; cf. 2 Cor 6:14). To those otherwise perishing, Paul brings a gospel of salvation from sin and its condemnation for all who believe the gospel message. Westerholm, “Justification by Faith Is the Answer: What Is the Question?,” 204

¹²⁹ See also 1 Cor 15:50; 2 Cor 1.21-22; 1 Thes 2.10-12. Stettler finds that the sins that exclude a person from the KOG are those that oppose the commandment to love one’s neighbor, particularly specific sins that violate certain commandments of the Torah, and those sins which oppose the love of YHWH. Stettler, “Paul, the Law and Judgment by Works,” 198-200.

before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19-21)

Luke says simply that evildoers are excluded from the kingdom of God.. In Matthew, Mark, John, James, and 2 Peter, exclusion from the kingdom is inevitable; only the saved are allowed in. Thus, for many New Testament writers, exclusion is the rule, and inclusion is the exception. However, as the above passages demonstrate, in Paul exclusion from the kingdom of God is not inherent at all—it is “earned” by doing the most heinous sins. Unless Paul thinks that every single human being ever born is sexually immoral, or an idolater, or a prostitute, then Paul must think that only those people who do particularly wicked sins are out of the kingdom of God. Thus, denied entry into the dominion of God is earned.

Being handed over is another form of punishment found in Paul.¹³⁰ In the opening of Romans, Paul talks about a group of people who some time ago had a falling out with God, as they committed a series of grave sins. Consequently God handed them over from his own authority to the authority of their own passions and lusts. In effect, the relationship between God and the people was completely severed. The severing of the relationship is expressed in three waves, the second of which is illustrative: “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to their

¹³⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans Volume 1: Justification by Faith 1-4* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 178. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 62f. Moo, *Romans*, 110f.

There is wide attestation to being handed over in the New Testament outside of Paul; however, God is rarely the subject. Christ is handed over to be crucified, and Christ is handed over by Judas. All things are handed over to Jesus by the Father in Matt 11.27 and Luke 10:22. When the devil tempts Jesus he claims that all things have been handed over to him. (Luke 4:6).

disgraceful passions.” (Rom 1:25-26) The way Paul describes those who were handed over (Rom 1:18-32) is reminiscent of the way he describes those who are denied entry into the kingdom of God. There are specific and particularly grave sins that caused God to hand people over. Paul defines a group of people who were punished with respect to their behavior, listing the vices and sins that people did: idolatry, sexual sins, greed, murder and so on. But not all people in Paul’s world were sinners of this caliber. Again, what Paul does not say about being handed over is highly relevant. He does not say: “God handed all people over.” Instead, he is clear that God handed over some people, and those people are explicitly defined by what they did. Being handed over was avoidable and therefore could not have been inevitable.

The most serious divine punishment is wrath, which is usually associated with the Day of the Lord. According to some scholars, when the *ὀργή* of God is unleashed on the last day there is no hope for salvation from it, outside of faith in Christ.¹³¹ “At the

¹³¹ There is a debate about the nature of divine wrath. Käsemann observes that wrath in Paul’s thought should not be considered purely emotional. Divine anger does not derive from Greek thought, but from Jewish apocalypticism, where wrath is often eschatological; judgment day is often called the day of wrath. Käsemann, *Romans*, 37. Leander E. Keck, *Romans*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 59. Matera, *Romans*, 47-55. Ridderbos posits that the wrath of God is not an “unbridled and normless exercise of vengeance,” as heathen gods are sometimes known for, but a definite response to wickedness, determined by and originating from God’s holiness. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 108. On the view that wrath in Paul is a response to wickedness, see also Jean Noel Aletti, *God’s Justice in Romans: Keys for Interpreting the Epistle to the Romans* (Rome: Gregorian and Biblical, 2010), 63, 68-70. Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 148-51. Andrew T. Lincoln, “From Wrath to Justification: Tradition, Gospel, and Audience in the Theology of Romans 1:18-4:25,” in *Pauline Theology, Volume III: Romans*, ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). Philip C. Smith, “God’s New Covenant Faithfulness in Romans,” *RQ* 50 (2008): 35. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Westminster: John Knox, 1994). For Dunn, divine wrath in Paul is manifested by a reaction to rebellious humanity, who is on a downward, degenerative trajectory. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 55. Dunn’s critics, including Moo, argue that Dunn’s view is more in line with Greek philosophical notions of an abstract, impersonal, dispassionate god. Moo, *Romans*, 99. Morris, also rejecting Dunn, acknowledges that human wrath most often denotes passion and anger, “characterized by the loss of self-control.” But divine wrath, aroused by the wickedness of humanity, “expresses the settled and active opposition of God’s holy nature to everything that is evil.” Morris, *Romans*, 76-77. See also Fretheim, “Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God,” 11. Crockett

judgment God's wrath will cease only for those who have faith in Christ."¹³² The necessity of the gospel lies in the reality that humans are unrighteous and are due the wrath of God.¹³³ Indeed, the Reformed model of justification is codependent with wrath. The unbridled anger of God is inevitable for all people; it is the peril from which one is saved.

I argue that wrath is not inevitable in Paul's thought. This point can be proven by once again comparing Paul to other New Testament writers. As with aforementioned modes of punishment, Paul's views of who gets wrath differ sharply from other New Testament writers. In Luke's gospel, John the Baptist went around the region of the Jordan proclaiming baptism of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, and the coming wrath of God, saying:

You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And also the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Luke 3: 7-9; Matt 3:7-10; NAS)

The author of this passage has John the Baptist warning of the wrath to come, and implies that all people are destined for destruction by fire, except those who bear good fruit. The wrath of God goes out to all people. Similarly, in the gospel of John, all people will see

concludes that in Paul's letters, the wrath of God is not reformative, especially on Judgment Day. Indeed, the wrath of God on the Last Day endures forever, even though Paul does not say that it does. W. V. Crockett, "Wrath That Endures Forever," *JETS* 34.2 (1991): 196.

¹³² Ridderbos, *Paul*, 110f. Crockett, "Wrath That Endures Forever," 199. Ashmon, "The Wrath of God: A Biblical Overview."

¹³³ Westerholm, "Justification by Faith Is the Answer: What Is the Question?," 214.

wrath, except believers: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disbelieves the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (3:36). Wrath in the apocalypse of John is global and more—even the heavens are impacted. God’s anger goes out to the entire earth, causing earthquakes and heavenly catastrophes. Seeing God’s wrath against the world, people hide in caves to escape, wishing that the rocks and mountains would fall on themselves. They lament, “hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev 6:16-17). Indeed, nothing and no one is spared the wrath of God (16:1- 21).

Paul does not describe who will experience wrath that way. It is not inevitable. In fact, the closest he comes to describing universal wrath is in 1 Thessalonians, when he assures his readers that Jesus “delivers believers from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; cf Rom 5:9). This comment might be taken to mean that wrath is inevitable. However, the context of the letter suggests that not all human beings will suffer wrath.

One of the main features of the letter is to encourage his brethren in Thessalonica to persevere through oppression. He encourages his readers to endure by assuring them that they will be spared wrath, while their oppressors will not be spared wrath. In essence he is saying: “They will get their just reward, and you will get yours.” The thrust of the letter is encouragement in the present, in spite of troubles that are happening in the present. Future wrath is not the main theme—it is secondary at best, a rhetorical device that confers Paul’s message: “you believers are doing the right thing.”

Paul begins the letter by recollecting his own suffering and hard work for the gospel, comparing the suffering of the Thessalonians to the suffering of the churches in Judea: the Jews in Judea killed Jesus and the prophets, and the oppressors in Thessalonica have caused hardship to the believers there. Paul defines groups of people by describing what people in the groups do. The Jews oppressed Christ and the prophets, and the oppressors in Thessalonica caused the church members there to suffer. Consequently, the oppressors are displeasing to God, and hostile to men, “But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.” (2:16). Thus, wrath is directed to groups of people who do bad things--the Jews in Judea, and the oppressors in Thessalonica. In chapter 5, Paul again tells of wrath and destruction in a discourse about the day of the Lord: “For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:9) But who will feel the wrath of God? Is it the whole world, as in John’s apocalypse? It is not the whole world; it is the people who are causing the believers in Thessalonica to suffer. Paul affirms this 5:3: “While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” But who are “they”? The context of the statement suggests that “they” are the opponents of the faithful in Thessalonica, because Paul has been setting the faithful in Thessalonica against those who have oppressed them throughout the epistle. Wrath is directed at the oppressors, not at the whole world. Thus, wrath and destruction on the persecutors is Paul’s way of doing theodicy: “You faithful will get your reward on the day of the Lord, and your enemies will get theirs.” Wrath is retribution for the pain and

suffering that “they” have been causing, and it is directed at a particular group of people. Wrath is local, not global.

Paul speaks of wrath in Rom 9: “What if God, although willing to demonstrate his wrath and to make his power known, instead endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?” (v.22) At first glance, a reader might take Paul to mean that people are pre-destined for wrath; they are inevitably condemned to divine punishment. To be sure, some scholars read the passage that way. God’s judgment on the unsaved is inescapable, and is already executed.¹³⁴ The impenitent will be shown no mercy, and only the saved will be spared wrath.¹³⁵ Punishment is inevitable.¹³⁶ I disagree. Here as elsewhere wrath is directed at some people, not all people; it is not universal and it is not inevitable.

The above statement in v.22 follows a history of Israel’s election (9:1-18), which is in a larger discourse about God’s sovereignty, God’s promises, and the current status of Israel, given its failure to recognize the Christ event as Paul has. (Rom 9-11) The relevant question here is: Is wrath in v.22 inevitable for all people? One way to answer that question is to determine who the vessels of wrath are, and why they are the target of wrath. In agreement with most commentators, I take the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy to be instruments for God's purpose, which are used by God to make something

¹³⁴ Käsemann, *Romans*, 270.

¹³⁵ Hendriksen, *Romans*, 328f.

¹³⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 608.

known--either the wrath of God or the full glory and mercy of God.¹³⁷ I also take it for granted that the vessels of mercy and the vessels of wrath are two distinct groups of people.

There are reasons to think that the vessels of mercy are Gentiles. One is that later in Romans Paul says that the Gentiles are the object of God's mercy. (Rom 15:9) Additionally, Paul in Rom 9:25-27 takes several texts from the LXX, where God's mercy is on the Gentiles:

As he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"

"And in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God."

And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel were like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved. (Rom 9:25-27)

The object of God's mercy in these three LXX texts is consistently *not* the Israelites. In the first two, the writers are implying that God can call into his own people that are "not God's people," meaning God can call and have mercy on people other than Israelites. God can have mercy on Gentiles. In the Isaiah passage the writer implies that not all Israelites will be saved, and Paul's allusion to it indicates that he thinks not all Israel will be saved. Rom 10:1, 21 affirm this as well: "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their (the Israelites) salvation. (10:1) . . . But as for Israel he says, "All the day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

¹³⁷ A. T. Hansen, "Vessels of Wrath or Instruments of Wrath? Romans IX. 22-3" *Journal of Theological Studies*, 32.2, 1981, 433-443.

(10:21) Verses 9:25-27, and the two quoted above altogether point in the same direction: God's mercy is not limited to all Israelites, and God can discipline his own people, the Israelites. Paul reiterates this again in v.30, saying that Gentiles have attained righteousness via faith, while Israel has stumbled to attain righteousness via the Law. I conclude that the objects of mercy and blessing in Rom 9:22 are Gentiles who have come to faith, and the vessels of wrath are Jews in Paul's time who have not come to faith in Christ. Therefore, the objects of wrath are a fraction of the whole population, which means that wrath is not directed at all people. The anger of God is directed at some people, in a particular place and time. Wrath is contextualized.

But wrath may not be inevitable, even for Paul's fellow non-believing Jews. The statement in 9:22 begins with "What if?" (εἰ δὲ); it is a question that asks the reader to consider a hypothetical situation. Paul is not being definitive; he is not saying unequivocally that non-believing Jews are destined for wrath. And the "what if" question directs the reader to a larger point anyway, namely that God is merciful on whom God wants to be merciful. Paul is in effect suggesting that God's wrath, while it may be deserved, is on hold because God has mercy on his people. The predominance of patience and mercy over wrath in the potter/clay metaphor (v.21) and elsewhere in the chapter point toward Paul's conclusion in 11:1-2, which is that God will never abandon Israel.¹³⁸ Thus, wrath in Rom 9:22 is neither global nor inevitable. At worst, it might happen, but only for a relatively small number of people.

¹³⁸ Jewett, *Romans*, 596.

Punishment in Paul: Conclusions

It is remarkable to me what Paul is supposed to have said, but did not. And the stakes could not be higher! At least for those who practice Christianity, and for those who study Paul for a living. How we understand the basic human problem determines virtually everything else that has any relevance in Paul—Christology, theology, grace, etc. If the human condition means that the essential problem is punishment from God, then it makes perfect sense that salvation should be from punishment. It makes perfect sense that Christ did away with punishment, somehow. But if punishment is not inevitable, if it can be assiduously avoided, if it is not imputed from Adam, then it is impossible that punishment is the peril from which one is saved, assuming all people are saved from the same thing. We have found that Paul does not think of all people as deserving punishment. Some will be punished, and some will not be punished. If punishment is not the peril, then what is the peril? In the next chapter it will be shown that the real, universal peril from which one is saved is alienation from God, which is moral death.

Chapter Two: Death in Paul

Death in Paul, an Introduction

The purpose of the previous chapter is to challenge the view that divine punishment is the primary peril from which one is saved. Having eliminated divine punishment as a peril, what are other possibilities? Supposedly, physical death is an option, as it is universal, problematic, and is punishment for sin. The long and widely held view in Pauline studies claims that human beings were created immortal, but have been punished with physical death for sin. When Paul says in Rom 1, for example, “Those who do such things (grave sins) deserve to die” (v.32), or elsewhere in Romans “The wages of sin is death” (6.23), he means that physical death is the punishment for sin. People die physically because of sin.

I disagree with this view. I will show that when Paul speaks of physical death, sin is not the cause. Sin and physical death have no relationship whatsoever. But the purpose of this chapter is not to simply disprove the supposed connection between sin and physical death. Instead, the goal is to demonstrate that “death” in Paul often means something other than physical death. It can mean moral death, where a person is alive yet morally dead, living apart from God. Moral death, not physical death, is caused by sin. Scholars have either confused or conflated physical death and moral death, and in so

doing have missed the peril from which people are saved. In other words, claiming that sin is punished with physical death obscures the real human problem, which is moral death. Therefore, disproving the supposed connection between sin and death is a means to an end—by looking closely at “death” in Paul, we will see that physical death is not the consequence of sin, and that moral death is. We will also see that moral death signifies broken relationship with God. It is the primary peril from which one is saved.

To prove my thesis, I begin by showing that sin and physical death are not mutually dependent in pre-Pauline literature. The Christian claim that immortality was lost in Eden, and that Adam’s transgression brought the penalty of death are simply not present in the literature. However, in the wisdom tradition, sin can lead to “death,” but only moral death, and not physical death. Death that is caused by sin marks a way of living apart from God.

Death in the Pentateuch

.There is one kind of death in the Pentateuch: biological death. Physical death was not regarded as a problem, or as an evil that violated the world or human race. Death was accepted, alongside all the delights and disappointments of life.¹³⁹ It was acknowledged that people were created mortal--subject to death-- just like all other living things. The

¹³⁹ Michael G. Wensing, *Death and Destiny in the Bible* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical, 1993), 17-22. Ben Ollenburger suggests that "death happens (in Israelite tradition)," meaning everyone must die. Ben C. Ollenburger, "If Mortals Die, Will They Live Again? The Old Testament and Resurrection," *Ex Auditu* 9 (1993): 33. See also George E. Mendenhall, "From Witchcraft to Justice: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament," in *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*, ed. Hiroshi Obayashi (New York: Greenwood, 1992), 68-70; Black, "Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5-8," 414f. Dan Mathewson, *Death and Survival in the Book of Job: Desymbolization and Traumatic Experience* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 8-14.

Pentateuch is silent on the loss of or yearning for immortality. Everyone dies, and while the death of loved ones was unpleasant, it was expected. Death was not the result of a theological crisis—that people are mortal and subject to death has no relationship to sinfulness. The pious and the wicked all die.

Of course, sin sometimes leads to death. However, not every sin leads to death, and not every death is caused by sin. Further, sin by itself cannot cause death. As an illustration, Gen 18-19 tells us that the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah was so great and the sins of the people so grievous that the Lord considered wiping out both cities, which he did, even after Abraham's bold attempt to save the righteous from God's wrath (Gen 18:23-33). When Moses stood before the Lord on Mount Sinai and received the Torah, the Israelites cast off their gold jewelry and made and worshipped a golden calf. Understandably angry, having just delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, the Lord set out to strike down his people, until Moses talked him out of it. However, the Lord promised Moses: "When the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." Not long afterward the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did (Exod 32:34-35). David angered the Lord when he commanded Joab to make a census of the people of Israel, and was punished with three days of the sword of the Lord. Seventy thousand men of Israel died. (1 Chron 21:1-17).

These examples show that sin can lead to death. But sin alone does not cause death—God does. People who sin can set into motion events that eventually culminate in their own death, but God is always the cause of death in those cases. The cause and effect

relationship between grave sin and the penalty of death is perhaps clearest in Lev 26, which the following passage exemplifies:¹⁴⁰

But if, despite this, you disobey me, and continue hostile to me, I will continue hostile to you in fury; I in turn will punish you myself sevenfold for your sins. You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars; I will heap your carcasses on the carcasses of your idols. I will abhor you. I will lay your cities waste, will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odors. I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it. (Lev 26:27-32; NRS)

The above segment is part of a lengthy monologue by the Lord, which is a series of conditional statements about behavior and consequences. In the beginning of the chapter, God says that if Israel keeps his commandments, she will be blessed. The present passage is also a conditional statement that warns of death for certain behaviors, all of which are avoidable. The point is that sometimes God reacts in anger to sin, and he strikes down sinners with death. So, sin sometimes causes death. However, not every sin is punished with death, and not every death is caused by sin. Bad sinners can hasten their death, and bring wrath and despair to the nation of Israel, but all people die whether they sin or not.

Many Pauline scholars do not see it that way. They instead see in the opening scene of the Pentateuch the origins of physical death. Eve and Adam disobeyed, and brought the penalty of physical death on themselves and on their progeny. Pauline scholars who read the Eden narrative this way tend to read Rom 5 (and others) similarly. They read Rom 5 and Gen 2-3 synoptically, seeing in Paul what they see in Genesis—and they assume that Paul reads Gen 2-3 as they do. Therefore, I will demonstrate that the

¹⁴⁰ The Lord makes similar threats of severe punishment when he makes his covenant with David (2 Sam 7:14). The prophets abound with punishment predictions, many of which come to pass (Isa 13:11; 26:2; Jer 9:25; 11:22; Hos 1:4; 4:9, 14; etc.).

traditional interpretation of the Eden narrative, where the first couple and their progeny were punished with physical death, is not the inevitable interpretation of the story.

Indeed, that interpretation is not at all plausible.

The tragic story of the so-called “Fall of Man” is told in Gen 2-3. After the Lord created the world and Adam (the second time) he placed him in the garden and said to him: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen 2:16-17) Shortly thereafter, Eve had a conversation with the serpent, she ate the fruit, and gave her husband some as well. Their eyes were opened. Realizing that they were naked, they hid from the Lord, who soon thereafter banished them from the garden, but not before the so-called “curse speech,” in which he said to the man: “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Gen 3:19) Thus, Eve and Adam chose their own will over that of the Creator and permanently destroyed the harmony between God and humanity. Expulsion from Paradise soon followed, and humanity began its inevitable march toward physical and moral decay, and death. They were punished with death and lost immortality forever. This interpretation of the Fall and the origins of death has a long history,¹⁴¹ and is held by many scholars today.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ E.g., *City of God* 13.3 (NPNF¹ 2:394).

¹⁴² Indeed, argues R. Gonzales, biological death is a “part of Yahweh’s *punitive sentence* (emphasis original) on humanity.” Robert R. Gonzales, *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in the Book of Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 50. See also John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 83; Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 70; Michael Maher, *Genesis* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1982), 47. Cf. John C. L. Gibson, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1981), 138.

This view suffers from several exegetical inconsistencies. The first is that God's emphatic warning that they would die on that day simply does not happen.¹⁴³ From a literary perspective, this throws a wrench in the consistency of the story. How could the same god who speaks the cosmos into existence fail to execute the first directive he ever gave to humanity? His first command is either a bluff or he forgot about it.¹⁴⁴ But, if we accept the story as it is, it must be acknowledged that they did not die on that day, as God promised. Therefore they could not have been punished with death.

Second, Adam was made of stuff that does not last forever, so he could not have been immortal. God made Adam from earth, a perishable substance.¹⁴⁵ Adam was called

¹⁴³ This flaw in the story has produced supporting arguments, but they are not convincing. Kenneth Matthews claims: "God did not execute the penalty (of death) by taking Adam's life but by banning him from the rejuvenating power of the tree of life (3:22). Though not excommunicated from the divine presence (4:1-2), Adam's expulsion from the garden sealed his doom and that of all who followed. Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, NAC (Nashville: B & H, 1996), 254. Similarly, argues Merrill Unger: "The aging process, eventuating in physical death, began and was passed on to the entire race (Gen 3:19; Rom 5:12-20). Spiritual death (alienation from God) and eternal death were also implied in the Adamic Covenant (2:17; Rev 20:11-15), calling forth the promise of the coming Redeemer." Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume I Genesis -- Song of Solomon* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 19. John Townsend claims that eating the fruit made the first couple unclean, citing parallels in Leviticus for cleanliness requirements and "do not touch" commands (Lev 11:24-28). Because they corrupted themselves with food from aliens and demons, and more importantly, because the willful act of eating was conscious revolt against God; "the death penalty would certainly be expected," in accordance with Levitical law (Lev 20:22-26). Townsend's argument, however, suffers from the fact (which he brings to the reader's attention early in the essay) that no fruit or vegetable is known to be unclean in Israelite religion. John T. Townsend, "I Corinthians 3:15 and the School of Shammai," *HTR* 61(1968): 412. Cf. John E. Hartley, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 60.

¹⁴⁴ D. P. Wright maintains that the threat of death made in Gen 2:17 is not carried out because God repents, and seems to realize that if the "center of the deity's creation" (humans) is dead then the creation would come to an end. No one was there to replace the first couple, unlike when the Lord destroyed all of humanity in the Flood, save Noah and a handful of others. Wright concludes that the couple was never immortal in the first place. David P. Wright, "Holiness, Sex, and Death in the Garden of Eden," *Biblica* 77.3 (1996): 316-17.

¹⁴⁵ Lloyd R. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 36-39. See also Neil Gillman, "Judaic Doctrines of Death and Afterlife," in *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck, and William Scott Green (New York: Continuum, 1999). More on Adam speculation in Jewish and Rabbinic thought can be found in Larry Kreitzer, "Christ and Second Adam in Paul," *Communio Viatorum* 32.1-2 (1989): 55-101.

a “living creature” (2:7), as were the animals that God created (1:20, 24); thus people and animals were of the same substance, and both were subject to death from the beginning. This view of human mortality is echoed in most Hebrew Bible literature, and Rabbinic literature as well.¹⁴⁶

Third, the warning itself in 2.17 to “not eat lest you die” indicates that Adam was a mortal creature already. Warnings of death have no meaning to true immortals because they *cannot* die; true immortality means a person is not even subject to death. “Don’t look at the sun” is a warning that makes sense only for people who can see, people who have something to lose by looking at the sun. Blind people cannot lose their sight, and immortal creatures cannot lose their lives. The warning of death is a threat only to creatures that are subject to death.¹⁴⁷

Fourth, the question of immortality does not come into view until after the Fall. The Tree of Life may have given Eve and Adam immortality, but they were expelled from the garden before they could eat of the Tree of Life.¹⁴⁸ The key verse is 3:22, where God is concerned that Adam and Eve have become like “one of us” knowing good and

¹⁴⁶ For example, Rabbi Meir says that even death, created in Genesis 1, is good (*Genesis Rabbah*). The angel of death was also created on the first day according to *Tanhuma, Va-Yeshev* 4. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, 38f. Gillman suggests more possibilities: (citing Barr) that death was a trade for human consciousness. Or, that death is an allusion to the ancient deity *Mwt* found in Ugaritic mythology, where death is a power independent of the creator God of the Hebrew Bible. N. Gillman, “Judaic Doctrines of Death and Afterlife,” 196-212. Against the claim of lost immortality, see also Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer, 1997), 22.

¹⁴⁷ James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 1-16, 19. Westermann also claims that the command in Gen 2:16-17 is more a warning than a threat. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 224-25. Following closely to Westermann is Kolarcik, who concludes that Gen 2:17 is not a threat to immortality, but signals the advent of a new, hostile relationship between people and their world, and, perhaps most importantly, a disharmonious relationship between humanity and God. Michael Kolarcik, *The Ambiguity of Death in the Book of Wisdom 1-6*, ANBIB (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991), 143f.

¹⁴⁸ Otto Kaiser and Eduard Lohse, *Death and Life* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 22-23.

evil. God continues: “he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” (3:22) They lost the opportunity to become immortal, not immortality itself.¹⁴⁹

Fifth, Eve and Adam were not punished with anything, least of all death.¹⁵⁰ The only action that the Lord actually took *against* Eve and Adam was to expel them from the garden. The so called “curses speeches,” in which the Lord describes life outside paradise, are simply God’s way of saying what will happen next. The serpent is cursed, and so is the ground from which food is harvested, but the man and woman were not cursed by God. They were told what to expect. At worst, their penalty was expulsion from the garden. But, as Robert Sacks rightly argues, even ejection from Paradise cannot be viewed as punishment per se, because they were not removed for doing something wrong.¹⁵¹ They were not kicked out for disobedience, they were expelled because God realized they had “become as one of us,” and, if they should eat of the tree of life, they would live forever (2:22). That is why in v.23 the Lord God sent them out of the garden. They were not banished for what they had done, they were banished for what they might have become. They were not punished. Indeed, even after they ate and were banished from the garden, the Lord follows them out and makes clothing for them, signifying his

¹⁴⁹ Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation, Fall, and Flood: Studies in Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 72f; D. Stuart Briscoe, *Genesis, The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 66f; James McKeown, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 33.

¹⁵⁰ Life and death per se are not part of God’s so-called curse speech to Adam. “To the earth you shall return” (3:19) echoes 2:7 (“The Lord made Adam from the earth”), but the return to dust is presented as an inevitability, not as a consequence of the “commandment” in 2:17. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 83.

¹⁵¹ Robert D. Sacks, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 36f.

commitment to relationship with them, and making moot the command to not eat of the Tree of Knowledge.¹⁵²

In conclusion, we have seen that God in the Pentateuch at times punished people with death for sin, but the fact that people are subject to physical death is not viewed as a problem in and of itself. Human mortality is not related to sin. Further, in the Eden narrative we found that Eve and Adam could not have been punished with physical death because they were mortal to begin with. I conclude that in the Pentateuch, physical death has no connection to sin. Therefore, if we read Rom 5 and Gen 2-3 synoptically, we must acknowledge that a different reading of “death” in Rom 5 is possible. Adam did not bring physical death into the world in Gen 2-3; neither did he bring it into the world in Rom 5. But I am well ahead of my argument. To get to Paul’s views of death, we must first look at death in the wisdom tradition. In the next section we will begin to see a different kind of death, one that is caused by sin, and one that signifies a life apart from God.

Death in the Wisdom Tradition

In the wisdom tradition death takes on meanings that go beyond physical death. Death can mean both physical death, and moral death. Moral death is connected to sin, but physical death is not. “Death” is not restricted to the loss of physical vitality that animates the human body;¹⁵³ it can suggest a way of life apart from God. The wisdom writers, then, are in agreement with the pentateuchal writers on physical death, but they

¹⁵² Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1995), 40.

¹⁵³ James A. Loader, "Emptied Life: Death as the Reverse of Life in Ancient Israel," *OTE* 18.3 (2005).

nuance meanings of death with reflection that Wisdom commands. The result is a metaphorical meaning of death that reflects a certain way of life.

Jewish Wisdom was concerned primarily with “affirming a meaningful order in reality.”¹⁵⁴ The same Wisdom that gives order to the cosmos is available to the prudent person, and is “manifest in the prosperity and well-being both of the wise person and of the created order.”¹⁵⁵ A person who practices Wisdom should gain the promises implied by Wisdom; a person who practices foolishness should suffer the consequences. But the wisdom writers knew that life did not always work that way. Many things in life were unfair, so skeptical reflection characterizes much of the literature.¹⁵⁶ Some writers believed that certain aspects of death were unfair and incongruent with Wisdom, and they expressed anxiety about death, often in ways other Hebrew Bible writers did not.

For example, sometimes the pious died young, and the wicked lived way too long. Further, the departed were believed to be in an inescapable, permanent state from which there was no escape, an existence that precluded worship of or presence with God. Physical death meant the end of community with loved ones and with God.¹⁵⁷ This sad

¹⁵⁴ John J. Collins, "The Root of Immortality: Death in the Context of Jewish Wisdom," *HTR* 71.3-4 (1978): 177.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁵⁶ Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 26.

¹⁵⁷ Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, 44f; Gillman, "Judaic Doctrines of Death and Afterlife," 18-19, 197f. Earlier Hebrew texts considered a person to be an organic unity of soul and body; thus there is negligible evidence for a “spiritual” life after death, even if the dead continue to exist in Sheol. Wensing, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 12-13; "Afterlife," in *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder (Washington Square, New York: New York University, 1989); "Death," in *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder (Washington Square, New York: New York University Press, 1989); Chinitz argues against this view. God told Moses, “Behold, you are going to lie with your fathers” (Deut 31:16), but Moses was buried on the plains of Moab, far away from his ancestors. Chinitz

reality is evident in the Psalms, where the silence of death prohibits godly praise and worship: "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?" (Ps. 30:9; cf. Ps 6:5; 39:13-14; 49:6-13; 88:10; 115:17) The afterlife was indeed hopeless, because people "lie down and do not rise again" (Job 14: 7-9, 12).¹⁵⁸ And it was entirely unfair, as the good and the wicked all go to the same place. The wise person and the fool share the same destiny beyond this life.¹⁵⁹

What befalls the fool will befall me also; why then have I been so very wise? . . . For of the wise man as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been forgotten. How the wise man dies just like the fool!" (Qoh 2:15-16)

In response to these apprehensions, the Wisdom writers justified or made sense of physical death in creative ways. Early death for the wicked may have signified divine intent. The impious were forgotten after death. Premature death of the righteous was in

says that God was implying not burial, but a spiritually-endowed death" (cf. 1 King 2:10). Jacob Chinitz, "Death in the Bible," *JBQ* 32 (2004): 100. Daniel Cohn-Sherbock claims that "because Biblical Judaism stressed the importance of attaining a complete and blissful life with God during earthly life; there was no need to transfer the purpose of existence to the Hereafter." Daniel Cohn-Sherbock, "Death and Immortality in the Jewish Tradition," in *Death and Immortality in the Religions of the World*, ed. Paul and Linda Badham (New York: Paragon House, 1987), 24.

¹⁵⁸ Ollenburger, "If Mortals Die, Will They Live Again?," 34. See also on the hopelessness of the afterlife in Job, Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Book of Job* (New York: WW Norton, 1998), 181; Mathewson, *Death and Survival in the Book of Job: Desymbolization and Traumatic Experience*, 103f. Humans, being made of flesh are in the hands of God who gives nothing but pain. Edwin Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 241.

¹⁵⁹ Death is a given in Qoheleth, a certainty for all who live, and there is no life after death. See for example John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 54-56, 203; Graham S. Ogden, "Qoheleth IX 1-16," *Vetus Testamentum* 23.2 (1982): 161. Some post-exilic texts, remaining faithful to the promise that God would reward the righteous, hint at the possibility of resurrection or even life after death (Ezek 37; Dan 12:1-2; Isa 26:19). See also de Boer, *The Defeat of Death*, 45-51.

some texts a welcome release from social and religious oppression, and may even indicate divine intent (*Wis Sol* 3: 4-5).¹⁶⁰

The pain of death was softened by the belief in corporate personality, and the belief that a person lived on through his progeny or nation.¹⁶¹ Sheol was shadowy and dreary; nonetheless the “ancient Israelites viewed death as ‘gathering’ or ‘collecting’ people to their ancestors—literally placing them in the family tomb with previously deceased relatives.”¹⁶² It was believed that the departed were gathered unto their ancestors not unlike a family reunion.¹⁶³

The two most significant ways in which the wisdom writers re-evaluated death, and brought the reality of death in line with Wisdom, were to consider life after death, and to redefine death as a metaphor for unrighteous living. The Wisdom of Solomon is well known for introducing the former idea. Immortality is gained for those who practice Wisdom because *Wis Sol* draws from Greek Philosophy and Jewish Apocalypticism, where the immortality of the soul is a possibility (3:1-3; 5:15; 7:12-14).

Wis Sol also affirms the latter idea—people who turn from Wisdom are thought to be “dead,” even if they are still physically alive. The second chapter affirms this, and

¹⁶⁰ Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, 78-80. The righteous who live out their years can await death with confidence and peace and the hope for God’s blessing (*Sir* 1:13). Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism*, 121.

¹⁶¹ Lou H. Silberman, "Death in the Hebrew Bible and Apocalyptic Literature," in *Perspectives on Death*, ed. Liston O. Mills (New York: Abingdon, 1969), 19-20.

¹⁶² Clark-Soles, *Death and the Afterlife in the New Testament*, 12. The memory of the righteous lives on in the collective memory of Israel (*Sir* 37:25-26). Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism*, 122.

¹⁶³ Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 138f. Premature or violent death, or when the deceased had no surviving heirs heightened anxiety about individual death. An example of “bad death” is offered by Alexander. Jacob finds no comfort in the death of Joseph, instead weeping for him, and saying, “in mourning shall I go down to Sheol, to my son” (*Gen* 37:34-35). Desmond Alexander, "The Old Testament View of Life Afte Death," *Themelios* 11.2 (1986).

much of it is written from the perspective of the unwise person. From the vantage point of the wicked, life is temporary and meaningless. After death the body turns to ash and the spirit dissolves like smoke in the wind. Nothing remains of a person (2:1-5; 4:18-19). Therefore, why be good? Why embrace the burden of Wisdom and all its cumbersome morals and ethics? Eat, drink, and be merry--take advantage of the poor and the widowed. In response, the author counters that the wicked deceive themselves—those who belong to the company of the devil experience death (2:24). The writer means moral death, a mode of living marked by immoral behavior and foolishness. Worse, morally dead people are apart from God-given Wisdom, and even from God himself. Says the author: “Perverse thoughts separate people from God.” (1:3). Because they consider death to be the final destination of the person, the unwise are prone to lead a nihilistic and frivolous way of life.¹⁶⁴

The wicked and the wise experience physical death in two completely different ways in *Wis. Sol.* Morally dead people have no chance for immortality; their death is their own end. Because they do not believe in immortality (their reasoning on mortality is faulty; 3:10), and because they lead wretched lives, the wicked “experience their own (physical) death according to their judgment, namely as punishment and as a tragic entrance to ultimate death.”¹⁶⁵ Any chance of the afterlife is forfeited, and there can be no relationship with God.¹⁶⁶ The righteous, on the other hand, believe that after the death of

¹⁶⁴ Kolarcik, *Ambiguity*, 163-70. Matthew Goff, "Adam, the Angels and Eternal Life," in *Studies in the Book of Wisdom*, ed. Geza G. Xeratis and Jozesef Zsrngeller (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 8.

¹⁶⁵ Kolarcik, *Ambiguity*, 171.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 174-80. Goff, "Adam," 8.

the body they will be rewarded with a blessed existence with God. That is why they only “seem to die” (3:1).¹⁶⁷ Physical death is final for the wicked and transitional for the righteous.

Life and death are qualitative metaphors for manners of living, and relating to God in other wisdom texts. In Proverbs, life and death are understood this way.¹⁶⁸ A wise person gains life in the present: “The accomplishment of the righteous is for life; the produce of the wicked is for sin” (10:16; cf. 3:1-2). The dual parallelisms, righteous/wicked and life/sin, indicate that “life” is a way of living, just as “sin” is a way of living.¹⁶⁹ The writer is suggesting that practicing righteousness and avoiding wickedness will gain a person a better life, which is one of the rewards of Wisdom. “She (Lady Wisdom) is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her” (Prov 3:18). And in 8:35-36: “he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord; but he who misses me injures himself; all who hate me love death.” The allusion is to a manner of living, not simply physical life and death.¹⁷⁰ Life and death in Proverbs are lived spaces, not just biological realities. The former goes to the righteous in pursuit of Wisdom, while the latter is a way of life marked by foolishness, evil, and despair.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Goff, “Adam,” 8.

¹⁶⁸ Collins, “Immortality,” 180. Shannon Burkes, “Wisdom and Law: Choosing Life in Ben Sira and Baruch,” *JSJ* 30.3 (1999): 254-57.

¹⁶⁹ Jack T. Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death, and the Evolution of Intellectual Traditions,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 36, no. 3 (2005).

¹⁷⁰ Collins, “Immortality,” 180.

¹⁷¹ Richard W. Medina, “Life and Death Viewed as Physical and Lived Spaces Some Preliminary Thoughts from Proverbs,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 122 (2010).

Wisdom is superior to folly in Qoheleth, but Wisdom has its limitations in a world fraught with despair and futility.¹⁷² “All is vanity” is the chorus that repeats through the book; human efforts are futile. The works of the wise are futile because they do not last, and because all people end up dead in the end: “The wise dies just like the fool” (2:16), and the wealth produced by hard working wise people might go to a fool after death (2:21). So, death is the leading cause of futility, but Qoheleth does not suggest that people should never die—instead he uses the futility of death refrain to encourage his readers to enjoy life to the fullest now. Enjoyment is one way to exercise control over one’s life—it is one way to beat back the despair and futility. “Mirth counterposes vanity;”¹⁷³ But the tenuousness of enjoyment is balanced by the fact that God is the giver of material things that are used for enjoyment (2:24-26; 3:13; 5:17-18; 6:2). Delight depends on God’s generosity. Thus happiness is one way to experience the blessings of God.¹⁷⁴ In the end, the writer proposes neither despair nor blind hedonism, but living a joyful life in fear of God. Practicing Wisdom injects quality and happiness into this life; turning from it alienates a person from God.

Finally, Ben Sira’s views of life and death are in many ways similar to other wisdom writers. Immortality was never God’s plan, as the Lord made people “out of earth, and makes them return to it again. He gave them a number of days and a season.” (17:1-2a) Being made of earth means people are made of perishable substance and it

¹⁷² O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature*, 117f.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁷⁴ Matthew S. Ringe, "Mortality and Enjoyment: The Interplay of Death and Possessions in Qoheleth," *CBQ* 73 (2011).

suggests that people will return to the earth when they die (40:11; 41:10). Having a number of days indicates a finite life. Physical death is a limitation for people, as it was for Qoheleth; a person and all her efforts pass away eventually (14:19). And physical death is likewise a great equalizer—all people must die, kings and servants alike (8:7; 40:1-11).¹⁷⁵ Like other writers, Ben Sira transcends the futility of physical death with exhortations to live righteously:

The human body is a fleeting thing, but a virtuous name will never be blotted out. Have regard for your name, since it will outlive you longer than a thousand hoards of gold. The days of a good life are numbered, but a good name lasts forever. (41:11-13; NRS)¹⁷⁶

In agreement with Israelite tradition, Sirach does not allow for a significant existence beyond this life--the dreary underworld of Sheol, where godly praise is impossible, is the ultimate fate of all the departed (14:12, 16; 41:4).¹⁷⁷ Like other wisdom writers, Sirach has high regard for right living, which renders the miseries of this life and the quality of existence in the underworld less significant.¹⁷⁸ Also in keeping with the basic ideals of the wisdom tradition, Ben Sira sees “death” as physical death, and also as a metaphor for unrighteous living. Death is often associated with foolishness (37:18). Indeed, the life of a fool is worse than death (22:11). A life well lived, on the other hand, is linked to Wisdom. (31:14) Sirach locates the value of one's life in doing God's will, in being devout. Some people are in a hurry to work, but end up wanting even more; some

¹⁷⁵ Collins, "Immortality," 179-90.

¹⁷⁶ Burkes, "Wisdom and Law: Choosing Life in Ben Sira and Baruch," 262f.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 260.

¹⁷⁸ Collins, "Immortality," 190.

are slow and abound in poverty. Whatever station in life a person has, it is remembered that all things come from the Lord, poverty and wealth, and even life and death. (11:11-14)

Slandering speech is called “death,” and it alienates a person from God. Swearing by many oaths, or swearing by false oaths are comparable to death; they bring a house full of calamities. (23:11-12; 26:5) Many have fallen by the sword, but many more by the tongue. Death by an evil tongue is an evil death, and those who forsake the Lord will fall under the power of an evil tongue. (28:18-21; cf. 37:17-18)

Some of Ben Sira’s views of death are unique. For example, “life” and “death” are a matter of choice. (15:14-20) Seeking Wisdom brings the bread of learning, gladness and an everlasting name. Seeking foolishness and leading a life of sin brings ire from the Lord, who created humankind with free choice. One can choose to keep God’s commandments and have “life,” or turn from the Lord and have “death.” (15:1-20) But no one can simply choose life in a physical sense, as Sirach says elsewhere: “This is the Lord’s decree for all flesh . . . whether life lasts for ten years or a hundred or a thousand, there are no questions asked in Hades.” (41:4). The Lord determines the number of years for each person, so the choice of life or death Sirach is referring to is a way of life, not physical life itself. Death and life are metaphors for living a life of foolishness or Wisdom. His affirmation that the quality of one’s life is optional makes Ben Sira more optimistic than Qoheleth about fate and futility, and at the same time places the fate of each person’s life squarely in the hands of the person.

Looking forward, we shall see that Paul's views of physical death are compatible with the wisdom writers surveyed above, in two critical ways. One, physical death is not caused by sin; and two, "death" that is caused by sin means a life of foolishness, unrighteousness, and alienation from God.

Physical Death in Paul

In this section I will look at passages where physical death is unambiguously in view. I will show that physical death is never the penalty or even a consequence for the sins of those who die.¹⁷⁹ Biological death is not in itself problematic, and Paul does not lament that people do not live forever.¹⁸⁰ Physical death is simply an event that marks the end of a person's life.

¹⁷⁹ The death of Christ is in the following verses: Rom 5:6, 7, 8; 6:9, 10; 8:34; 14:9, 15; 1 Cor 8:11; 15:3; Gal 2:21; 1 Thes 4:14; 5:10. The literal death of other people or things is described in: Rom 5:15; 7:3; 1 Cor 9:15; 15:32, 36; 2 Cor 6:9. Paul describes his own death in Phil 1:21. The only other case is in 1 Cor 15:22, which is analyzed in detail in the next section.

¹⁸⁰ That death is punishment for sins is a widely held view in Pauline scholarship. See, for example, Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans Vol. 3: God's Grace, God's Freedom, God's Heirs*, vol. 3 of 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 30-31; Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 38f; Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 112; F. Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 347; Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 140; William S. Plumer, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971), 221; James Boice, *Romans: An Expository Commentary*, vol. 2 of 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 564. Ben C. Blackwell, "Immortal Glory and the Problem of Death in Romans 3.23," *JSNT* 32.3(2010): 285. Rudolf Bultmann sees in Paul two views of death. Both views draw on the Hebrew Bible axiom that "sin draws death after it." One view is that death is physical, and is punishment for sin, brought into the world by Adam's transgression. Paul also believes that death can be "a fruit organically growing out of sin." Another model maintains that death is the consequence of falling prey to the deceit of sin. In this model, people think they can gain life by following the desires of the flesh. But instead of gaining life, Paul warns, sinners gain death. One major difference between the two models is that in the former there is judgment and punishment; in the latter there is only consequence. Bultmann maintains that the juristic model of death as punishment, and the model of death as the fruit of sin do not completely harmonize in Paul's thought. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament, Volume 1* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1951), 246-49. Malina claims that Paul is "not interested in the origin of physical death, which for Christians is simply sleep." The death brought by Adam in Paul's thought is "the opposite of eternal life, hence eternal death or complete separation from God." Bruce J.

The Vocabulary of Physical death

The purpose of this section is to prove that when Paul speaks unambiguously about physical death, sin is never the cause. In other words, there are many passages in Paul where it is beyond dispute that Paul is speaking of physical death. In all of those passages, sin and death are not connected in any way. I have chosen to look at physical death from a philological standpoint because some Greek words that describe death have nuances that are lost in translation. Most Greek “death” words are translated in some form of “to die,” but that is not always what Paul had in mind. This will become evident as we proceed.

Paul uses two verbs to describe physical death. The first is ἀποθνήσκω. The verb can mean literal, physical death, and it can also be used metaphorically to suggest moral or spiritual death. The focus here is when Paul describes physical death. The following are representative of this use of ἀποθνήσκω: “For to this end Christ died (ἀπέθανεν) and lived, that he might be lord both of the dead and of the living.” (Rom 14:9); “For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies (ἀποθάνη), she is released from the law concerning the husband. (Rom 7: 2)” There are many other examples of physical death with the verb ἀποθνήσκω, and most of them refer to the death of Christ.¹⁸¹ But Paul also discusses his own death as well as the death of others using this verb.¹⁸² It is self-evident that there is not one verse in all of these

Malina, "Some Observations on the Origin of Sin in Judasim and St. Paul," *CBQ* 31(1969): 29n.34.; cf Black, "Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5-8," 426.

¹⁸¹ E.g. Rom 5:6; 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11; Gal 2:21; 1 Thes 4:14.

¹⁸² E.g. 1 Cor 9:15; 2 Cor 6:9

instances where the physical death of Christ, Paul, or other person is connected to sin. Simply stated, in all of these verses physical death is unarguably what Paul is talking about, and in every case sin is nowhere in view. When Paul describes physical death with the verb ἀποθνήσκω he follows the thinking of the Pentateuch and wisdom writers in that physical death is in no way problematic, and completely disconnected from sin.

There is another death verb in Paul: κοιμάομαι. It means to sleep or fall asleep, or it can mean to be dead, as in the sleep of death.¹⁸³ Paul never uses it to describe sleeping literally, nor does he use it to describe unbelievers who have departed; he only uses it to describe the present state of believers who have passed on:¹⁸⁴ “For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died (κοιμῶνται).” (1 Cor 11:30); “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died (κοιμωμένων) so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” (1 Thes 4:13) Paul’s use of κοιμάομαι implies that believers who have met their earthly demise are in a temporary state until Christ returns. They are not dead in the way non-believers are dead; they are sleeping. In this way Paul’s readers are comforted in knowing that biological death is not the end, it is not final. This way of thinking of death has parallels in *Wis. Sol.*, where the righteous only appear to die, and the unrighteous experience death as a final state, without hope for immortality. The difference between *Wis. Sol.* and Paul is that in the former the spirit goes to be in relationship with God forever after death, whereas Paul looks to the resurrection of the body as the ultimate eternal experience for the believer. I

¹⁸³ See “κοιμάω” *BDAG* 1:551.

¹⁸⁴ W. V. Crockett, "Universalism and the Theology of Paul" (University of Glasgow, 1986), 84f.; 1 Cor 7:39; 15:6, 18, 20, 51.

will examine Paul's views of death and resurrection below in greater detail. For the present it is noted that Paul and *Wis. Sol.* both allow for continued existence with God beyond this life, but only if death occurs first.

The adjective *νεκρός* appears several times in Paul, often as a substantive plural (e.g. *τοὺς νεκροὺς*), which means “the dead ones,” “those who are dead,” or even “the corpses.” In this convention Paul often says that God will raise those who are dead: “As it is written, ‘A father of many nations have I made you,’ in the sight of him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead (*τοὺς νεκροὺς*) and calls into being that which does not exist.” (Rom 4:17; 1 Cor 15:35; 1 Thes 4:16, etc.) Paul also uses *νεκρός* this way to demonstrate that Christ is the Lord of the dead: “For this reason, if Christ died and then lived, so it is that he should lord over both the dead (*νεκρῶν*) and the living.” (Rom 14:9). Similarly, *νεκρός* can connote the realm of the dead, or the place where the dead ones are, the dominion from which Christ has been raised: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death (*θάνατον*), so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead (*νεκρῶν*) through the glory of the Father, so we might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:4)¹⁸⁵ None of these conventions of *νεκρός* imply a connection to sin. When Paul speaks of *νεκρός* as the realm of the dead, he does not associate it with sin. It is not punitive. Compare Paul's references to the realm of the dead with Mark's view of hell: “And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:47-49) This Jesus saying from

¹⁸⁵ See also Rom 1:4; 4:24; 6:9; 7:4; 8:11; 10:7, 9; 14:9; 1 Cor 15:12, 13, 15; 1 Thes 4:16, etc.

Mark (cf. Matt 5:29; 18:9) describes a post-mortem existence for the wicked that is tormenting, punitive, and eternal. People go there after death because they have sinned in this life. This sort of post mortem existence has no parallel in Paul. The Apostle's realm of the dead is not even subdivided into saved and unsaved categories—in fact, he has nothing to say at all about the fate of the unsaved dead. The realm of the dead is not a prison (1 Pet 3:19); there is no weeping, no gnashing of teeth, no fire, and no worms. There is no suffering of any kind. Most importantly, νεκρός when it is the realm of the dead is never connected to sin.

Like νεκρός, θάνατος in Paul's thought often means the physical death of a person, such as here: ¹⁸⁶“For whenever you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death (τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου) until he comes.” (1 Cor 11:26); “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death (θανάτου), even death (θανάτου) on a cross.” (Phil 2:8); “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death (θανάτου) of his son. Much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” (Rom 5:10) There are many examples of θάνατος, where context tells us that death is unambiguously physical death.¹⁸⁷ Many of these refer to the death of Christ, and many refer to Paul's own flirtations with death.¹⁸⁸ As with νεκρός, Paul never implies that physical θάνατος is deserved or punitive; it is not associated with or caused by sin. Physical death is simply an event that marks the end of

¹⁸⁶ Crockett argues that θάνατος is highly flexible and can mean physical death, eschatological death, or the power of death in the world. Crockett, "Universalism and the Theology of Paul", 82-87.

¹⁸⁷ Rom 6:3, 4, 5, 9; 8:38; 1 Cor 3:22; 2 Cor 1:10; 4:11, 12; 11:23; Phi 1:20; 2: 27, 30; 3:10.

¹⁸⁸ E.g. 2 Cor 1:9; 4:11.

a person's life, independent of judgment, sin, or penalty, just as it is in the wisdom literature and the Pentateuch.

Physical Death in 1 Cor 15

To this point, I have been looking at death primarily using a philological approach. That approach was practical because the context of the verses in question had relatively minimal bearing on the meaning of death in each passage. That is not the case in 1 Cor 15; the context of the whole chapter is critical toward an understanding of death. In this section, I set aside the philological approach to physical death and look at a critical chapter in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which he speaks at length about death.

Besides Rom 5, discussed below, 1 Cor 15 is ground zero for the argument that physical death is punishment for sin. While there is no question that Paul speaks of physical death in 1 Cor 15, he also invokes Adam and language that ostensibly connects physical death with punishment. Indeed, the overwhelming consensus on death in the chapter claims that the cause of death is the Fall, where the transgression of Adam brought an end to human immortality.¹⁸⁹ Sin entered the world via Adam and the penalty of physical death followed.¹⁹⁰ Death is not only punishment for sin, but it is also a great

¹⁸⁹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 549. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 268. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1228f. C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971), 351f.

¹⁹⁰ Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "1 Corinthians," in *Romans – Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 396. Cf. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 263.

enemy to God and people.¹⁹¹ It is a foe because it is a violation of the created order; death was not God's intent for people.¹⁹²

Against the prevailing views, I offer the following argument. Paul does not view the event of physical death as punishment for sin. I go one step further: physical death is a necessary process that a believer must pass through to enter the kingdom of God. Dying, when viewed as an event or a process, is good. It is not punishment. To be sure, death is an enemy, but only when death is viewed as a state of being. In short, the event of death is good, but the state of death is an enemy.

The chapter begins with an admonition that the gospel should be taken seriously, and not let go of (vv.1-19). Critical to Paul's gospel is the resurrection of Christ, which Paul emphatically claims was a real historical event, with plenty of witnesses, including himself.¹⁹³ Further, belief in the power of the resurrection and belief that it actually happened is critical to salvation—if the resurrection of Christ is false, Paul says, the gospel falls apart. In v.20-28 Paul illustrates a vision of the Parousia, when Christ, the first fruits of the new age, abolishes all enemies, the last of which is death. Then Christ subjects himself and the world to God. A description of the baptism of the dead follows,

¹⁹¹ Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2000), 571. Verbrugge, "1 Corinthians," 404. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 803. J. Paul Sampley, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 982.

¹⁹² F.L. Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 791.

¹⁹³ Paul's interest in 1 Cor 15:4-8 ("he appeared to James, the apostles . . . and last of all to me.") is not an attempt to establish the historical truth of the resurrection, argues Anderson. The resurrection event had meaning not just for Paul but for the whole world. The introduction of Adam in verses 20-23 is "an attempt to underscore the universal dimensions" of the resurrection. Gary A. Anderson, "Necessarium Adae Peccatum: An Essay on Original Sin," *Pro Ecclesia* VII.3 (1999): 323-24.

along with an appeal to persevere in the face of adversity (vv.29-34). Paul then begins a long discourse about the process of resurrection, describing the natures of the two types of bodies on either side of resurrection—this earthly, perishable body, and the raised, imperishable body (vv.35-49). Finally, Paul returns to the end of times, when believers who are still alive will be transformed into imperishable bodies without passing through the sting of death (vv.50-58). In the end Paul taunts death, saying, “Death where is your sting?” The chapter ends with a declaration of the victory of God, and an admonition to toil for the sake of the gospel.

I take it for granted that death is physical death, because resurrection, the theme of virtually the whole chapter, is physical. Paul is resolute about that. The thrust of his argument in the beginning of the chapter is that the resurrection of Christ was a real, physical, historical event. It shall be so with believers. Resurrection is no myth and no metaphor. Because resurrection is real and physical, so is death, as a body cannot be raised unless it is physically dead first. Death is not moral death or metaphorical in any way in the chapter in question—it is physical death. But Paul speaks of physical death as both an event and as a state of being, a nuance that is too often overlooked.

Physical death as an event cannot be punishment because it does great good: it is the necessary process that one must pass through to enter the Kingdom of God. One way to understand my viewpoint is to work backwards in time, starting at the general resurrection when Christ returns. When the trumpets blare on the Last Day, the faithful dead will be raised and will enter the kingdom of God. The faithful who happen to be

alive at the Lord's return will be taken up and transformed into the imperishable. They do not pass through death (1 Cor 15: 51-52; 1 Thes 4:15-17; Phil 3:21). Either way, Paul is clear that bodily transformation occurs to the faithful dead and to the faithful living at the parousia. No one can enter the kingdom "as is;" all kingdom of God members must be granted a new body.

I suggest that the reason a new body is needed to enter the kingdom of God is because the current body has several flaws that make it incompatible with the kingdom. To understand this, it is first necessary to understand how Paul thought of the "body." According to Dale Martin, Paul's explanation of the body is informed by ancient philosophical and medical theories.¹⁹⁴ The body was more than "flesh and blood," being constituted of several substances like *πνεῦμα*, *νοῦς*, and *σάρξ*. These substances together made up the "body," just as in the modern world the "self" or "person" is a composite of body, mind, soul, spirit, etc. The substances each have their own qualities, like "perishable," "mortal," and "glorified." Some of the substances and their corresponding qualities are desirable and some are not. Some are compatible with the kingdom, and some are not. For example, *σάρξ* (flesh) is associated with sinful passion (Rom 7:5). Nothing good dwells in the flesh (Rom 7:18). Paul says that when a body dies and is raised, a transformation occurs, where some of the substances are lost, and the qualities associated with those substances are sloughed off. The current body, being mortal, made of dust, dishonored, weak, and physical, is altered into a raised body that is immortal, in Christ, glorified, powerful, and spiritual. When Paul says the raised body will be spiritual

¹⁹⁴ Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 122.

and no longer flesh and blood, he means that the perishable, corruptible substances like flesh will be eliminated in the process of dying, while the incorruptible substances like spirit will remain. The raised body has qualities that are compatible with the kingdom. But the transformation cannot occur without death.

Paul explains the necessity of physical death using agricultural imagery. A seed planted in the ground grows into a plant; a new body emerges. The body that is sown is not the body that will come to be (v.37). But that seed cannot come to life unless it dies first. (v.36) So it is with people, and for good reason: this earthly body, made of flesh and blood “cannot enter the kingdom of God” (v.50) Participation in the eternal kingdom of God requires the process of physical death.

To my second argument, I agree that death is an enemy, but only when death is viewed as a state of being. Death as an event is not an enemy, but *being* dead is. Paul says as much:

Then comes the end, when he (Christ) hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (vv.24-26; NRS)

The consensus on the meaning of death in this passage is that physical death is an evil power that has dominated the whole world since Eden. It is an enemy of God and humankind, a cancer that defines this age.¹⁹⁵ People die because the demonic foe of death

¹⁹⁵ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 264f. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 756f. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 570f. Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 791. C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 358. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 298. Kenneth L. Chafin, *1,2 Corinthians The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985), 185. Conzelmann, *1*

rules the world. In other words, death is an enemy because it has cancelled God's original plan for immortality. I disagree with this view. As argued above, dying cannot be an enemy. What does Paul mean, then, when he says the last enemy to be destroyed is death? I maintain that death is an adversary only when viewed as an ongoing mode of existence.

To prove my argument, I will first consider possible influences on Paul's thought. Because Paul was influenced by Jewish apocalypticism, which allows for the possibility of existence after death, he can speak of a state of existence beyond death. Perhaps that is why he describes the faithful departed as "sleeping," noted above. Christ followers are asleep in death, and when the Lord returns they will "awaken"—they will be raised into the imperishable. Paul's views of death were also influenced by the wisdom tradition, where the state of death—not the event of death--was viewed as hopeless because a person could not commune with God. Existence in the afterlife was unfair because all people go there, the pious and the wicked. It is possible that Paul viewed the afterlife as unfair, as many of his Jewish predecessors and contemporaries did. However, the simple fact is that Paul has very little to say about existence between this life and the resurrection, so we cannot say with certainty what his vision of the afterlife is. In other words, what happens to dead people while they await the resurrection Paul simply does not say, except that believers are in a temporary sleeping state. Still, because Jewish apocalypticism and wisdom were both influences on his thought, he may view death as

Corinthians, 274. Bruce B. Barton, et al, *1&2 Corinthians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 229f.

an enemy because it is an unfair, and it is a place where communion with God is impossible.

This view has support in v.55, where Paul taunts death. Toward the end of the chapter Paul says: "O death where is your sting?" His boldness toward death and its power comes at the end of a lengthy discourse on death, resurrection, the return of Christ, and the consummation of the entire world. His taunt of death alludes to two LXX passages, Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14. Paul points to the latter passage by ignoring its context completely--the chapter in Hosea is a judgment oracle against Israel. In Hosea, the Lord summons death and Sheol to punish Israel.¹⁹⁶ After the judgment, the Lord says: "I will deliver them from the hand of Hades, I will redeem them from death. O death, where is your penalty? O Hades, where is your sting?" (Hos 13:14; LXX) In Hosea 13, dead people are delivered from the power of the underworld, from the realm of the dead. The Lord taunts Hades for its incapacity to hold the dead, and affirms his sovereignty over Hades and death. Paul taunts death similarly--he taunts it because it cannot hold people in the realm of the dead any longer. In this sense, death in 1 Cor 15: 24-26, 55 is the realm of the dead, which has holding power on the departed. It is an enemy because it prevents the faithful from being raised into imperishable bodies, and from communing with God in the kingdom. It causes believers to continue in "sleep" until the Lord returns. Death is an enemy, but only for some, and only if it is viewed as a realm that holds the faithful departed.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 276.

In conclusion, Paul's views of physical death are in many ways identical to that of his predecessors. Physical death is not problematic, it is not punishment, and it is not connected to sin. As we shall see in the next section, Paul takes from the wisdom tradition the type of death that is caused by sin.

Death in Rom 1, 5-8

Thus far, I have been looking at passages where physical death is unarguably in view. In this section, which is divided into four parts, the meanings of death are not as clear, and the broader context is critical toward an accurate understanding of death in each passage. For that reason, I will analyze the meaning(s) of death in each entire chapter. In what follows, I will continue to demonstrate that sin does not cause physical death, and at the same time, show that sin leads to moral death, and only moral death, which is a qualitative metaphor for a life apart from God. We will also see several other nuances of death, most of which are contextualized by relationship.

Death in Romans 1

Following a salutation and a declaration of the gospel, Paul tells his readers in Rome that he is anxious to see them and share the good news. In vv.16-17 he declares that the gospel is the power of God for all people who believe; the righteousness of God is revealed through faith. The remainder of the chapter is an explanation of the terrible consequences of willfully rejecting God, and failing to recognize and worship him. God should be plain to see and worthy to know, but futile thinking and senseless minds have lead to foolishness and wickedness, and worse, an unbearable strain on the God-person

relationship. The result is expressed in three waves—God handed the sinners over to their degraded passions. Separated from God, the wicked are filled with evil, malice, murder and the like. People who not only do such things but applaud those who do “deserve to die” (v.32).

The focus in this section is the precise meaning of death in v.32, especially the nature of death. Is Paul saying that all sinners deserve to die physically? Is he explaining why and how humans lost immortality? Most commentators do not ask these questions. Indeed, most of the conversation about v.32 is focused on other issues: the textual variances of v.32 and the possible motivations of the scribes who copied them, and whether or not Paul means that applauding evil is worse than doing evil. A handful of scholars reason that death is deserved even for Gentiles, because God and his commandments were obvious and intelligible.¹⁹⁷ A small group of commentators see echoes of the Eden in vv.19-25, 32 where Adam and Eve deliberately turned from God and were punished with death.¹⁹⁸ But there is virtually no debate about the nature of death, that is, whether death is physical or moral. I argue that death in v.32 is not physical death, but moral death. The people Paul describes who do great evil and who intentionally turn from God, and who have been handed over to their lustful passions and depraved minds are alive, but they are morally dead.

¹⁹⁷ N.T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 434. Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman, 1995), 86. Schreiner, *Romans*, 99. Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 38.

¹⁹⁸ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 53, 69. Douglas J. Moo, *Romans 1-8*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 116. Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 1-8*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2013), 141.

In the Introduction I suggested that how we think of the peril from which one is saved is critical toward much of the remainder of Paul's thought, because the human problem and the divine solution must be functionally compatible. This is especially true in the present verse, because it is the opening salvo in a lengthy description of the human condition, and the divine reaction to the human condition. Paul is setting up the problem so he can propose a solution. How we think of death in v.32 is a crossroads in Romans, one that is overlooked in scholarship. If we think of death as physical death, and as penalty from God for transgressions, then we locate the essential human problem, and the divine response, in a legal realm. From this legal vantage point we then proceed through the next two chapters of Paul's letter, with the operating assumption that people are in legal trouble with God, whose righteousness compels him to punish the wicked. By the time we get to Rom 4, the nature of justification is already settled—it has to have something to do with legal matters, because that is the problem. And this pattern continues through Rom 5 and beyond. However, if we think of death in v.32 as moral death, then the essential human problem is not legal at all—it may *lead* to legal problems, but the peril in its most basic form is one of broken relationship, which in my view, and I think in Paul's too, is far more serious than the threat of wrath on the Day of the Lord.

Death in Rom 1:32 is moral death, not physical death, for several reasons. First, within the context of Romans 1, *θανάτου* cannot refer to physical death because the statement in v.32 would not make any sense. By saying “Those who practice such things are worthy of death,” he is implying that those who *do not* do such things *do not* deserve to die. Logically, we can deduce that if a person never does the sins he lists, then such a

person is not worthy of “death.” Yet all people die physically. Even newborns sometimes die physically, and they could not have done the grave sins Paul lists in the chapter. So, either some people die undeservedly, or “death” means something other than physical death. Also, while the sins Paul lists are grave, not all of them are punishable by death. Strife, deceit, and malice (v.29) are hardly capital punishment-grade sins.

Second, if death is punishment for sins, and if Christ has atoned for sin, and if the sins of Jews are also atoned for via Torah observance, then why do Christ believers and Jews continue to die? It makes little sense to think that Christ followers and Jews continue to be punished for sin with physical death. This is what some wisdom writers asked about physical death: if the pious and the wicked both die, then why bother to follow God’s commandments? Paul is not asking that question, but a Gentile reader might. If Paul’s premise is that the wicked are worthy of death, a reasonable response is: “But I’m not wicked. My next door neighbor does all that stuff in the vice lists, and more that you forgot. Yet I know that she and I will both die.” And if the reader responds that way, Paul has lost him already.

Similarly, Rom 1 is Paul’s opening statement of an argument that will lay the groundwork for the need of the gospel. He is beginning to describe the human problem, and he will continue to do so for another two chapters and beyond. It stands to reason that the problems thus proposed will be solved by the gospel in one way or another. This way of constructing an argument comes naturally for people who are trying to persuade others to adopt a new mode of behavior, or perhaps to buy a new product. Politicians, salespeople, and preachers do that. They say: “Let me tell you what is wrong with the

current situation.” Then, having convinced the audience that it has a problem, the pitch man offers the solution. That is Paul’s basic strategy in Rom 1-3. He is describing a problem, so that he can proclaim the gospel as a solution. That said, if he means that physical death is a problem, then we should expect a solution to physical death in the subsequent chapters. The antidote to physical death should be somewhere in Romans. Yet, there is not one. Nowhere in the subsequent chapters of Romans or in all of Paul’s writings is there a promise that believers will be exempt from physical death. To be sure, Paul elsewhere speaks of the promise of resurrection and eternal life, but even then people still must die. (1 Cor 15) No one, not even Christ, is exempt from physical death. Being raised from death might defeat the lasting *effects* of death, but the event of death, the dissolution of the vitality that is life, remains inevitable. The hope of resurrection into eternal life, as profound as it is, does not exempt any person from passing through death (except for faithful who are alive at the Parousia, discussed above). Therefore, if there is no solution to physical death, it does not make sense that Paul is posing the problem of physical death.

Third, death cannot be physical because God does not cause it. Death in Rom 1 is caused by sin, not God. As I argued above, sin cannot by itself cause death—only God can do that. Once again, Paul *does not* say: “and God punished people with death because they sinned.” The statement, “Those who do such things are worthy of death” implies that “death” is self-imposed. If God does not cause death, then death cannot be punishment, and it therefore cannot be physical death. Let me try to simplify my reasoning using Boolean logic. Death is either: 1) physical AND punishment AND caused by God, or 2)

not physical. But Paul says nothing of God's involvement in the death of sinners. The only thing God actually does is hand people over. After that, what happens to them is out of God's hands, which is the point of the whole decline narrative. Death is caused by sin alone, so it cannot be punishment from God. It cannot be physical.

Fourth, Paul's language of death is likely informed by conceptions of death that come from the wisdom tradition, where death is a qualitative metaphor for a mode of living, a life apart from God. The distinctive pattern of Rom 1 as a whole, which is held together by the refrain "God gave them up," the theme of failure to recognize, and the vivid details of sinful life and its consequences, all together have direct parallels in much of the wisdom literature, especially *Wis. Sol.* 13-14.¹⁹⁹ Both texts assume that people can and should know God (*Wis. Sol.* 13:1-5; Rom 1:20-21). Both texts censure human failure (*Wis. Sol.* 13:6-9; Rom 1:21d), and affirm that sin leads to a depraved mind (*Wis. Sol.* 11:15; Rom 1:21).²⁰⁰ With other wisdom writers, the author of *Wis. Sol.* proclaimed that practicing wisdom gave meaning to and validated life. The value of wisdom was often described by contrasting it to a life of foolishness, as Paul does. (v.22) But the wisdom writers also knew and were even frustrated by the fact that the wise and the foolish both die physically; physical death therefore was not punishment because it happened to everybody. Death for them, when associated with and caused by sin, was a metaphor for a way of life.

There is another parallel between *Wis. Sol.* and Rom 1 that reveals what Paul means by death. In the middle of v.32, the Apostle delivers a final blow to the wicked,

¹⁹⁹ Talbert, *Romans*, 63.

²⁰⁰ Byrne, *Romans*, 64f.

saying: οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες ἄξιοι θανάτου εἰσὶν. Some translations render the following: “those who do such things deserve to die.” (NRS; cf. NIV, NKJ) “Deserve to die” suggests a future event that is caused by actions in the past or present. It sounds a lot like a death sentence, issued from a judge. Death is indeed punishment and it is also physical. It is not a great leap from that conclusion to Gen 2:17, where God says to Adam, in so many words: “If you disobey me, you deserve to die.” Here we can see echoes of the Eden narrative, and the problem between God and people slips unnoticed into a divine courtroom. But that interpretation/translation is incorrect.

A better translation is: “those who practice such things are worthy of death.”²⁰¹ Being “worthy” of death refers not to divine judgment, but to the inevitability of a situation caused by poor choices. A person who walks in the rain without an umbrella is worthy of getting soaked, but she is not judged in the process. This way of thinking about worthiness of death, as well as the major themes of Rom 1 is echoed again in *Wis. Sol.*: “But the ungodly by their words and deeds summoned him (death; 1:12-13), considering him a friend, they longed for him and made a covenant with him, because they are fit (ἄξιοί) to belong to his company. (1:16) *Wis. Sol.* and Paul are in harmony here. They are both saying that if you dance with the devil, if you turn away from God, you are fit to lead a life of moral death. Who you have relationship with, and the consequences of the relationship, are themes common to both texts. *Wis. Sol.* describes relationship with death as the antithesis of relationship with God. A person who befriends death is alienated from God. Paul uses different language, but in saying God “gave over” sinners, he is saying the

²⁰¹ NAS, NAU.

same thing. Being given over means that the relationship between God and person is broken, and that leads to moral death. But the admonitions in *Wis. Sol.* and Rom 1.32 are not threats from God—they imply no future penalty. Instead, they are summary statements of what is: people who are alienated from God are dead already.

Death in Romans 5

Most commentators split Romans 5 into two parts, vv.1-11 and vv. 12-21. In the first part Paul clarifies what God is doing and has done on behalf of believers, reminding his readers of the benefits of being justified, and of the loving commitment of God toward believers. In the second major section of the chapter Paul takes a new tack, telling a history of the origins of sin and death. God fades to the background, and Adam and Christ come to the forefront in an Adam-Christ typology, centered on the effects of each man's action. The transgression lead to death, and the obedience of Christ leads to righteousness.

There are debates about death in Rom 5. One debate tries to explain why the transgression of Adam, which Paul refers to several times, leads to the punishment of death for all people—after all, Adam's transgression was his, not ours.²⁰² Why is Adam's loss of immortality our problem, and why are we punished for something we did not do? Another debate is centered around v.14, where Paul says “death reigned from Adam to Moses.” The question is, if there was no law from Adam to Moses, and if sin in that time period was not reckoned as sin (because there was no law to violate; v.13), then why

²⁰² That discussion hinges on the highly disputed ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον phrase at the end of v.12, and whether or not Paul meant that death spread to humanity “because all have sinned,” “because all sinned,” or something else. Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 218-35.

were people still punished with death?²⁰³ The third major debate is centered around the Adam-Christ typology, and the effects of each man's actions on the world.²⁰⁴

The discussions share a consensus on the nature of death—it is nearly always presumed that death is physical death, for the primary reason that Paul is alluding to the Eden narrative to explain the origins of physical death.²⁰⁵ As with 1 Cor 15, interpreters read Rom 5 and Gen 2-3 together, and since Eve and Adam were punished with physical death in Eden, it must follow that Paul is referring to physical death in Rom 5. Death is not only a consequence of sin,²⁰⁶ it is “the fully developed fruit of sin. It is the just sentence of God.”²⁰⁷ Death has spread to all people because of sin.”²⁰⁸ Physical death “is a present judgment, part of the revealed wrath of God in this present world.”²⁰⁹ Paul sees the manifestation of death first and foremost in the Fall of the first couple, rather than as part of the created order; “mortality is a violation of the will of the Creator, a sign of the

²⁰³ See for example, C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William E. Eerdmans, 1985), 116. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Cambridge: T&T Clark, 1973), 281f.

²⁰⁴ See for example Stowers, *Romans*, 253-55.

²⁰⁵ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 188f; Bartlett, *Romans*, 58; Achtemeier, *Romans*, 97; Cobb and Lull, *Romans*, 82; Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts*, 178. Other scholars see death as having more than one meaning, e.g. Talbert, *Romans*, 149f. Cf. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 229f. For much of what follows in this section, I am indebted to Peter J. Leithart, whose research on Rom 5:12-21 was helpful to my interpretation of Rom 5, even though his thesis and mine are not the same. Peter J. Leithart, "Adam, Moses, and Jesus: A Reading of Romans 5:12-14," *CTJ* 43 (2008).

²⁰⁶ Stanley B. Marrow, *Paul: His Letters and His Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 210.

²⁰⁷ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 112. On physical death as penalty for sin in Rom 5, see: Emil Brunner, *The Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 44; Keck, *Romans*, 147; Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts*, 179; Moo, *Romans*, 315; Byrne, *Romans*, 176. The following scholars see death as punishment in Paul: Menahem Kister, "Romans 5:12-21 against the Background of Torah-Theology and Hebrew Usage," *HTR* 100.4 (2007): 406. Byrne, *Romans*, 176. Barnhouse, *Romans*, 30-31. Barth, *Christ and Adam*, 38f.

²⁰⁸ Reasoner, *Romans*, 54.

²⁰⁹ Wedderburn, "The Theological Structure of Romans V.12," 344-48.

world's fallen condition, and an evil that will eventually be overcome."²¹⁰ The unnatural intrusion of death can only be rectified through Christ's sacrifice.²¹¹ Some scholars claim that Paul is drawing on an Adam tradition in early Jewish thought that sees Adam as responsible for the mortality of human beings.²¹² Byrne explains:

By "Death" (in v.12) Paul means physical death, simply assuming in this respect the biblical tradition (cf. Gen 3:17-19) that sees death as the punishment for sin. This "theological" view of death is alien to modern sensibility, where death is seen as simply the natural, inevitable term of human life.²¹³

In contrast to Byrne, I maintain that physical death is not at all what Paul is talking about in the chapter, and that moral death is the true meaning of death, for the following reasons.

First, death in Rom 5 is neither physical death nor punishment because death comes into the world via sin, not God: *Διὰ τοῦτο ὡςπερ δι' ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος*; "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin." (5:12a) The preposition *διὰ* can take many meanings, but in the genitive it can be translated as "by means of," though most English translations use "through." Whether by means of or through, there is a cause and effect relationship between "one man," who is clearly Adam, and sin, and between sin and death. In this highly contended verse, Paul says that sin came into the

²¹⁰ Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, 87-91.

²¹¹ Black, "Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5-8," 412.

²¹² Byrne, *Romans*, 174-76.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 176.

world because of or through one man, and *then* death came into the world right behind sin. Strictly speaking Adam is not even the cause of death, sin is. If sin caused death to enter the world, and if God did not bring death, then death cannot be punishment from God. Punishment requires a punisher, someone or something who is able and desires to inflict punishment on a person for an offense. But God is not even in view v.12. Sin cannot cause physical death by itself, however, doing sin can cause moral death and alienation from God. Therefore, looking at the true cause and origins of death, because it is not from God, death cannot be physical nor can it be punitive.

Second, when the actions of Adam and Christ are compared in vv.12-19, moral death is the logical meaning of death in the passage. Paul contrasts the effects of Adam's transgression with the effects of Christ's action. The action of one man opposes the action of the other, or, stated another way, the problems that Adam created are solved by God and Christ. The consequences of Adam's transgression are death to many (vv. 12, 15), judgment and penalty (vv.16, 18), the reign of death (v.17), and sinfulness to many (v.19). All together, these effects seem to point to physical death, but if we look at what Christ did to oppose the effects of Adam's transgression, a different picture emerges. On the Christ side we have the following effects: grace to many (v.15), a righteous deed (v.16), righteousness that leads to reigning in life (v.18), and righteousness (v.19). All of the effects of Christ's action are related to righteousness; indeed righteousness seems to be the primary benefit of Christ's action. Righteousness is nuanced somewhat in vv.17-18 and is related to "life," but the dominant benefit is righteousness, not physical life. Even in vv.17-18, "reigning in life" and "justification of life" are better interpreted through the

lens of Wisdom, where life and righteousness come together to describe a proper way of living, and a proper relationship with God. In any case, what Paul does not say is revealing. He does not say, “and the grace of God and gift of Christ defeat death,” where “death” is unambiguously physical death. Instead, the benefits of Christ’s action are framed consistently in terms of righteousness and justification, which in broad terms means a proper relationship between God and people. Righteousness and physical death do not oppose each other in Paul’s thought, but righteousness and moral death do. Indeed, moral death is in many ways synonymous with unrighteousness. Therefore, because the actions of Christ and Adam oppose each other, and because Christ’s actions lead to righteousness and proper relationship with God, it is more plausible that Paul is speaking of moral death, the opposite of righteousness.

Likewise, the actions of God and Adam oppose each other in vv.1-11, and vv.12-14, and the opposition reveals that moral death is the human problem, brought on by broken relationship between God and humankind. The first half of the chapter (vv.1-11) is both a summary of Paul’s discourse in chapter 4, and the beginning of a new line of thought, in which he speaks of the benefits of justification and salvation. The passage summarizes the divine response to the human condition. Following that, vv.12-14 are a brief description of what the human condition is. In this way vv.1-11 and vv.12-14, held together by the phrase *διὰ τοῦτο* (therefore), complement each other. Paul tells us the solution, and steers the reader toward the problem with “therefore...” Divine solution first, human problem second. He has done this before. In Rom 1 Paul says: “For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith” (v.17). This “solution”

statement is then followed by a description of the problem, framed in terms of the solution, and with multiple references to themes in the solution. The crisis is that people failed to have faith and failed to recognize the righteousness of God. The problem and the solution are functional mirror images of each other. So it is with 5:1-11, and vv.12-14.

The solution is a list of benefits of relationship with God: God makes peace with and shares his glory with believers, and pours out his love for them. Paul summarizes the catalog of benefits as follows:

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled (*κατηλλάγημεν*) to God through the death of his son, much more, having been reconciled (*καταλλαγέντες*), we shall be saved by his life. And not only this, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (*καταλλαγήν*). (vv.10-11)

Καταλλαγή means that a relationship once broken has been made whole, or has been re-established. It can also mean that a once hostile relationship between two enemies has been supplanted by a friendly or loving relationship. The next few verses are as follows:

Therefore (*Διὰ τοῦτο*), just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned--for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (vv.12-14; NAS)

The “therefore” phrase indicates that what follows is in some way related to what has gone before. This suggests that vv.1-11 and vv.12-14 are functionally complementary, the first unit being the solution, the second unit being the problem. Thus, the problem is a functional complement to the solution. If the solution is reconciliation, or the healing of a broken relationship, then a logical complement is broken relationship, or moral death.

Third and finally, taking death to mean physical death in v.14 defies logic, and leads to interpretations of the relationships between sin, death and Torah that are not supportable. This verse has been interpreted in a variety of ways, and with some difficulty, because of Paul's statement in the previous verse: Sin was not reckoned when there was no Law. Together the verses read:

Sin was in the world even before the Law, but sin was not reckoned when there was no Law. Still, death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type the one to come. (vv.13-14)

One of the difficulties in interpreting this passage, if death is assumed to be physical, is the notion that there was a period of time when sin was not reckoned, and yet people were still punished with death during that time. Sin was not reckoned between Adam and Moses, yet people died between Adam and Moses. How could people be punished with death if they violated no law?

Scholars have attempted to resolve this exegetical issue in a variety of ways. First, Paul may think that there is a more comprehensive law than Mosaic law, a law written on the hearts of all people (Rom 2:15). People sinned against the law in their hearts, so they died.²¹⁴ Second, the people who lived from Adam to Moses may not have sinned exactly as Adam did, but they sinned in their own way, so they were punished with death.²¹⁵ Third, sin means an inward disposition of rebellion toward God, and transgression is a violation of a commandment. In other words, sin is a state of existence, and transgression is an individual act against a commandment. What Paul meant, then, is that people did

²¹⁴ Morris, *Romans*, 233; Hendriksen, *Romans*, 179. Cf. Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 87.

²¹⁵ Byrne, *Romans*, 178; Matera, *Romans*, 137.

not transgress between Adam and Moses, as there were no laws, but they sinned nonetheless, which resulted in their death.²¹⁶ Fourth, later Jewish tradition held that the Noahic commandments, given between Adam and Moses (Gen 9:1-7), were binding on Gentiles. Paul does not explicitly mention them, but he may have them in mind. Thus, people from Adam to Moses were under a “law” even if not Mosaic law. So they were punished with death for violating these “creation ordinances.”²¹⁷

Once again, simple logic precludes any of the above interpretations. If Paul means that biological death reigned from Adam to Moses, does he mean that biological death did not reign after Moses, after God gave Torah to the Israelites? If so, then we can assume that death no longer reigned for the Israelites after Torah was given by God. Then why did the Israelites keep dying after the Lord gave them Torah? Why didn't Torah observance bring back immortality to those who practiced it? After all, obeying the Law honors God (Rom 2:23), and doers of the Law are justified (2:13), as the Law is holy (7:12), spiritual (7:14), and good (7:16). Further, some of the scholars who make the above arguments tend to be in the camp that claims Paul was against Torah, because Torah was insufficient or ineffective. If Paul considers Torah ineffective, then why does he suggest that it had an impact on the reign of death?

A better way to interpret death in v.14 is to assume that Paul means moral death. From Adam to Moses, as Torah was not available to prevent moral death, there was no guide, no divine direction to illuminate sin (3:20; 7:7). They were morally dead because

²¹⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1991), 105. cf. Käsemann, *Romans*, 139-58.

²¹⁷ Bruce, *Romans*, 123f.

they did not have a relationship with God—they did not have a means to relate to God, which is what Torah is. Further, the expression “death reigned” (ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος) does not mean that God was not sovereign from Adam to Moses, rather, it is a hyperbolic way of saying that God had nothing to do with the type of death that ruled in the absence of Torah. God did not bring moral death—sin and those who practice sin brought moral death. So, with moral death as the true meaning, we can have it both ways—sin can be not reckoned from Adam to Moses because there was no Law to reckon with; but people still sin without Law, as Rom 1 so vividly shows. As the sinners in Rom 1 died morally independent of Torah, so did the people from Adam to Moses.

Death in Romans 6

One of the ways I approach exegesis in Paul is to read a passage and think about the big picture—what is Paul trying to say generally, and why is he saying it now? How else might Paul have said the same thing, and why did he choose the words and themes in the passage? This exercise helps me to gain insight into the wild imagination of one of history’s most influential thinkers. It is particularly helpful in the present chapter, as Paul speaks of death in many ways we have not yet seen. We shall see that death caused by sin is moral death. Now we shall see that death can signify the end of relationship, with one thing or another.

This is the big picture of chapter 6, as I see it: Paul has affirmed in chapter 5 that moral death has been defeated for Christ followers. But Paul has been light on specifics as far as how this comes about. These specifics are given in chapter six, beginning with a rhetorical question: Since Christ has solved the problem of moral death, should we go on

sinning? (vv.1-2) Paul says No! Because we have been baptized into Christ, we have become in many respects just like him, the most important respect being we no longer are held captive by sin and moral death (vv.3-11). But there is still work to do. We believers must not let sin take us back to moral death--it cannot become our master again. (vv.12-14) One can choose one's master, either sin and moral death, or God and righteousness. (vv.15-20). People who are slaves to sin earn their moral death (vv.21-23). On a macro level, Paul's message is not terribly complicated, and is boiler plate Christian preaching: Christ and God have empowered believers to live a life free of the power of sin, but if the gift is denied, a person will remain morally dead. But the details of Paul's message are far more nuanced, and he uses the theme of death in a variety of ways formulate his arguments.

The relationship between sin and death, a major theme of Rom 5:12-21, remains the same for Rom 6. However, where moral death in Rom 5 was a consequence of sin, here the emphasis is on relationship *to* sin, for believers and non-believers.²¹⁸ Being dead *in* sin means a person is a slave to sin; a person who is dead *to* sin is no longer a slave to sin.²¹⁹ Being "dead" in relation to sin is a rhetorical strategy that delivers emphasis and clarity, and draws on the fact that physical death is one of the few things in life that are irreversible. It represents finality, the end of a way of being. Paul's use of it here is a way of delineating with absolute precision that a person can be either on one side or another.

²¹⁸ Black, "Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5-8," 422.

²¹⁹ The concept of being dead in sin is duplicated in the disputed Pauline letters: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins . . . even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph 2:1-5; Col 2:13)

Death in relation to sin is the great wall that separates the morally dead from the morally alive.²²⁰

There are other nuances of death. The physical death of Christ is mentioned several times.²²¹ Once again, the biological death of Christ was not caused by sin. Some scholars see yet another mode of death in v.7: "For he who has died is freed from sin." This verse has been interpreted in several ways: as an allusion to a rabbinic axiom ("Death pays all debts"; b. Sabb. 151b); as a reference to expiatory theology, or the removal of human guilt by atoning sacrifice; and as an allusion to judicial acquittal.²²² These interpretations are not identical, but they all imply the removal of guilt or penalty. In my view the statement is a recapitulation of the preceding verse, where believers participate in the death of Christ and are sanctified. Believers are free of the effects of sin on a person, not from the legal consequences of sin. Being free from sin means being free of its power, and crossing over from moral death to life in Christ. The freedom that death leads to is in the present, and is not eschatological.

Dying in Christ is another mode of death (vv.3-8). Believers who are baptized into Christ somehow participate in and benefit from the same things Christ experienced during his death, burial and resurrection. As Christ died to sin, and is forever free from the power of sin, so it is with believers. Sin and death have no power over Christ--death cannot be his master. Here we see hints of a transformation of the person, as we did in 1

²²⁰ On the expression "death to sin" as signifying a transition from an old life to a new one, see Charles H. Talbert, "Tracing Paul's Train of Thought in Rom 6-8," *Review and Expositor* 100 (2003): 54-56.

²²¹ Vv. 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10.

²²² Black, "Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5-8," 423.

Cor 15. In Rom 6 Paul describes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ—the bodily transformation of Christ—which has the effect of freedom from the powers of sin and death. Likewise, the bodily transformation in 1 Cor 15 has the effect of eliminating the possibility of sin in a raised body. The same is true here, but it is Christ's death that is the cause, not the death of the person. Either way, death leads to transformation, and ultimately to righteousness and proper relationship with Christ and God.²²³

Finally, we come to the end of the chapter. The meaning of death in the last verse is viewed by some scholars as an affirmation of penalty from God: “For the wages (ὀψώνια) of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In one view, sin pays the slave the wage of death, where wage is a debt caused by sin. The sinner thus makes atonement for her own sin, by paying for it with her life.²²⁴ Another interpretation sees death not only as physical death, but as “a judgment beyond the death of this life.”²²⁵ Death means the penalty of physical death, and also the penalty that extends into eternity. A third, similar view, offered by Dunn, maintains that the “payoff” of sin is twofold; it is “not just eternal death, but death as the forfeiture of eternal life.”²²⁶ In my view, these interpretations miss the intended meaning ὀψώνια, because they take it too literally. Paul really means “results,” or “consequences.” It is not

²²³ Westerholm, "The Righteousness of the Law and the Righteousness of Faith in Romans," 254; Dunn, *Theology*, 386.

²²⁴ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament, Volume 1*, 246.

²²⁵ Roy A. Harrisville, *Romans*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 98f.

²²⁶ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 349. Jewett sees death in the passage as having “a present reality that will extend into the future . . . life eternal is the very opposite of the death of the children of Adam have earned.” Jewett, *Romans*, 426.

so much that a person earns or is paid for sin, but rather that sin has consequences, namely moral death.

In the New Testament *ὀψώνια* means compensation for work performed (Luke 3:14; 1 Cor 6:23; 9:7; 2 Cor 11:8).²²⁷ In all of these passages wages is exactly what it sounds like--the monetary result of a social contract that has been fulfilled by the worker. Wages are a reward from an employer to a person for doing what a worker has agreed to do. There is a transaction that creates wages, which involves an employer, work done by an employee, and payment for work performed.

In the present verse, if we take *ὀψώνια* literally, someone has hired a person to do sin, a person has done sin, and the person is paid for doing sin. For wages to be paid, there must be a hiring agency. If the task is sin, who hired the sinner? In the above interpretations, the wage payer is God. But the wage payer is the same as the employer. Therefore, the agency that hired the sinner is God. Of course, this is not possible in Paul's thought. God cannot pay the wage of sin, because he did not hire anyone to perform it. That *ὀψώνια* should be taken figuratively is supported by the fact that in the final two verses of the chapter, Paul uses symbolic language to indicate the effects of sin: fruit (vv.21, 22), outcome (vv.21, 22), and wages. These are simply consequences, dire as they are, but they do not imply action by God. Paul is saying in v.23 what he has said many times already in Romans—that leading a sinful life has the consequence of moral death. The phrase “wages of sin” suggests a way of life, not a sentence.

²²⁷ See also 1 Esd 4:56; 1 Macc 3:28; 14:32. See “ὀψώνιον,” *BDAG* 1: 747. Liddell Scott offers six definitions, ranging from salary to gratuity; all of the definitions involve a transfer of money for services rendered. *LSJ* 1: 1283.

Death in Romans 7:1-8:17

Romans 7 is usually split into two main units, vv.1-6, and vv.7-25, the former being Paul's argument that one must consider oneself "dead to the Law" and the latter being a lengthy discussion about why the Law and the human mind are in some ways incompatible, and together lead to hostility toward God. The first unit begins with an analogy of marriage, where, as a widow is no longer bound to her husband, so a Gentile is no longer bound to the Law. Paul claims that a person must consider himself "dead to the Law." The reason he must be dead to the law is explained in vv.7-25, which in very brief is: because the Law, the human mind, and flesh altogether actually make sin worse. They create a body of death that seems uncontrollable and hostile to God, especially when the person is commanded by Law to not covet.²²⁸ But all is not lost, as the body of death is saved through Christ and God.

Death in vv.1-6 is neither moral nor physical death; rather it signifies end of relationship. In an analogy, Paul makes the point that a wife's relationship with her husband can only end by death.²²⁹ She is bound to him relationally as long as he is alive. When the husband dies, the relationship dies, and her obligation to him comes to an end. He develops this analogy to explain relationship to the Law. Death to the Law is analogous to the death of the marriage relationship, and it echoes death to sin. All three

²²⁸ The soliloquy in vv.7-25 was taken by Augustine and Luther as a confession of the human will of its inability to do good. This interpretation "made an intense inner struggle with sin the normative human condition and placed Paul's text at the center of Christian theologies of sin." Emma Wasserman, "The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Revisiting Paul's Anthropology in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology," *JBL* 126.4 (2007): 793.

²²⁹ Everett T. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, *Romans*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 114f. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts*, 220f.

relationships must end, and death is used rhetorically to signify permanence and finality in the context of relationship. In sum, death in vv.1-6 is neither physical or moral, but it is metaphorical. Death indicates end of relationship.

Death is a metaphor of a different sort in v.8: “apart from the Law sin lies dead.” I think Paul is exaggerating here, because sin is never dead in Paul, even for believers. That is why he exhorts his readers to be good, even the ones who have died to sin, and who have been baptized into the death of Christ. The battle with sin never ends, as long as a person is alive in a body of flesh. Saying sin is dead apart from the Law is another way of saying that sin depends on Law for its efficacy. In the absence of Law, sin is “dead” in that it is less effective.²³⁰ The inverse of that is sin is amplified by the Law, which is Paul’s larger point; sinfulness is intensified by the command to not covet, as we shall see below.

In the remainder of Rom 7, death takes on different meaning. One interpretation of death in vv.7-25 rests on the claim that Paul is recalling the Eden narrative, as there are many parallels between vv.7-25 and Gen 2-3. For example, “I” is not really Paul, it is Adam, who laments the events leading up to and after the Fall. The commandment that lead to death (Rom 7:9-10) is the commandment to not eat of the Tree of Knowledge; the sin that deceived (v.11) is the serpent (or the devil, by some accounts); and death throughout the passage is the loss of immortality, punishment for doing sin.²³¹ Another

²³⁰ Cf. James 2:17, 26; 1 Cor 15:56. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 381.; cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ABD (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 467.

²³¹ Wright, "The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," 563f.; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 380-85. See also Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 154. Boice, *Romans*, 741. Käsemann, *Romans*, 194-97.

interpretive framework assumes that “I” is Paul, who is recalling his former life as a zealous, Law-abiding Pharisee. Paul came to realize that Torah, and perhaps the whole Jewish religion, are insufficient and wrong. Paul says, “the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me, for sin, taking an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me” (vv.10-11). This orientation also leads to the conclusion that death is physical death, punishment which is the judgment of God. I disagree with these interpretations.

For one thing, I do not think Paul is doing history to explain the origins of death, as he did in Rom 5. Nor do I believe that the fictive “I” is Adam or himself. I am in agreement with Stanley Stowers, who argues convincingly that Paul is doing moral psychology, not history. Further, I am in agreement with Stowers that “I” is a Gentile who is attempting to live by Torah.²³² As we shall see, this orientation supports the conclusion that death throughout the passage is moral death, not physical death.

Moral psychology was the endeavor to understand the mental conditions essential to the development of proper character, including ideals of desire, temperament, and judgment.²³³ One feature of moral psychology was self-mastery. A person who struggles with self-mastery could not always manage the forces of evil on the mind. The following text, taken from Ovid’s (43 BCE – c.17 CE) *Metamorphoses* 7:17-21, illustrates a person who struggles with self-mastery:

²³² Stowers, *Romans*, 273-84. On the identity of *I* in Rom 7, see Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 156-59. Schreiner, *Romans*, 354-65. Moo, *Romans 1-8*, 470-77. Achtemeier, *Romans*, 119-24. Daniel Napier, "Paul's Analysis of Sin and Torah in Romans 7:7-25," *Restoration Quarterly* 44.1 (2002).

²³³ Stowers, *Romans*, 264-72. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts*, 226f.

Oh wretched one, drive out these flames that you fell from your maiden breast if you can. If I could, I would be more reasonable. But some strange power holds me back against my will. Desire impels (or “counsels”) me one way, my mind another. I see what is better and approve it, but I follow the worse. Why do you, a royal maiden, burn for a stranger, and think about marriage in a foreign world.²³⁴

The problem is one of mind and will, manifested in a person who knows acutely the right mode of behavior, yet who at the same time acknowledges an external, foreign power that he has not yet and perhaps never will subdue. But the writer is not talking about himself alone—he is actually confessing to a condition that he thinks many people have. When he says “I” he really means “the average person, especially you the reader.” This technique is called *prosopopoiia*, or speech-in-character, a literary and rhetorical method in which the speaker creates speech of another person, often inventing people with a particular ethos. Speech in character was often used in tragic monologues, such as the one above.

There are parallels between ancient texts that use speech in character and Rom 7. For example, Paul bemoans: “I do not understand what I am doing. I do not practice what I want to do; instead I do the very thing I hate.” (v.15); “I do not do the good I wish to do; instead I practice the very evil thing I hate.” (v.19) Paul is using speech in character to describe a problem that the reader is probably already privy to. The result is empathy with the reader, by confessing a lamentable condition that the speaker and reader share. He is in effect saying: “I understand how you feel.” That Paul was using speech in character to describe a person who struggles with self-mastery would have been obvious to his readers.²³⁵ Further, Paul, like the writer above, acknowledges the tension between

²³⁴ This is Stowers’ translation of a portion of *P. Ovid Naso Metamorphosen*, 10th ed., ed. Rudolf Ewald (Zurich: Weidmann, 1966) Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles*, 263.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 269-72.

doing what one ought and doing what one wants. He is confessing, through the voice of an invented character, that self-mastery is difficult, if not impossible. Rom 7 also has in common with ancient speech in character texts the notion that moral and psychological states are influenced by external powers. For Paul that power is sin; in Greek polytheism the gods were the cause of certain impulses, like love, chastity, and doing good or evil. At times the impulses were in conflict with each other, making self-mastery all the more unattainable.

For Paul, self-mastery is impossible because of a commandment:

And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. (9-11; NAS)

Why does Paul say that the commandment would actually empower sin, and even lead to death? Which commandment is Paul talking about, and what does he mean by death? Does he mean the commandment to not eat of the Tree of Knowledge, and is death therefore the penalty of physical death? I argue that the commandment to which Paul is referring is “You shall not covet,” and death in the remainder of the chapter is moral death, not physical death.

The most obvious argument for the identity of the commandment is that Paul tells the reader in v. 7 exactly which commandment he has in mind: “You shall not covet.” The reason for this particular commandment is because he is appealing to Greco-Roman ethics and moral psychology, an element of which is the struggle to attain self-mastery. Those who struggled with self-mastery understood that desire—covetousness--was a

primary cause of evil, and a major stumbling block to attaining self-mastery. Paul appeals to that sensibility by melding Greco-Roman ethics and his own scripture, cutting off the end of the commandment, quoted here from Exodus: “You shall not covet (*ἐπιθυμήσεις*) your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (20:17; NAS) The other nine commandments are imperatives to do or not do specific activities—do not kill, do not worship other gods, do not cheat on your spouse. You shall not covet is a commandment that goes beyond behavior and into the realm of thought, feeling, or emotion. Paul magnifies this aspect of the commandment by truncating the end of it, thus omitting the objects of covetousness.²³⁶ Paul, then, is not asking the reader to recall the whole of the tenth commandment—he is not interested in wives, goods, or cattle—he is instead bringing to light one of the essential problems with self-mastery, namely the problem of desire, which in many circles in the Ancient World was the root of evil.²³⁷

Indeed, the verb *ἐπιθυμέω* conveyed desiring good things and bad things.²³⁸ In philosophical circles, it was connected to the carnal side of humanity, to be disciplined by the mind. The Stoics thought *ἐπιθυμία* was one of the four passions to be held in check. Paul uses the word to indicate vices.²³⁹ In Paul's world desire was sometimes equivalent to evil itself. Thus, when Paul says the command to not covet leads to more desire, and ultimately to death, he is drawing on the ethic of self-mastery, desire being a primary

²³⁶ Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts*, 229.

²³⁷ Byrne, *Romans*, 219.

²³⁸ Jewett, *Romans*, 447f.

²³⁹ 1 Thess 4:5; Gal 5:16, 24; Rom 1:24, etc. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts*, 229f.

obstacle toward leading a healthy and productive moral life. This appeal to Greco-Roman sensibilities is not unlike his appeals elsewhere to Wisdom, where a life of Wisdom and godliness is superior to a life of foolishness and wretchedness. A “dead” person in the wisdom tradition has no control over herself; she is unbridled, unrepentant sinner and has no possibility of relating to God.

Death in Rom 7 has strong ties to death in Rom 1. The moral death of the Gentile is told from an historical standpoint in Rom 1; in Rom 7 it is told from a psychological standpoint.²⁴⁰ In both chapters Gentiles are captive to their own passions and desire, and are burdened with base minds. In chapter 7 the Law increased the power of desire, with the same result: moral death. Such a person has failed to master sin and the forces of evil, and needs to cry out, “Oh wretch that I am, who will save me from this body of death?” This is an exclamation not of hopelessness or despair, but one made by a person who “desires from the depths of his being to respond to the claims which the gospel makes upon him.”²⁴¹ It is made by a person who is acutely aware of her proximity to moral death. Of course, Paul in the end speaks of a solution for moral death, and a release from the body of death, saying: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” But the chapter ends before he can explain how that solution works.

The solution to the inner struggle of the mind, and the failure of self-mastery comes in chapter 8, and it is articulated in terms of ethics and relationship. The difficulty of moral death is overcome by relationship with the Spirit; a person in relationship with

²⁴⁰ Stowers, *Romans*, 273.

²⁴¹ Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 169.

the Spirit has been released from the bondage of sin. He is no longer morally dead, and is now a child of God.

In some ways the beginning of Rom 8 is a recapitulation of death related themes from chapters 6 and 7: Christ has conquered sin in the flesh; those in the flesh set their minds on the flesh, which is hostile to God.²⁴² The reference to hostility indicates that Paul thinks of only two possibilities; a person can either have relationship with God, or relationship with sin —“there is no middle ground.”²⁴³ In v.13 Paul says if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if you live by the Spirit and are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. By now, it should be obvious to the reader that death and life are qualitative metaphors for right or wrong living. They are also indicative of relationship with God.

The relationships between sin, flesh, moral death, and God are not new; however, there is one major addition to Paul's thinking: the Spirit, a transformative force in a believer's life. The Spirit enables life, disables sin and its power, and enables relationship with God. He places the Spirit against the flesh, against the ungodly mind. He also places the Spirit opposite the Law, calling the Law weak in the flesh (8:3). Now we can understand why Paul in 7:1-6 said a person (a Gentile!) must die to the Law--it is because a believer can only be "married" to one or the other, the Law or the Spirit. But this is true for Gentiles only, whose moral death begins in the mind and flesh. Moral death is

²⁴² The expressions “the mind set on the flesh” and “the mind set on the Spirit” may be echoes of literary and philosophical themes contemporary to Paul, e.g. Aeschylus *Pers.* 808 and Euripedes *El.* 1201-4. Jewett, *Romans*, 487. Against this view, Wright claims that the “flesh, personified, ‘thinks’ in a certain way, which then becomes embodied in particular individuals.” Wright, “The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” 582.c.f. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 180.

²⁴³ Middendorf, *Romans 1-8*, 621f. Moo, *Romans*, 488.

exacerbated by the command to not covet, but it is conquered by the Spirit, God's gift to Gentiles. The promise of human-divine relationship reaches its climax in vv.12-17, where believers are granted fully realized affiliation to Christ and God with the power of familial imagery.²⁴⁴ In the end, the solution for Christ followers is explicitly framed in terms of the most intimate associations; believers are called sons of God (v.14), children of God (v.16), and heirs (v.17). By the gift of the Spirit believers are “taken into the very *familia* of God’s own household.”²⁴⁵

Death in Paul: Conclusions

It is very risky business using terms like “always” and “never” when making conclusions about the way Paul thinks of just about anything. Nonetheless, I conclude that Paul never links physical death to sin, and he never thinks it is a cosmological problem that the gospel solves. The kind of death that is related to sin is a metaphor for a way of life apart from God. This way of looking at physical and moral death has substantial support in literature that preceded and influenced Paul. We have also found that Paul speaks of death metaphorically in other ways—dying to sin, dying to the Law—ways in which relationship with sin and Law is forever changed. In that sense, the concept of death is a rhetorical strategy that represents finality, a completed action that cannot be reversed.

Looking forward, the peril from which one is saved is neither physical death, nor punishment. It is broken relationship with God. Paul’s gospel is less a crime story than a

²⁴⁴ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 447.

²⁴⁵ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 498.

love story, a story about God who cares more about reconciliation with the lost than with punishment of the wicked. In the next chapter I will continue with this theme, looking at justification.

Chapter Three: Justification in Paul

The Justification Debate in Pauline Studies

The starting point of this dissertation is the question, “From what is one saved in Paul’s thought?” In the first chapter I argued against the view that one is saved from punishment; thus the peril from which one is saved is not a legal one. In the second chapter I argued that physical death is not the peril either; instead it is moral death, a way of life apart from God. Moral death in Paul’s thought means not communing with God, and not knowing God. So, building on the conclusions I have made so far, the starting point of this chapter is the assumption that the peril for Gentiles is that they do not know God and they cannot have relationship with God.

With the peril in place, we are now in a position to identify the essence and function of justification in Paul. Simply stated, justification is the means by which a Gentile comes to know God. It is the very beginning of the God-person relationship, which starts with recognizing God. Justification happens when a person comes to believe in the creative power of God, manifested in the resurrection of Christ. Recognition of God’s power and belief in his promise of the resurrection is what makes a person righteous, and enables proper relationship with God. Righteousness begins with seeing

and recognizing God in the resurrection of Christ. It is fundamentally relational, and not forensic.

One of the challenges in trying to define justification or righteousness in Paul is translational. Δικ-stem words have a wide range of meanings in Hellenistic thought, the LXX, the New Testament, and even in Paul. But those many nuances of δικ-stem words are often lost because translators have chosen just a few English words to translate them with. For example, δίκαιος is usually translated as “righteous,” δικαιοσύνη is usually translated as “righteousness,” and δικαιώω is usually translated as “to justify.” In English, righteousness and righteous suggest moral piety,²⁴⁶ whereas to justify suggests legal issues. But these translations and connotations are sometimes too narrow. Writers in the ancient world thought of δικ-stem words beyond the categories of piety and legalism. In Hellenistic thought of Paul’s time δικαιοσύνη meant an ideal against which the actions of a person could be measured.²⁴⁷ In very broad terms “righteous” in Hellenistic thought implies a social contract, and describes proper activity within a relationship. In Aristotle it could also describe justice in the strictest sense, or the proper performance of social obligations of a person, like doing right by one’s neighbors.²⁴⁸ Being “just” was a virtue

²⁴⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 369-70. For more on the history of translation of the δικαί family of Greek words, and how these translational problems are still present in some lexicons, see Richard K. Moore, "Δικαιοσύνη and Cognates in Paul: The Semantic Gulf between Two Major Lexicons (Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker and Louw-Nida)," *Colloquium* 30.1(1998).

²⁴⁷ Dunn, *Theology*, 341. Dunn, *New Perspective*, 369-70.

²⁴⁸ J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 49-51.

like courage and wisdom. In Plato, *δικαιοσύνη* is a quality of the soul and is equivalent to piety.

In the LXX *δικ*-stem words can mean deliverance from enemies, the satisfaction of internal personal conflicts, vindication, and military victory (Ps 35:22-28; Isa 54:11-17).²⁴⁹ *Δικ*-stem words can also suggest blamelessness (Gen 6:9), practicing justice (Ps 106:3; Prov 1:3), and speaking honestly (Prov 8:8; Isa 45:19). Ezekiel implies that practicing righteousness leads to remission of sins (18:20-21). The noun *δικαιοσύνη* can also mean what “one ought to do.” To declare people righteous (or justify them) is to find them to have done what they ought. The verb *δικαίωω*, on the other hand, can mean in the LXX to acquit. Several LXX texts stress the correctness of justifying the righteous and the wrongfulness of justifying the ungodly (e.g. Exod 23:7; Deut 25:1; Isa 5:23; cf. Sir 9:12), but that does not guarantee that the righteous will prevail, and the prevailing party is not necessarily righteous. In other words, winning or losing a court case has no bearing on a person’s moral character. The righteous are simply those who should prevail, whether they do or not.²⁵⁰ New Testament writers use *δικ*-stem words in many ways. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus associates righteousness with ethical behavior toward others within a society--being merciful, having a pure heart, and making peace (Matt 5:4). In Acts righteousness also is rooted in ethics; it is linked to self-control

²⁴⁹ Peter J. Leithart, "Justification as Verdict and Deliverance: A Biblical Perspective," *Pro Ecclesia* 16 (2007).

²⁵⁰ Westerholm, "The Righteousness of the Law and the Righteousness of Faith in Romans," 255. Cf. James White, *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001).

(24:25), and opposes deceit and fraud (13:10). In 1 John, the writer associates righteousness with piety--Abel was righteous and Cain was evil (1 John 3:12).

Righteousness and justification language has a spectrum of meanings in Paul as well. In Romans alone it can suggest ethical practice (Rom 2:13), piety (3:5; 6:19), right relationship with God (5:1), and deliverance from sin and death.²⁵¹ Some scholars see justification language more narrowly, as being defined as God's approval expressed in a forensic verdict. Paul's use of justification words should be viewed as allusions to people standing before God as judge (Gal 2:16d), and his references to divine wrath indicate a judicial crisis (cf. Rom 2:5, 8; 3:5; 5:9), which is often expressed in terms of God's righteous judgment (2 Thes 1:5-10).²⁵²

The point of the above admittedly brief survey is that δικ-stem vocabulary had a wide range of meanings in the Ancient World. Therefore trying to define it narrowly may lead to inaccurate conclusions. Claiming that righteousness (*δικαιοσύνην*) in Paul always means "X", everywhere in every Pauline epistle, will not yield good fruit. Therefore I will not attempt to develop a meaning of justification that has universal application. I am not claiming that justification or righteousness means exactly the same thing in every passage of every one of Paul's letters. Instead, I will demonstrate the meaning of

²⁵¹ Looking at δικα language in the New Testament and in Paul, Don Howell concludes: "The juridical element in the δικαίω word group, however, seems to be its characteristic sense in Paul. The forensic meaning 'to declare or pronounce righteous' is especially dominant in the Pauline usage of the verb δικαίω. With δικαιοσύνη and δίκαιος the ethical sense is widely attested. They denote the quality of character and behavior required of individuals by God, particularly uprightness of conduct and obedience to the divine commands. However, the forensic sense of both terms again becomes the distinctive Pauline usage. Don N. Howell, "The Center of Pauline Theology," *BS* 151 (1994): 51f.

²⁵² With the inevitability of judgment in view, Paul exhorts his readers to strive to receive the wreath of boasting and to be found "blameless" (*αμεμπτοι*, 1 Thes 3:13; cf. *άμέμπτος*, 1 Thes 5:23) before the divine judge. Paul A. Rainbow, "Justification According to Paul's Thessalonian Correspondence," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19.2 (2009).

righteousness in the expression: “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (δικαιοσύνην).” (Rom 4:3)

There are three reasons why I have chosen this expression to develop my model of justification. First, Paul quotes it directly no less than four times (Rom 4:3, 9, 22; Gal 3:6), and alludes to it another five times (Rom 4: 5, 6, 11, 13), all in the context of lengthy discourses about justification, faith, and Abraham. Second, the expression occurs in two letters, Galatians and Romans. In Galatians, Paul was responding to a social-religious crisis that involved Gentiles who were attempting to live by the precepts of Torah. His letter to the church in Rome does not appear to be a response to a similar situation. The occasions for Galatians and Romans are not the same. So, we have two letters written for two reasons, to two groups of people at separate times, and yet within them is a common line of thought where Paul explains his views of justification and righteousness. This line of thought, and the scripture he quoted (Gen 15:6) to formulate his thoughts, must have been important to him. Therefore the phrase and the text it is taken from are the starting point from which I will analyze the meaning of justification and righteousness in Paul. Third and finally, the passages where the expression occurs are the epicenter of the justification debate. Indeed, Rom 4 and Gal 2-3 are impossible to avoid if one is arguing about meanings of justification and righteousness, because it is in these passages that Paul explains in the greatest detail what justification and righteousness mean. To be clear, I am not trying to develop a model of justification or righteousness that has application in every passage of every letter in Paul. Instead, I will show what righteousness means in the phrase: “Abraham believed God, and it was

reckoned to him as righteousness." I will also demonstrate that Gentiles come to righteousness in the same way Abraham did.

A Critique of Reformed Justification

Luther believed that Paul, like other Jews of his time, pursued righteousness by doing works of the Law. On the road to Damascus Paul saw the magnificence of Christ raised, and simultaneously his own wretchedness. He realized his own need for justification, and that practicing Judaism was not the way to get it.²⁵³ Judaism had misunderstood the role of Law and had become a religion of righteousness by works, at the expense of faith.²⁵⁴ Once "converted," Paul the Christian railed against this false religion and preached justification through faith alone, in opposition to legalistic Judaism. Justification by faith means that a believer is justified through faith in Christ, whose own righteousness is imputed from to the believer, resulting in acquittal in a divine law court.

Most scholars in the Reformed school maintain these basic ideals, and affirm that Paul's concern is judicial approval on the Day of the Lord, when God as righteous judge will finally exact punitive justice against the guilty.²⁵⁵ For example, Malcolm Yarnell suggests that "the classical Protestant position" of justification means God will someday

²⁵³ Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Apollos, 2000), 26.

²⁵⁴ Torah does little to help with justification; in fact the law brings even more accusations against the defendant. Indeed, no person can justify herself. The only thing a person can do is cry out to the Lord, "O God, provide the propitiation for me, a sinner." Malcom Yarnell, "Christian Justification: A Reformation and Baptist View," *CTR* 2.2 (Spring 2005): 89.

²⁵⁵ De Boer claims that justification in Gal. 2.15-21 encompasses not only God's forensic justification of the believer in the future, but also God's dynamic rectification of the believer in the present. Martinus C. de Boer, "Paul's Use and Interpretation of a Justification Tradition in Galatians 2.15-21," *JSNT* 28.2 (2005): 215.; cf. David R. Maxwell, "Justified by Works and Not by Faith Alone: Reconciling Paul and James," *Concordia Journal* October (2007): 376.

judge all people, who are depraved and have no chance of acquittal in court, lest they be justified by faith in Christ.²⁵⁶ Only the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed from Christ to the believer, can change the verdict from guilty to acquitted.²⁵⁷ For the guilty the reckoning of sins results in divine wrath; for the acquitted justification results in acceptance and blessings from God.²⁵⁸ In short, for the Reformers, justification begins with the presumption that all people will stand condemned before God in the divine law court on the Day of the Lord.²⁵⁹ Justification is primarily judicial, and its main benefit is the avoidance of the wrath of God. The following quote from Karl Donfried exemplifies the Reformed position on purpose of justification: "What are we being saved from? The wrath of God—a theme found in 1 Thessalonians, his (Paul's) first letter . . . and in his

²⁵⁶ Yarnell, "Christian Justification: A Reformation and Baptist View," 71f. Other scholars who maintain forensic justification: Reumann, "Justification by Faith in Pauline Thought," 108-30. Macchia, *Justification in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God*, 38-74. Oden, *The Justification Reader*. Peter Toon, *Justification and Sanctification* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1983), 20-31. White, *The God Who Justifies*. Wilhelm Dantine, *Justification of the Ungodly* (trans. Eric W. Gritsch and Ruth C. Gritsch; Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1968). Thomas R. Schreiner, "Justification: The Saving Righteousness of God in Christ," *JETS* 54.1 (2011): 22-23. See also Joseph A. Burgess and Marc Kolden, eds., *By Faith Alone: Essays on Justification in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

²⁵⁷ Frank Macchia, "Justification and the Spirit: A Pentecostal Reflection on the Doctrine by Which the Church Stands or Falls," *Pneuma* 22.1 (2000): 4. Yarnell, "Christian Justification: A Reformation and Baptist View," 71f. Schreiner, "Justification," 22.

²⁵⁸ S. J. Gathercole, "Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21-4:25," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism Volume 2: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. P. A. Carson, et al (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 168. Karl P. Donfried, "Paul and the Revisionists: Did Luther Really Get It All Wrong?," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 46.1 (2007): 33.

²⁵⁹ Reumann, "Justification by Faith in Pauline Thought," 108-30. Macchia, *Justification in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God*, 38-74. Oden, *The Justification Reader*, 53f. Toon, *Justification and Sanctification*, 20-31. White, *The God Who Justifies*, 73-92. Dantine, *Justification of the Ungodly*, 55-83.

last (Romans) . . . All human beings are enslaved to sin and are in need of God's righteousness."²⁶⁰

I disagree with the Reformers on the need for, and the essence of justification. As we saw in the first chapter, punishment is not inevitable in Paul. Instead, future or even present punishment is due to those who behave in a certain way. Therefore, the threat of punishment is not common to all people, which is another way of saying not all people need to be saved from it. So, the threat of punishment cannot be the peril from which one is saved. It follows that justification does not need to be forensic.

There are other reasons why the Reformed model is incorrect. The model assumes that justification is forensic, but it also assumes that justification has its full effect when the divine court is in session, on the Day of the Lord. Justification is fully realized when the judgment comes. We should therefore expect Paul to associate justification with judgment, in one way or another. But Paul often does not do that. There are several passages where Paul speaks of future judgment, yet he says nothing of acquittal of the righteous, or condemnation of the unjustified. He does not describe judgment in terms of justification or righteousness, and he makes no mention of justified believers being acquitted. There are several examples. Paul says in Romans: "Do you suppose that if you pass judgment upon those who do such things (grave sins) and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?" (2:3) He goes on to say that hypocrites who judge others store up wrath on the day of wrath; the righteous God will judge everyone according to what he has done. To be sure, the chapter is full of judgment language, often

²⁶⁰ Donfried, "Paul and the Revisionists: Did Luther Really Get It All Wrong?," 33.

in the context of judgment day; however, justification comes up just once: “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous (δίκαιοι) before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified” (δικαιθήσονται; v.13).

How people are justified on the day of the Lord goes against the Reformed view. Rather than the imputation of righteousness from Christ to believers, the justified are justified because of what they do. Gentiles who instinctively do works of the law, because the law is written on their hearts, will do well on the day of judgment (v.16). These people, who are essentially “good,” or “righteous” as Westerholm uses the term (doing what one ought), are the ones who are justified, and they are justified because they practice morals and ethics. Thus, Jews who keep the Law and Gentiles who keep the Law are both on the right side of God’s judgment. This is to say that justification is in part self-determined, being caused by doing good, obeying the law or by having the law written on one’s heart. In sum, judgment is a prevalent theme in much of Rom 2, but there is only a hint of justification language; people who do good works are in good standing with God, not “justified” people.

The divine law court and the judgment seat of God are in view in Rom 14:0-11:

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God." (NAS)

If Paul believed that Christ would on judgment day advocate for the justified—an essential element of Reformed justification--he might have said so here. The judgment

seat of God is where justification is supposed to happen, and yet there is no mention of it. A third example is in 1 Cor 4:5, where Paul is addressing divisions in the church: “Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his praise from God.” The broader context of this verse is exhortation for the Corinthians to get along with each other. The apostle pleads with the stewards of the church, and encourages them to aspire to be found trustworthy. It is appropriate to not judge each other as the Lord will judge when he comes. Again, righteousness language is nowhere in view. People who stand before God are not righteous or unrighteous, nor are they classified in groups of justified or unjustified. Instead of receiving the imputed righteousness of Christ on judgment day, believers are given praise (ἐπαινος) from God. Here, as above, Paul invokes future judgment, and implies that all will be judged. There is certainly a courtroom in view, but is there an advocate in the court room, as Reformed scholars claim? God is in the courtroom, but Christ is not. Indeed, the divine law court on judgment day not only lacks Christ, it lacks the essential ingredient of Reformed view: justification itself.

Another premise of Reformed justification is that its main benefit is avoiding the wrath of God on the Day of the Lord. Therefore, justification should be a critical component of Paul’s eschatology. If this is so, then we should expect justification to be associated with the return of Christ, or the Day of the Lord. When Paul describes the end, we should expect him to say something of the fate of people, the righteous and the unrighteous. But Paul does not do that. Eschatological discourses in Paul often lack

forensic ideals altogether, and are virtually always void of justification language. For example, in 1 Cor 15, Paul illustrates vividly the return of Christ, drawing on imagery from Jewish apocalypticism. There is a resurrection, when believers are raised into imperishable bodies; death will be destroyed along with the rulers of this world, and all things are redeemed to God. Much of the chapter echoes aspects of apocalyptic literature of Paul's time, yet totally absent is any indication of future judgment or wrath. Further, there is no mention of justification either—there is no hint that the justified will do better on that day than the not-justified. He implies that the faithful dead (who are sleeping) will rise, but their rising has no bearing on whether they are “justified” or “righteous.”

Paul writes eschatologically in 1 Thessalonians, but he says nothing of justification. As he looks to the end of times, when the wrath of God is unleashed on the oppressors in Thessalonica, he does not describe who gets wrath in terms of unrighteousness. As I argued above, Paul often groups people in terms of their behavior, not in terms of status, like “righteous” or “justified.” In the letter he speaks directly to believers in Thessalonica, who have the following qualities: they have worked in faith and in steadfastness of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ (1.3); they are imitators of Paul and of the Lord; they are examples for all believers; they have turned from idols and serve the living God (1.9); they are sons of light, sons of day, alert, and sober (5:5-8). Finally, the believers are described as “the chosen” ὑπο [του] Θεου την εκλογην υμων (1:4). Again, Paul makes clear distinctions between the faithful Christ followers and those who oppress them, and he is equally clear that the oppressors in Thessalonica will experience eschatological wrath, and that believers will be spared. But he makes those distinctions

without using any justification language at all. Indeed, the Reformed school maintains that justification comes to bear in the divine court room, on the day of the Lord. It supposedly spares a believer from wrath on that day, yet in Paul's visions of the judgment seat, and of the day of wrath, justification language is absent.

A Critique of New Perspective and Radical New Perspective Justification

Most New Perspective scholars seem to agree that the purpose of Paul's gospel was not how a sinner could find a gracious God, but rather how to find a way for Gentiles to be included in the family of God.²⁶¹ On that score, the Reformed and New Perspective camps are divided. The two schools are also distinguished by how they view the means by which justification takes place, the function of justification within a soteriological economy, as well as the role of faith in the process of justification. There are even points of distinction among New Perspective scholars about the elements and function of justification. Radical New Perspective scholars like Eisenbaum and Stowers have their own claims to justification and salvation, which are distinct from other scholars on the New Perspective side. So, while discussing the Reformed view is a relatively straightforward undertaking, New Perspective and Radical New Perspective views of justification resist generalizations. Therefore, owing to the limits of space and time, I will discuss and critique justification models of two New Perspective scholars, Dunn and Wright, as well as two Radical New Perspective scholars, Eisenbaum and Stowers.

²⁶¹ Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 78-96.

James Dunn presumes that Paul's theology of justification was in large part the working out of his experience on the way to Damascus (Phi 3:7-9).²⁶² Paul thought of his epiphany as a prophetic calling. His recollections of the experience in Gal 1:15-16 and 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8-10 are made with allusions to major prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, so his Damascus experience was a divine commission, not a "conversion" away from Judaism and to Christianity. Therefore when Paul speaks of justification he is not condemning Judaism or Torah, but he is instead wrestling with the challenge of how Gentiles can be reconciled to God.

Dunn maintains that Paul's conception of justification is best understood within the context of relationship, in which parties to the relationship have obligations to each other.²⁶³ The righteousness of an individual is not measured by how well a person conforms to social ethics or morals, but rather it means that a person has met the claims "which others have on them by virtue of their relationship."²⁶⁴ In other words, contracts between people include expectations for each person in the relationship; a righteous person is true to the expectations of the contract. Marriage is a good example; it is expected that a wife and husband are faithful to each other. God's righteousness is similar—it means that he will make good on the promises embedded in the covenant with Abraham. The righteousness of God "denotes God's fulfillment of the obligations he took

²⁶² Dunn, *New Perspective*, 367-71.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ James D. G. Dunn and Alan M. Suggate, *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 16.

upon himself in creating humankind and particularly in the calling of Abraham and the choosing of Israel to be his people.”²⁶⁵

Like some other New Perspective scholars, Dunn maintains that when Paul says justification is by faith apart from works of the Law, he is reacting to Jewish exclusivism, not Jewish legalism. Indeed, justification by faith was the heart of Jewish doctrine at the time.²⁶⁶ If justification is by faith, then what was Paul reacting to in Galatians 2:16 and Rom 3:20, if not Jewish legalism?²⁶⁷ In a word, restrictiveness—the notion that Israel alone could be the recipients of God’s covenant righteousness. In Galatians, when Paul speaks of justification “apart from the law” he has in mind the social and religious setting described in Galatians, like when Peter was compelling Gentiles to live like Jews. Paul was not referring to obtaining righteousness via a works-based religion as Reformers thought, but to the works of law that caused the barrier between Jew and Gentile to remain, works like eating laws and circumcision, the very works Paul had been describing in Galatians up to Gal 2:16. In Paul’s mind Israel had become too preoccupied with separation from other people to remember its purpose—to be the light of the world. Our understanding of justification in Paul, then, should take into account the social and religious setting of Galatians and to a lesser extent Romans, two letters that deal at length with Jew-Gentile relations. Paul is calling for equality in a matter of speaking, arguing that Jew and Gentile are equally justified before God, on the condition of faith.

²⁶⁵ Dunn, *New Perspective*, 370.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 370f.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 367-71.

The reason Dunn's take on justification in Paul has not garnered the volume and intensity of responses from Lutheran scholars such as has been delivered to Wright, I believe, is because he defines justification so generally. While Dunn does not embrace forensic justification, he nonetheless expresses the meaning of justification broadly enough so as to not cause a strong reaction by the Reformed camp. That justification means a person is found acceptable to God is hard to argue with, whether you are Wright or Martin Luther. I agree with Dunn that the expression "justification is by faith apart from the works of the Law" has been misunderstood, but my interpretation of the expression is not the same as Dunn's, as we shall see below. I also agree that justification is fundamentally relational, but, again, for reasons other than the one Dunn gives.

Wright's take on justification in Paul begins with a unique read of Genesis, the Abrahamic covenant, and the history of Israel as told in the Hebrew Bible.²⁶⁸ The Abraham narrative is a retelling of the Eden story, but with a different ending. The promises to Abraham are allusions to the commands to Adam. In fact, the whole argument of Genesis is that "God has called Abraham and his family to undo the sin of Adam."²⁶⁹ God called Israel to be his chosen people "who know the secrets of the universe and are called to live by its otherwise hidden rules, while other nations blunder around in darkness."²⁷⁰ But Israel became part of the problem, overplaying her role as

²⁶⁸ N.T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 36f.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 23. God's plan for the world is thwarted by sin, so "God calls Abraham to be the means of rescuing humankind." Further, the Abrahamic covenant is "organically and intimately related at every point to the particular concern of sinful, guilty humankind." N. T. Wright, "Justification: Yesterday, Today, and Forever," *JETS* 54.1 (2011): 52f.

²⁷⁰ Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 22.

elect. The Christ event solves the problem of a fallen world by redeeming it, as well as enabling Abraham's family to be what it was intended to be in the first place, but with Gentiles included.²⁷¹ Jesus, the faithful Israelite, was vindicated through his resurrection, and believers who are in Christ are declared to be in covenant with full status and benefits, including being declared righteous. Paul's concern about justification is not how sinners can find right relationship with God.²⁷² Rather, the "point of justification and of Abraham and his family, always was that the way God intended to deal with evil was through keeping promises made in the covenant."²⁷³

Wright defines the meanings of justification and righteousness within the framework of the Abrahamic covenant, and in the context of a divine law court. Human righteousness has nothing to do with moral character, but it does reflect a person's standing in court, which must be understood as "the covenantal one in which God's promises to Abraham are at stake."²⁷⁴ Therefore right legal standing is the same as covenantal status in the family of Abraham, including "the assurance of sins forgiven and of the promise that 'those whom God justified, them he also glorified.'"²⁷⁵ To justify someone is a declaration of legal status, not the transformation of the person.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ Ibid., 36f.

²⁷² Ibid., 37.

²⁷³ Ibid., 38.

²⁷⁴ Wright, "Justification: Yesterday, Today, and Forever," 58.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 58.

Wright's take on justification has produced substantial criticism.²⁷⁷ While I disagree with his opponents on the nature and function of justification, I think most of the criticism coming from the Reformed school is warranted. The first problem with Wright's view is that the human problem and divine solution are disconnected.²⁷⁸ The problem, says Wright, is that people are outside of covenant and are deemed unrighteous, and the solution is to bring the unrighteous into covenant, which has the consequence of declaring them righteous. In other words, Wright conflates righteousness with covenant. However, Paul often impugns the wicked, the unrighteous, and the sinful, as well as whole groups of people like Jews and Gentiles, without describing the unrighteous in terms of covenant. Indeed, the terms *ἄδικος*, *ἀδικία* ("unrighteous, unrighteousness") occur in several places and are virtually always associated with doing bad things, not being outside covenant. (Rom 1:18; 2:8; 1 Cor 6:9, etc.).

²⁷⁶ NT Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 90f.

²⁷⁷ Some of Wright's critics include: John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007). Donfried, "Paul and the Revisionists: Did Luther Really Get It All Wrong?." Schreiner, "Justification."; Michael F. Bird, "Incorporated Righteousness: A Response to Recent Evangelical Discussion Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in Justification," *JETS* 47.2 (2004).; Joshua W. Jipp, "Rereading the Story of Abraham, Isaac, and 'Us' in Romans 4," *JSNT* 32.2 (2009).; Cornelius P. Venema, "N. T. Wright on Romans 5:12-21 and Justification: A Case Study in Exegesis, Theological Method, and the 'New Perspective on Paul'," *MJT* 16 (2005). Matera attempts an impasse between New Perspective and traditional scholars of Paul. The new path is on three fronts: Justification apart from works of the law; the law in light of the promise; and the morality of believers who are not under the law. Frank J. Matera, "Galatians in Perspective: Cutting a New Path through Old Territory," *Interpretation* 54.3 (2000): 235. In Gal 2:15-21 Paul contrasts works of the law with faith in/of Christ. Clearly, however the words are translated, it is clear that *ἔργων νόμου* does not justify a person before God, but *διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* does. Traditionally the difference between the two ways to justification was explained with reference to Judaism being a works-based religion, where a person earned his way to righteousness by doing good. Following Dunn, Matera claims the problem in Galatia was more social, and not as theological as Paul's interpreters think. The key to understanding this is the showdown at Antioch, where Paul rebukes Peter for asking the Gentiles to live like Jews (Gal 2.14). *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ Piper, *The Future of Justification*, 39-42.

Secondly, Wright's premise that the covenant with Abraham was a retelling of the Eden narrative, and that the covenant with Abraham was intended to cure the problem that Adam created, and that writers of the Hebrew Bible saw it that way is impossible to defend.²⁷⁹ Moreover, Paul's Jewish contemporaries did not seem to read the Eden and Abraham narratives as Wright does. As discussed above, the misadventures of Adam and the consequences thereof are soon forgotten by the writers of the Hebrew Bible. The consequences of Eve and Adam's transgression are not the theological, historical, or literary conflict that define the history of Israel, nor is the whole Eden episode anything more than a blip on the radar screen, as far as the writers of the Hebrew Bible are concerned. Wright is projecting traditional Western Christian interpretations of the Eden narrative into the Abraham narrative, interpretations that were developed long after Paul died. Paul did not read Adam the way Wright does, and he did not conflate the Eden narrative and the Abraham narrative the way Wright does.

Thirdly, Wright diminishes the need for individual justification, because he overestimates the need for cosmic or ecclesiological salvation. Wright claims the central

²⁷⁹ Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, 99. Mark Seifrid makes several essential points regarding justification language and covenant in the Hebrew Bible that work against Wright's justification model. First, covenant means a distinct relationship that invokes quasi-forensic and familial language. Mark A. Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. P. A. Carson, et al (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001). For example, the prophets made accusations of infidelity to the covenant using familial language: "I have reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." (Isa 1:2) *ibid.*, 424. Second, righteousness in the context of covenant takes the form of love and loyalty, so that covenant keeping is "righteous, but not all righteous behavior involves keeping covenant. Therefore, equating "God's righteousness" with "covenantal-faithfulness" is misleading. Third, righteousness language is often linked with creational theology; righteousness and language of ruling and judging are often together. Further, one of the obligations of a king or ruler is to make covenants, so it is appropriate to place covenantal theology within the broader category of creational theology. Mark A. Seifrid, "Paul's Use of Righteousness Language against Its Hellenistic Background," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism Volume 2: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. P. A. Carson, et al (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 40-41.

question facing Judaism in Paul's time was not about individual salvation, "but about God's purposes for Israel and the world."²⁸⁰ He therefore locates justification in an ecclesiological and cosmic context, and downplays the reality that salvation can be understood as individual. To be sure, Paul thought of salvation as cosmic (1 Cor 15: 24-28), but we should not deny that individuals in the first century were seeking salvation for themselves. The gospel writers tell of people seeking personal salvation: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18; Acts 16:30).²⁸¹ Paul's vision of salvation is also at times individual. He was called to baptize people into the body of Christ, and he is interested in more than the social or cosmic aspect of God's grace and Christ's work on the cross.

Finally, Wright's justification model assumes the Abrahamic covenant is central to Paul's justification theology, while the evidence points in the other direction. If covenant is central to Paul's justification theology, why does the term "covenant" (*διαθήκη*) not appear at crucial junctures in his discussions of justification?²⁸² The first time the term comes up in Romans is long after the Abraham discourse in chapter 4, and when he finally uses the term it is in the plural, a reference to the many covenants of Israel (Rom 9:4). This cuts across Wright's claim that Paul's thought should be understood in light of the "single, unbroken covenant with Israel beginning with

²⁸⁰ Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, 76.

²⁸¹ David Wenham, "Tom Wright Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision," *EQ* 82.3 (2010).

²⁸² Says Donfried: "Despite Wright's claims to the contrary, the fact that Paul uses the term 'covenant' only a total of five times in all of his letters is instructive with regard to its minimal role in his theology." Donfried, "Paul and the Revisionists: Did Luther Really Get It All Wrong?," 32.

Abraham.”²⁸³ The next time the term shows up in Romans, it does not refer to the Abrahamic covenant, but to a future covenant (11:27). In Galatians and 2 Corinthians Paul again looks at covenant, but not in a way that would support Wright’s view. Here again Paul sees multiple covenants, a new one and an old one (Gal 3:15, 17; 2 Cor 3:6, 14).²⁸⁴ Further, when Paul recalls the Lord’s supper in 1 Cor 11 he quotes Jesus as offering a new covenant, not fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant (v.25). In fact, Paul mentions the covenant with Abraham, by itself and with no others, a total of two times in all of his letters (Gal 3:17, 24). Covenant with Abraham was not critical to Paul’s thought.

Another way to understand the lack of significance of covenant in Paul’s justification theology is to look at covenant in Galatians. For Wright, salvation and justification are dependent on covenant membership. If this is so, then Paul’s kerygma would certainly include ideals about justification, covenant, and membership in the Abrahamic family. In other words, if justification and covenant are intertwined and are central to Paul’s gospel, then they should be “stock sermon” material, something he explains to every congregation he speaks to. Having spent time in Galatia, we must assume that Paul had told the Galatians the basics of the gospel. Why, then, is Paul explaining justification and its dependency on covenant to the Galatians for the first time? There is nothing in the letter that indicates that Paul has already told them about justification and covenant dependency—he seems to be revealing a new idea. If so, given

²⁸³ Mark A. Seifrid, "The Narrative of Scripture and Justification by Faith : A Fresh Response to N. T. Wright," *CTQ* 72.1 (2008): 27.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

that Paul had stayed in Galatia, explaining the gospel and how it works, how is it possible that he forgot to tell the church there the core of his theology of justification? Wright's premise that justification depends on covenant membership does not make sense, because in the letter to the Galatians Paul is telling his readers something they do not already know. They do not know that justification is dependent on covenant. They do not know that membership in the Abraham family is critical toward justification and salvation, and they do not know the logical relationships between justification and covenant. Therefore, it defies common sense to think that covenant is central to Paul's theology of justification. Paul's explanation of the relationship between covenant and righteousness is circumstantial, a response to a unique situation in Galatia.

One of the ways Radical New Perspective scholars distinguish themselves from New Perspective and Reformed scholars is in how they view faith in Paul's justification theology. Faith for Luther comes from a person in search of a gracious God, and the object of faith is Christ, whose perfect righteousness is imputed to the believer. The net result is acquittal in divine law court. For some scholars in the Radical New Perspective camp, the faith that saves is the faithfulness *of* Christ. It was Christ's faithfulness, (and the faithfulness of father Abraham) that enable groups of people to become members of God's family. This view is based to a certain degree on an alternate reading of the phrase *πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, which is usually translated as "faith in Christ." For example, in Galatians Paul says:

We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in

Christ Jesus (πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ (πίστεως Χριστοῦ), and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. (Gal 2:15-16; Rom 3:22; NAS)

The two phrases in parentheses above are in the genitive case. The genitive can be objective or subjective, meaning Christ can be either the object of faith (the classic Reformed view), or he can be the subject of faith. In the latter, the phrase is translated as “the faithfulness of Christ.”²⁸⁵ Thus, Christ is the one who is faithful, not Christ followers. His faithfulness “puts right Gentiles and incorporates them into the family of God.”²⁸⁶ Christ’s selfless act on the cross (Phil 2:5-8) atones for Gentile sins, and restores relationship between God and believers. Consequently, Gentiles are deemed righteous, their sins are forgiven, and they are ready to enter the family of God. Thus, the phrase “justification by faith” does not refer to what Gentiles must do, but rather to what Christ has done.²⁸⁷ I agree that the faithfulness of Christ is critical toward justification for Gentiles, but I maintain that Gentiles must also have faith in something, for reasons I will argue below.

Another distinctive feature of the Radical New Perspective school is its view of Abraham, especially regarding how the patriarch functions toward salvation for Gentiles. Traditionally, the role of Abraham in Paul’s thought is that he is the exemplar of faith. But he has also been assumed to be the “ultimate proof of Paul’s most important

²⁸⁵ Stowers, *Romans*, 194. Eisenbaum, *Paul*, 189-95.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 240. Stowers, *Romans*, 37f.

²⁸⁷ Eisenbaum, *Paul*, 240-42.

theological postulate: that one is justified by faith.”²⁸⁸ For many in the Reformed school, Abraham is the exemplar of justification by faith, *as opposed to justification by doing works of the Law*. In other words, Paul talks about Abraham in a polemical context, in which the virtues of (Christian) faith are superior to doing (Jewish) works of Law.

Eisenbaum and other Radical New Perspective scholars have argued convincingly against this interpretation of Abraham in Paul.²⁸⁹ The similarities between Abraham and Gentiles in Paul do not mean that Abraham was the exemplar of how to be saved. Instead, the parallels between Abraham and Gentiles are drawn to enforce Paul’s claim that Gentile believers are descendants of Abraham. The significance of Abraham in Paul is that he is the patriarch of Jews and Gentiles. Abraham is the reason why Gentiles are saved, not the example of how Gentiles are saved. I argued in the previous chapter that Abraham is a corporate figure, in whom Gentiles participate. There is no question that Gentiles are grafted into the family of God, and thus inherit the blessings of God, as promised in the Abrahamic covenant. On the corporate nature of Abraham, I agree with Stowers and Eisenbaum. However, I will argue below that Abraham is the exemplar of how a person is declared righteous before God.

Still another distinction between many Radical New Perspective scholars and New Perspective scholars is the claim that Gentiles in particular need justification, and Jews do not. As I stipulated in the Introduction, I agree with this view. I have argued that the essential peril is moral death, or broken relationship with God. To be sure, Paul has

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 202.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 202-08.

reservations about the failure of Israel to see the Christ event the way he sees it, but, in agreement with Eisenbaum and Stowers, I think Paul believes that his fellow Jews are in right relationship with God. Gentiles need justification, but Jews do not.

Eisenbaum's and Stowers' arguments about justification in Paul are focused primarily on how justification comes about, and not on what justification is. On the essence of justification—what it actually does for a person--Stowers and Eisenbaum are in agreement with their Reformed opponents. Both scholars claim that salvation for Gentiles is ultimately from the wrath of God, and that justification means the forgiveness of sins.²⁹⁰ I disagree with that assessment as well, for reasons argued in Chapter 1. The peril from which one is saved is not punishment, so justification and righteousness are not related to punishment.

Justification: My View

It has been said that Abraham is the exemplar of faith, but I think he is much more than that for Paul. Abraham is also the exemplar for being declared righteous by God. Paul quotes or alludes to the moment when Abraham was called righteous (Gen 15:6) nine times in two letters: “And Abraham believed God, and his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Because the expression occurs so frequently in discourses where the nature and purpose of righteousness and justification are discussed, I take Paul's understanding of righteousness to be formed in large part by Gen 15:6. The way he reads Gen 15:6 tells us what he thinks about righteousness, and the way he thinks of Abraham

²⁹⁰ Stowers, *Romans*, 241. Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian*, 241, 45.

tells us something about how he thinks of Gentiles, in as far as Abraham and Gentiles are justified. In other words, I am assuming that the righteousness that Abraham was declared to have had is the same righteousness that Gentiles can now have, and I am assuming that the process by which righteousness was attained for Abraham is similar (but not identical) to the process by which Gentiles attain righteousness. Abraham and Gentiles came to have relationship with God in the same way.

In order to argue my model of justification, I want to first make several observations about Abraham's journey toward righteousness in Genesis, and then draw on those observations to develop a model of justification in Paul. In Genesis 12 God comes to Abraham and makes a covenant with him, which includes promises of progeny, land, and blessings from the Lord. God's faithfulness is evident in his promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you." (12:3) Abraham did as God commanded him, packing up his household and heading across the countryside to a new land. Eventually, having gone down to Egypt and back, and after travelling around some, Abraham settles in Canaan. (13:12), where the Lord re-affirms a portion of the covenant: "Raise your eyes now," God says to Abraham, "and look from the place where you are, to the north, south, east, and west. As far as you can see I will give the land to you and your offspring forever." God commanded Abraham to look and see, and come to appreciate the scope of God's blessing to him. Abraham, we must presume, looked and saw, but the narrator says nothing of his reaction. Abraham does not respond. God then affirms the promise of progeny to Abraham, saying "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; if one could count the dust of the earth--that is the

number of your offspring." Again, God makes a promise, and again, Abraham does nothing except pitch his tent by the oaks of Mamre. (13:12-18) After this, the narrative changes directions, and Lot gets captured and rescued. (Chapter 14).

In chapter 15 God once again seeks out Abraham, this time in a vision, and proclaims his faithfulness to him: "Do not fear, Abraham; I am your shield, and your reward will be great." Abraham, by now pushing 100 years old, boldly expresses doubt about the promise of offspring. So God takes him out into the night, and again tells Abraham to raise his eyes, and count the stars, if he can. "As many as the stars, so shall your descendants will be," the Lord says to Abraham. This time Abraham believed God's promise, and his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. (15:6)

Why Abraham believed in God's promise in 15:6, and not before, the narrator does not say. Still, several observations can be made. For one, throughout the story of Abraham, he was faithful in that he did what he was told. He obeyed God by moving across the countryside. But his faithfulness did not make him righteous; if it did his faithfulness would have been reckoned to him as righteous before Gen 15:6. The faith that made him righteous was a response to a visual demonstration of God's creative power—countless stars in the night sky. Looking and seeing, Abraham then believed in the promise God made to him. He had to suspend his rational disbelief that he and his 100 year old wife could bear a child. He had to believe in that which was physically impossible. And, he had to believe that God could bring life from that which is not living—he had to believe that the womb of his aged wife would produce life. Therefore his faith

in Gen 15:6 was not faithfulness; it was not a quality of his person. Instead it was a faith response in a moment in time. It was an act, with a clear object. The object of his faith was a symbol of the promise of progeny, which was clearly visible to him in the sky. The object of Abraham's faith was a guarantee of a very unlikely promise--it was essentially a demonstration of what God is capable of, with the understanding that God could bring to life that which is not alive. This understanding of Abraham's experience with God's manifested power, and his faith response to it will help us understand Paul's conceptions of righteousness for Gentiles.

There are many parallels between Abraham's journey to faith and righteousness, and the journey to faith and righteousness for Gentiles in Paul's thought. For one, Abraham was chosen by God to be the patriarch of the Israelites for no apparent reason. He is not described as good, righteous, or upright. He seems to have some wealth, and he is resourceful, but the narrator says little of Abraham's qualities. He is not chosen by the Lord because of his goodness. Noah, on the other hand, was a "righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God" (Gen 6:9), so God chose him and his family to survive the flood and later re-populate the earth. Job, the reader is told no less than three times, was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turned away from evil (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). The narrator and even the Lord say so. For this reason, the Lord is confident that he will win the wager with Hasatan, who thinks Job will curse the Lord if pressed enough. But Abraham is not described as a moral or upright before his encounter with the Lord. His choice of Abraham was a matter of divine grace. If Adam is Everyone, then Abraham is

Anyone. Paul says the same of Gentiles. Justification is a gift by divine grace (Rom 3:24; 4:24; 11:6, etc.)

Second, neither Abraham nor Gentiles knew God, nor did they worship him.

There was a tradition in Jewish literature held that Abraham was an idolater and an ungodly man (*ἀσεβής*), the first pagan to have relationship with God.²⁹¹ In Rom 4 Paul affirms this tradition, referring to Abraham as one “who does not work,” and as ungodly before his encounter with God. (vv.4-5) By alluding to Abraham’s status before he met God (vv.1-5), Paul is provocatively establishing the fact that Abraham was no better than Paul’s Gentile readers. Like most Jews of his time, Paul thinks that Gentiles are ungodly as well.²⁹²

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:9-11, NAS; Rom 6:17-18, 20; 1 Cor 12:2; Gal 4:8)

To Paul’s mind, Gentiles were idolatrous sinners. Like Abraham, they were not chosen by God because they were good, or moral, or righteous. The Gentiles are not Job, and they are not Noah. Neither Abraham nor Gentiles sought for God—it was the other way around. God chose Abraham and Israel out of grace, and God chose Gentiles out of grace. (Rom 3:24; 4:16; 2 Cor 6:1, etc.).

²⁹¹ *Jub.* 12:1-8, 12-14, 16-20; *Apoc. Abr.* 1-8; Josephus, *Ant* 1.155; Philo, *Virt.* 219. Byrne, *Romans*, 149.

²⁹² Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian*, 150-53.

Third, the relationship between Abraham and the Lord was not tinged by outstanding legal issues; likewise the relationship between Gentiles and God is not defined by outstanding legal issues. At no point in the Abraham narrative does God say to Abraham: “I will be your God, and you will be the father of many nations, but you owe me for past sins first. My righteousness demands that all outstanding sins be dealt with.” Whatever past sins Abraham may have had, they had no impact whatsoever on the relationship between the Lord and Abraham. In other words, if Abraham was saved from a peril, that peril was not the threat of divine punishment. As we have seen in the first two chapters, the peril from which Gentiles are saved is not punitive or legal either.

Fourth, neither Abraham’s nor the Gentile’s righteousness is dependent on covenant. God made the covenant with Abraham initially in Gen 12, and he re-affirmed it in Gen 13, and again in Gen 15. The covenant carries no requirements on the part of Abraham, circumcision aside. Righteousness for Abraham does not lead to covenant, and covenant does not necessarily lead to righteousness. They are not mutually dependent. This truth is evident with Gentiles in Paul’s thought, as I and other scholars have argued above against Wright. The Reformed school is right on this one—Paul’s concern for covenant is minimal at best, and the salvation of Gentiles does not depend on it.

Fifth, righteousness for Abraham and Gentiles is bestowed on those who believe, independent of works, *both good and bad*. In Genesis, Abraham’s faith in God’s promise brought about his righteousness. His faithfulness—doing what he was told—was not determinative toward his righteousness. Paul makes note of that in Rom 4: “If Abraham

was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God.” (v.2) The things Abraham did to please God did not figure into his righteousness in Gen 15:6. This is true for Gentiles as well: justification is a matter of grace, and is not dependent on works. Further, bad works are not determinative toward righteousness either:

Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered." Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." (Rom 4:4-8; NAS)

One could interpret this passage as a definition of what justification does—it covers past sins, and acquits the ungodly. This is the essence of Protestant justification—the covering of sins, resulting in a new legal status.²⁹³ However, the context of the Psalm that Paul alludes to cuts across this interpretation. Paul is looking to Psalm 32, where the psalmist calls for repentance and confession of sins, which the Lord responds to with forgiveness. The repentant sinner in the Psalm is not declared to be righteous, he is declared to be forgiven, because God has chosen to forgive. Paul’s emphasis in the above passage is also on the choices that God makes. God does the reckoning.²⁹⁴ The choices that God makes, and who God chooses to bless or declare righteous is the thrust of the passage in both the Psalm and Romans 4. Paul is not describing the nature of justification, he is describing the scope of justification, by defining groups of people who can be justified. That includes everyone: Jews, Gentiles, the ungodly, those who do works, and those who

²⁹³ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, ed. Terry Muck, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 149.

²⁹⁴ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 205.

do not. This is even more evident in the subsequent verses, where Paul asks rhetorically, “Is this blessing on the circumcised or the uncircumcised?” which I paraphrase as: “Does God bless only Jews, or can God bless whomever he wants to?” Paul responds to his own question with the affirmation that circumcision is not determinative toward righteousness; only faith is. In other words, God can bless who he wants to bless, regardless of what a person or group has done, good or bad.

My purpose in making the above observation is to demonstrate again the thesis of this dissertation: that the peril from which one is saved is not legal, but relational. By omitting a causal relationship between past sin and righteousness, Paul is implying that righteousness has nothing to do with outstanding sin. Righteousness does not mean that sins are covered, it means that God has chosen to bless even those who have sinned. It means that God can choose ungodly people, like Abraham and Gentiles, or godly people like David. It means that God can choose to have relationship with anyone he chooses.

Sixth, the nature of faith is similar for Abraham and Gentiles. It is foremost faithfulness to God: Abraham and Gentiles were expected to practice piety, and to keep God’s commands. Their faith is subjective, to use Radical New Perspective terminology. But they also both believe *in* something that leads to their righteousness; their faith has an object, and faith in that object is what makes them righteous. The objects of faith for Abraham and Gentiles are not identical, but they are very similar. The object of faith for Abraham was the promise from God, symbolized by the stars in the night sky. As observed above, it was only after Abraham raised his eyes to the sky and believed that

God declared him to be righteous. The uncountable stars were a demonstration of God's creative power, a guarantee of his promise to Abraham.

Similarly, I argue that the object of faith that leads to justification for Gentiles is Christ raised. Though they could not see Christ raised as Abraham saw millions of stars, belief in the resurrection and in the power of God behind it is necessary for relationship with God.²⁹⁵ Indeed, Paul is resolute that Gentiles must believe in the resurrection of Christ if they are to be saved: "if you believe in your heart that God raised Christ from the dead you will be saved." (Rom 10:9) This expression was familiar to Paul's readers, and may recall for them their own conversion to the new Christ-follower movement.²⁹⁶ "We believe that Jesus died and rose again" (1 Thess 4:14) may also be a creedal formula that points to the promise of the future resurrection of believers.²⁹⁷ Not believing in the resurrection denies the gospel and prevents salvation (1 Cor 15:13-17). Denial of the resurrection of Christ denies the initiation of a new creation in Christ's resurrection.²⁹⁸ Denial of the power of God to raise the dead contradicts the entire gospel, and it is futile for deniers to claim solidarity in Christ.²⁹⁹ In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul is incredulous that some people in Corinth do not believe in the resurrection of Christ, and he goes to lengths to provide a list of witnesses to it, mentioning several people by name.

²⁹⁵ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 265.

²⁹⁶ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 616.

²⁹⁷ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1998), 64.

²⁹⁸ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1219.

²⁹⁹ Hays, "Paul and the Multi-Ethnic First Century World," 260.

If Christ has not been raised, then everything Paul has preached to them is in vain, and Paul is a false witness to God. The very faith of the Corinthians is at stake, as well as their relationship to sin. Paul is unequivocal that belief in the resurrection is essential toward righteousness and salvation. In 1 Cor 15, he goes beyond arguing why belief in the event is critical; he attempts to dispel their anxieties about resurrection by explaining in great detail how it comes about.

The object of Gentile faith and the object of Abraham's faith have much in common. Both are public displays. Paul says of the resurrection that God "publicly displayed" (προέθετο) Christ as a "demonstration" (ἐνδείξις) of his righteousness. (Rom 3:25) Both are the power of God;³⁰⁰ Christ did not raise himself; God raised Christ (Rom 4:24; 6:4, and many others). Both represent promises inherent to the God-person relationship. In Abraham's case the promise is progeny in the number as the stars. For Gentiles, the promise is resurrection into an imperishable body. In other words, the public display of God's power is not arbitrary—it is more than a manifestation of God's omnipotence. Instead, it is a demonstration of not only God's commitment to the promise, but also of his capacity to make good on the promise. (Rom 4:21) Finally, both objects of faith represent God's creative power and faithfulness to bring life from the dead. Paul says in Rom 4 that Abraham is the father of many nations thanks to God, "who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." (v.17) The phrase affirms God's power to raise the dead, a concept widely held in postexilic

³⁰⁰ 1 Cor 15:5-8; Rom 10:9; 1 Thes 4:14; 2 Cor 4:13-14

Israel.³⁰¹ It also echoes God's power to call things in existence *ex nihilo*, another attribute of God found in the same period.³⁰² The phrase is an allusion to the deadness of Sarah's womb (v.19), and to the resurrection of Christ, which are in themselves understood to be miracles attributed directly to God."³⁰³ The many parallels between the nature of faith and the object of faith for Abraham and Gentiles suggest that righteousness is the same for both; they further suggest that the means by which righteousness comes about are functionally the same.

Before I proceed to the final section of this chapter, I want to revisit two important conclusions I have made so far. First, I have concluded that the basic problem is not punitive, but relational. Gentiles are estranged from God. Based on this conclusion, and based on the assumption that justification solves the basic human problem, it is logical that justification solves the problem of alienation. Therefore, justification is fundamentally relational. This is a logical deduction. Second, I have argued that the process by which justification comes about requires faith in the power of God. This too is a logical deduction. Putting these conclusions together we have the following progression:

1. The problem is alienation
2. Justification happens when one recognizes and believes the power of God

A logical hypothesis of these conclusions is that alienation from God is eliminated when one recognizes the power of God. One way to prove the hypothesis is to reverse the

³⁰¹ See Jewett, *Romans*, 334. *Wis Sol* 16:13; Dan 12:2; 2 Macc 7:23.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 334. 2 *Bar* 21:4; 48:8; Philo *Spec. leg.* 4.187.

³⁰³ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 217f.

progression, and see if the evidence in Paul's thought supports the reversed progression. In other words, if the progression from alienation to recognition and belief is valid, then we should expect the reverse to be true: Failure to recognize and believe in the power of God leads to alienation. In the section that follows, I will demonstrate the validity of this progression. In so doing, I hope to prove the connection between alienation and justification.

Paul repeatedly argues that relationship with God is dependent on seeing or recognizing God. Failure to recognize God causes severe problems, and can lead to alienation from God. For example, in 2 Cor 3, Paul begins a discourse in which he compares the ministry of death (Mosaic Law) and the ministry of life (the gospel). Paul argues that the gospel has even greater glory than the Mosaic covenant, which itself was glorious. Indeed, if the ministry of condemnation had glory, much more the ministry of righteousness will abound in glory (v.9). However, Jews in Paul's time have failed to accept the gospel, because they are holding on to the old covenant. His reservations about his fellow Jews indicate that they have not seen what should be obvious, which results in alienation from God.

The Israelites have lost sight of God before, and a strained relationship with God was the result. Recalling Exod 34:27-35, Paul tells the story of Moses' experience with the Lord on Mount Sinai. Having spent time in the glory of the Lord, Moses came down from the mountain with a veil over his face. He hid his face because, having been in the presence of the Lord, it shone so brightly that the Israelites could not look at it. The veil over the face of Moses obscured the glory of God. Paul says that because of the veil, the

minds of the Israelites were hardened (2 Cor 3:14). Paul tells this story so he can compare the experience of the Israelites in Moses' day to the Jews in his time. To this day, Paul says, when Jews hear the reading of the old covenant the veil is still there—they still cannot see God as they should. Only “in Christ” is the veil removed (v.14). Those in Christ “are given eyes to see and minds and hearts to understand” God’s plan for them.³⁰⁴ Unveiling their hearts results in the recognition of God, and the recognition of the dispensation of grace. But relationship with God is only possible if people seek the glory of God through a new revelation.³⁰⁵

The same progression is found several times in Romans. People do not see or do not recognize the obvious revelation of God, and they end up unrighteous, alienated, and morally dead. For example:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (1:20-21; NAS)

As in 2 Cor 3, the progression begins with failure to recognize God, whose presence and glory is obvious. People should seek the glory of God, but they do not. The consequence is a futile mind and a hardened heart. Paul’s point is that right relationship with God begins and is defined by seeking God’s glory, and believing in the revelation of God.

Paul repeats this sequence in the subsequent verses:

³⁰⁴ J. Paul Sampley, "The Second Letter to the Corinthians," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 68.

³⁰⁵ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 216f.

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. (vv.22-25; NAS)

Exchanging the glory of God for an image is another way of saying they turned from God, and placed their faith in idols. The consequence here is even worse than in the previous verses—being handed over by God. This is the height of alienation. But again, the sequence of this process is critical: failure to recognize God and then shattered relationship. It is not the other way around. There is a similar track toward alienation from God in Rom 3:11-20. The decline of the relationship between God and people begins with: “There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one.” (vv.11-12; NAS) The allusion is to LXX Psalm 14, in which many wisdom motifs are present. In the psalm, the fool says there is no God; because he denies God’s existence he cannot have relationship with God. The result is corruption, abominations, and broken relationship with God. The Lord looks down from heaven to see if any understand, but people have turned aside and alienated themselves from him. The psalm stresses the strained or non-existent relationship between God and people who turn from him. Paul allusion to it suggests that he sees the sequence the same way: denial of God’s existence and alienation from God. In the psalm, as in Rom 3, wickedness is not the cause of alienation--it is the other way around. The outcome of not seeking for God is a degraded relationship with God. Paul’s point in these passages is the same: relating to

God begins with recognizing God. Failure to recognize God leads to moral death. The essential human problem, then, is cured by recognizing God, which is the essence of justification.

Justification in Paul: Conclusions

Generally speaking, relationship with God begins with and is determined by believing in the power of God and by seeking the glory of God. Righteousness also begins with believing in the power of God and by seeking the glory of God. This is true for Abraham, and it is true for Gentiles. By the same token, denial of God or failure to recognize God is the first step toward alienation. Stated another way, a Gentile can either recognize the one God of the Israelites, or he can recognize other false gods. Particularly speaking, relationship with God begins with and is defined by believing in the power of God in the resurrection. Objective faith in the resurrection of Christ is the requirement that Paul's gospel imposes on Christ followers. Objective faith in the power of God also leads to righteousness. To that I add the conclusions brought forward from Chapters 1 and 2, namely that justification must in some way solve the peril of alienation. In sum, I conclude that justification happens when a person comes to believe in the creative power of God, manifested in the resurrection of Christ. Recognition of God's power and belief in his promise of the resurrection is what makes a person righteous, and enables proper relationship with God. Righteousness is fundamentally relational.

Epilogue

I said in the Introduction that the New Perspective movement has done much to rescue Paul and 1st Century Judaism from scholars who have misunderstood both. Paul is not anti-Torah, nor does he think Judaism should be replaced by Christianity. I agree with that. However, in my view New Perspective scholars have more work to do in the area of Pauline anthropology. The peril from which one is saved is not what Wright, Eisenbaum, and Stowers say it is. Wrath is serious business and should be assiduously avoided, but the threat of it is not the reason to accept the gospel, as far as Paul is concerned.

This conclusion produces several questions. For one, are soteriology and eschatology dependent on each other in Paul's thought? Does the world have to end for Paul's gospel to have meaning? In Reformed thought, and for many New Perspective scholars, the answer is yes, salvation is dependent on the Day of the Lord. But this view is problematic. If the gospel is dependent on the avoidance of a future calamity, salvation itself is never fully realized—it is paid forward. And, for the sake of argument, let us imagine that the end never will come. If the end never comes, and if salvation is dependent on the end, then is salvation really needed? If the end never comes, and if salvation is from wrath at the end, then Christ died for nothing, and Paul was terribly wrong about almost everything.

Thus the second question: If you could go back in time and catch up to Paul on the streets of Corinth, and convince him that the end never came 2000 years down the road, is it possible that Paul would cast off his sandwich board and throw down his bell, and stop spreading the good news? Would he say that gentiles do not need to be saved, since wrath is a non-issue? I doubt it. Paul would respond to the time traveler such as this, “That wrath will never come makes no difference. Gentiles are lost, and God sent me to spread the news that God wants to have relationship with them, just as he has relationship with the Israelites. That is the essence of the gospel—to reconcile Gentiles and God.”

And so the third question: Is my view of the peril from which one is saved compatible with Paul’s Christology? Does Paul’s Christology solve the problem of broken relationship with God? The answer to these questions is: “It depends on which part of Paul you read.” For example, in Rom 3.25 Paul says “God displayed Christ as a propitiation in his blood through faith.” This is definitely atonement language, and atonement Christology works best in the classic Protestant theology, and not in mine. On the other hand, in other passages Paul simply says that “Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8, 1 Thes 5:10), but he does not say how the death of Christ functions to benefit believers. That Christ died for others implies that he was a martyr; however that does not necessarily suggest that he died an atoning death. A martyr’s death can serve many purposes. On yet another hand, in Rom 6 (discussed in chapter 2) and 2 Cor 5:15, the death of Christ serves a purpose not related to atonement at all; instead Christ’s death is a vehicle that transforms a person from old to new, from a slave to sin to a slave to God.

Christ died so that relationship with God was possible. The death of Christ is a means toward reconciliation with God, independent of atonement. But the death of Christ alone does not make for reconciliation in these passages—somehow the resurrection of Christ plays a role in the process, though Paul does not say exactly how or why. In my view, the resurrection of Christ in Rom 6 and 2 Cor 5 reconciles people to God because God is the power behind the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ solves a fundamental problem that Gentiles have, which is idolatry, which in and of itself signifies broken relationship with God. The problem for Gentiles is in some respects God's own doing—the God of the Israelites insists that no images be made of him, whereas images of false gods were common in the ancient world. In the marketplace of gods, Paul's is relatively hard to recognize in the natural world. So, God manifested himself through Christ in the resurrection, thus giving Gentiles an object of faith, which leads to justification and reconciliation. In my view, Paul's Christology rests on the resurrection of Christ, because that is how God manifested himself to the world. This does not nullify the death of Christ, but it suggests a different function of his death than atonement. The death of Christ is the essential prerequisite to the resurrection, which is the physical manifestation of God, the object of faith that leads to righteousness and reconciliation. Christ had to die so that God could be recognized. Viewed this way, the faithful act of Christ's voluntary death on the cross is preserved, and it remains essential to the salvation process. Thus, my view of the peril from which one is saved is functionally compatible with Christology.

In closing, I think that for too long some readers of Paul have placed all their salvation eggs in the basket of wrath, and they have developed anthropologies and

Christologies that are at odds with Paul's thought. Holding up divine wrath, judgment, and other legal matters as the peril from which one is saved obscures Paul's message of hope. Gentiles are lost and need to be saved to God, not from God.

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