

The Letters of PAUL

From the beginning the churches took care to preserve the letters they received from the apostles, since in them they had authoritative witnesses to the faith. It was more difficult then than it is today to gather these documents, and even save the perishable material of papyrus from dampness.

Before long, there was an initial collection of the first seven epistles arranged in the order of decreasing length: the four “great” letters to the Romans, to the Corinthians and to the Galatians, and “the letters from captivity.” Others came to be added: first, those to the Thessalonians which are actually the oldest; and then those that were passed on under the patronage of Paul: the letters to Timothy and Titus which were written some twenty or thirty years later, and the beautiful letter to the Hebrews, written most likely under the influence of Paul but by an unknown author. A phrase from the “second letter of Peter” (not written by himself but about fifty years after his death) is evidence that from this time the letters of Paul were counted among the inspired Writings (2 P 3:15-16).

Paul saw himself as “the apostle to the pagan nations,” seeing there his personal vocation beside Peter (to whom God had confided the charge of evangelizing the Jewish world) not only in Palestine, but also throughout the Roman Empire, wherever they were established. Paul received this mission from Jesus himself at the time of his conversion (Acts 22:21; Gal 2:7); so highly fundamental was it in the divine project of the mission and extension of the Church that it remained unfinished at the time of his death. The spirit of Paul, one of the great manifestations of the spirit of Jesus, is always at work in our midst through his letters.



LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Jesus presented himself as the Savior. First of all he wanted to save the Jewish people. He spoke to them of the kingdom and they understood that God would reign over them just as he would reign in their lives. Their collective aspirations were not unknown to him, but he oriented them toward a more universal mission: it was truly “good news” for them.

With the beginning of the mission into Roman territory the Gospel had equally to be good news for the Greeks of the Roman Empire who were listening to the word of the apostles. Protected by solid structures that no one questioned, they did not share the Jewish longing for liberation. In absorbing them the Roman Empire had practically reduced to nothing the pride and ambitions of nations great and small, leaving a void for religious concerns to take root. These people were interested in all that related to the human person and searched high and low in a jumble of doctrines and religions as a means of escaping Fate. So it was essential to speak to them of Christ, as the one who unravels our contradictions and gives us life.

In this letter to the Christians of Rome, capital of the Empire, Paul intends to respond to the concerns of the Greeks but without thereby neglecting the Jews.

The Letter to the Romans is for the most part a long exposition about Christian vocation. To us it will seem difficult, because that is what it is. It must be remembered that Paul’s teaching does not stem from a doctrinal system or from a theology; rather it constantly springs from his own experience. The encounter with the Risen Christ, the call made to Paul that put him at the service of the Gospel, the long experience as an apostle, the gifts of the Spirit acting in him and constant communion with Jesus: these were the sources of his vision of faith.

So Paul spoke of God’s salvation as if forgetful of the explosive Palestinian context where Jewish nationalism was at grips with the Romans and where all religious hopes were politicized. God’s salvation is the salvation of the human race, a total

project, but taking place in the heart of people; all will depend on our response to God's call: can we trust him?

Paul, marked by his own history, presents the beginning of faith as dramatic conversion. People are slaves to Sin (it would be necessary to understand what Paul means by that). We have been created to share the life of God, and as long as we do not achieve this we carry within ourselves a conscious or unconscious rebellion against God. Must we turn towards religion? We would gain very little, says Paul, with insistence that will shock many people: as long as we believe in becoming "good" through religious practices we turn our back on the only power that can free us: God's merciful love. The only response he expects from us is our act of faith, a faith which immediately frees us.

This salvation is the one announced by Scripture, but it will disconcert those believers who do not go beyond religious practices. These belong to a first stage of sacred history that ended with Jesus' death. Our baptism gives us entrance to a mysterious world which is no other than the Risen Christ: from now on we are "in Christ", and living by his Spirit. The gift of the Spirit opens a new era where all is inspired by the law of love, for those who have become true sons and daughters of God.

Why Did Paul Send This Letter?

Paul had decided to leave the Eastern provinces of the empire and to reach its very heart, that is to say, Rome (Rom 15:23). But others had established and formed that community, Peter for sure, and many others who are unknown. These Christians already had their own ways and their customs. Some of them had heard comments that did not predispose them favorably toward Paul and his methods. Therefore, it is understandable that Paul wanted to prepare his coming. He may have been thinking even more about the Jerusalem Christians who were spreading rumors and slandering him (Acts 21:21). Before Paul went to Rome, he had to go to Jerusalem to bring the proceeds of the collection taken in the Greek communities for the poor of Jerusalem. Paul was not too sure of being welcomed as a brother (Rom 15:31). So, he sent this letter to Rome, knowing that it would quickly reach Jerusalem. In this letter, Paul dwells on the complementary vocation of the Jews and the pagans.

His calls for mutual understanding, that make up the content of Chapters 13–15 of this letter, were important concerns of Paul at the time. Even if he addressed the Jewish community of Jerusalem in a special way, his remarks were not out of place in Rome. There, like everywhere, it was not easy to gather Jews and converted pagans in the same community. Paul was already preaching what we fail to put into practice, namely, to accept one another with our differences.

Paul probably sent this letter from Corinth in the winter of 57–58.

The Letter to the Romans and the Church

It is now impossible to speak of the letter to the Romans without saying at least a word on the place it has held and continues to hold in Protestant Churches. It has been considered by many as the key to the interpretation of the entire Scriptures.

It is known that Luther deepened the Reformation by commenting on this epistle. He was not wrong in seeing in this letter the condemnation of a Church

established in the world, where faith had been degraded, becoming no more than practice devoid of faith which saves. The Christianity of the Middle Ages was in fact a people, rather like what the people of Israel had become. A person was a Christian by birth and continued to be one; he/she could be a believer, but as one is in any culture whatever. It was thought that salvation was gained by religious rites and by the practice of good deeds that merited heaven.

It was therefore very important to remember that faith is at the heart of every conversion, and that this conversion is the response to a freely given call from God. This letter emphasizes Christ the Savior and this emphasis was sufficient to devalue the whole religious system which at the time was crushed by tradition and devotions. There was faith, at a time when preaching rarely touched on anything other than morality with its catalogs of moral principles. There was the word of God directed towards the individual person at a time when people were quite happy to trust Church leaders. It was then, a radical criticism of the Church which ended up looking at itself instead of turning towards God, and of a Church whose whole system—political, doctrinal and repressive, blocked the horizon.

We have said, however, that this letter had its roots in Paul's experience as a Jew, a Pharisee and as an apostle called directly by Christ. It is from that point that Paul spoke of sin and justification, of call, of salvation through faith. For their part, Luther and his contemporaries read this letter against the backdrop of their own problems—or better—of their anguish.

They magnified the perspective of sin and eternal condemnation, victims of a philosophy (nominalism) in which nothing was good or bad in itself but only if God declares it so. Because of that, everything Paul said about predestination of the Jewish people was interpreted by them as a personal predestination to heaven or hell.

When Paul spoke of justification—a word which at that time had a large and imprecise meaning—he meant that God re-establishes in us an order which is the true one; they understood instead that, if we believe, God will accept us even if nothing has been changed in us. The great perspectives of humankind and history as a battlefield of sin and grace, were reduced to a personal problem: am I really free or am I enslaved to sin or grace. Taking literally Paul's images and comparisons, a doctrine of original sin was developed in which we all pay now and forever, for the sin of our first ancestors.

Several generations of Protestants and Catholics have been marked by these controversies: salvation through faith alone, or through faith and works, or through faith, works and sacraments? The love of the Father who saves and of Christ the Savior were eclipsed in fact by an obsession for salvation: how can I escape from this rigid frame in which God confines me? The concept of a just God, of inexorable decisions, which so easily condemns people into hell would traumatize the West and prepare a revolt in the next centuries, that of militant atheism.

It is not pointless for us today to know this. We are all children of our time and the remedy, if we do not wish to be enslaved, is to not give over-importance to one biblical text to the detriment of others. When you have become familiar with Paul and first with the letter to the Romans you see that for him the Father of Jesus is really father, and passionately loved. Thousands of details are to be discovered in Paul that disclose his experience of a continual communion and a life "in" the Triune God, an experience very close to that of St. John.

That will not prevent us from finding in this letter just what Luther, after St. Augustine, saw there: a genial presentation of the mystery of humanity redeemed by Christ. There is a certain forgetfulness perhaps of this letter and of this doctrine which too often has allowed Catholics to hem themselves in by their practices and their sacraments, and neglect mission.

1Cor
1:1;
Gal 1:1

1 • ¹From Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, an apostle, called and set apart for God’s Good News, ²the very promises he foretold through his prophets in the sacred Scriptures, ³regarding his Son, who was born in the flesh a descendant of David, ⁴and has been recognized as the Son of God, endowed with Power, upon rising from the dead, through the Holy Spirit. Through him, Jesus Christ, our Lord, ⁵and for the sake of his name, we received grace, and mission in all the nations, for them to accept the faith. ⁶All of you, the elected of Christ, are part of them, you, the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy: ⁷May God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, give you grace and peace.

Is 52:7;
61:1;
Mk 1:1;
1:14

16:26

1P 3:18;
2Tm 2:8;
Ads 2:33;
Phil 2:9;
1P 1:21;
1Cor 3:10;
Gal 2:8

Paul longs to visit them

12:1;
15:16

1Thes
3:2

⁸First of all, I give thanks to my God, through Jesus Christ, for all of you, because your faith is spoken of all over the world. ⁹And God, whom I serve in spirit, by announcing the Good News of his Son, is my witness, that I remember you in my prayers at all times. ¹⁰I pray constantly that, if it is his will, he make it possible for me to visit you. ¹¹I long to see you, and share some spiritual blessings with you, to strengthen you. ¹²In that way, we will encourage each other, by sharing our common faith.

¹³You must know, brothers and sisters, that, many times, I have made plans to go to you, but, till now, I have been prevented. ¹⁴I would like to harvest some fruits among you, as I have done among other nations. Whether Greeks or foreigners, cultured or ignorant, I feel under obligation to all. ¹⁵Hence, my eagerness to proclaim the gospel also to you, who are in Rome.

• ¹⁶For I am not ashamed at all, of this Good News; it is God’s power, saving those who believe, first, the Jews, and then, the Greeks. ¹⁷This

1Cor
9:19

1:1

• **1.1 Paul, an apostle called and set apart for God’s Good News.** Paul speaks of the Gospel three times in this paragraph. In his time the word Gospel, which signifies Good News, conveyed the meaning of victory. Paul presents himself as one announcing the liberating message given to all humankind.

What is Paul’s Gospel? He develops it briefly in the following lines. The Son of God has come down to earth and after sharing our common condition, has through his Resurrection, taken possession of the glory due to him.

An apostle called and set apart... (v. 1). The Twelve apostles were selected by Jesus and confirmed in their mission by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Here Paul reminds us that he himself was made an apostle by Jesus, who met him on the road to Damascus.

Recognized as the Son of God (v. 4). Another possible translation: *constituted, or designated* as Son of God. That does not mean that Jesus was not the Son of God before his resurrection, but he was so really one of us that nothing of his

divinity showed. On the day of the resurrection, the Spirit of God “invaded” his human nature: from now on he is present and active in our history as the Son of God.

Paul usually reserves the term “God” for God the Father, fountain of the divine being, from whom all divine initiatives originate. The Father communicates his life to the Son. The Son, for his part, reflects this life back to the Father in such a way that they mutually generate the Holy Spirit. The whole vocation of a Christian is rooted in this life of God, and that is why Paul constantly mentions the names of the three divine Persons.

We will encourage each other by sharing our common faith (v. 12). The apostle, as well as the believer, needs to share anxieties, hopes and a common faith. The Church is a fellowship and in order to develop our Christian life, we must multiply meetings in which we can be in communion with one another.

• **16. I am not ashamed...** (v. 16). He who is proclaimed Savior by Paul is a crucified Jew,

2:9; Acts 13:46; Hb 2:4; Heb 10:38

Good News shows us the saving justice of God; a justice that saves, exclusively by faith, as the Scripture says: *The upright one shall live by faith.*

Humankind is under God's "wrath"

Mic 7:9; Zep 3:1; 1Thes 1:10

Ps 8:3; 19:2

Wis 13:4; 1Cor 1:21

• ¹⁸For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness, and injustice, of those who have silenced the truth by their wicked ways. ¹⁹For everything that could have been known about God, was clear to them: God himself made it plain. ²⁰Because his invisible attributes—his everlasting power and divinity—are made visible to reason, by means of his works, since the creation of the world.

So they have no excuse, ²¹for they knew God, and did not glorify him, as was fitting; nor did they give thanks to him. On the contrary, they lost them-

selves in their reasoning, and darkness filled their minds.

²²Believing themselves wise, they became foolish: ²³they exchanged the glory of the immortal God, for the likes of mortal human beings, birds, animals and reptiles. ²⁴Because of this, God gave them up to their inner cravings; they did shameful things and dishonored their bodies.

²⁵They exchanged God's truth for a lie; they honored and worshiped created things, instead of the Creator, to whom be praise for ever, Amen! ²⁶Because of that, God gave them up to shameful passions: their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷Similarly, the men, giving up natural sexual relations with women, were lustful of each other: they did, men with men, shameful things, bringing upon themselves

Dt 4:16; Jer 2:11; Wis 11:25

Jdg 2:14; Eph 4:19

Jer 16:19

an unknown carpenter. How often they laughed at Paul when he spoke about this dead man who had risen from the tomb to be the Judge of humankind!

It is God's power... (v. 16). The miracles that accompany the preaching of the Gospel are signs of God's powerful action in transforming people and history in every place where the Gospel is preached and inspires those who hear it.

Upright... righteous... righteousness (v. 17). The word *justice* used by Paul also signifies uprightness. On the other hand, when he speaks of the *justice* of God usually he is not saying that God is *just*: his *justice* denotes an intervention to keep order in the world. In a special way the *justice* of God has humans to become *just*, that is, *upright* before his eyes. It is a matter of understanding that the words *justice* and *just* had a wide meaning in the Christian vocabulary and now simply designate all that is good: being just speaks of a life as God *would have it*. The just person is rather like a saint, in the way we understand it today, or putting it more modestly, she is as she should be in God's eyes.

For that reason we shall at times translate *God justifies us* by: *God makes us just and holy, or: God gifts us with true righteousness.*

The Jews, like most humans, thought that people become righteous by their own efforts. Paul retorts that the righteousness God wants is something much greater and beyond what human efforts can achieve. We are upright and friends of God when he allows us to approach him after making us holy by his grace.

The apostles preached the Gospel to two classes of persons:

– the *Jews*, prepared by God to receive the Savior,

– the *Greeks* (or people who spoke the Greek language). In fact the Jews considered Greek all those who were subjects of the Roman Empire. These people did not know the word of God, nor did they have any hope in him.

Paul shows that all people need the Gospel. Because the world lives in sin, and all of us to a greater or lesser degree are responsible for the existing evil, we must believe in the Gospel if we want to be saved.

• 18. In these paragraphs Paul speaks of the pagan world of the Greeks, which included the great majority of humankind who had not received the word of God. In reality, God had not been absent from their conscience, and through centuries of civilization and religious research they tried to know God and the truth. Paul shows the failure of such human endeavor; ignorance and immorality are much more prevalent in the countries where God had not spoken as he did to the Jews.

They knew God and did not glorify him as was fitting... (v. 21). We have to compare this text with another famous one, found in Wisdom 13, and with the speech of Paul in Acts 17:27-29. In these verses Scripture shows clearly that it is possible for everyone to know God. Anyone who looks at the world and reflects on life easily finds signs of the presence of God. Yet, when

the punishment they deserve for their wickedness. ²⁸And since they did not think that God was worth knowing, he gave them up to their senseless minds, so that they committed all kinds of obscenities.

Mk 7:21;
1Cor 6:9;
Gal 5:19;
1Tim 1:9;
Rev 21:8

²⁹And so, they are full of injustice, perversity, greed, evil; they are full of jealousy, murder, strife, deceit, bad will and gossip. ³⁰They commit calumny, offend God, are haughty; they are proud, liars, clever in doing evil. They are rebellious toward their parents, ³¹senseless, disloyal, cold-hearted and merciless. ³²They know of God's judgment, which, declares worthy of death, anyone living in this way; yet, not only do they do all these things, they even applaud anyone who does the same.

The Jews also must fear judgment

2 • ¹Therefore, you have no excuse, Mt 7:2 whoever you are, if you are able to judge others. For, in judging your neighbor, you condemn yourself, for you practice what you are judging. ²We know, that the condemnation of God will justly reach those who commit these things, ³and do you think that by condemning others, you will escape from the judgment of God, you, who are doing the same?

⁴This would be taking advantage of God, and his infinite goodness, patience and understanding; and not to realize that, his goodness is in order to lead you to conversion. ⁵If your heart becomes hard and you refuse to change, then you are storing for yourself a great punishment on the day of

Wis
11:23;
2P 3:9;
Lk 13:7

Ezk 7:19;
Rev 6:17

one lives in sin, *truth is silenced*. People do not openly deny God; they simply ignore him.

Faith is neither an option nor a luxury, as if we could well do without it. Certainly a majority on the planet do without it comfortably. Yet, if we were to withdraw all that comes from faith in our culture and life, the world would die for want of hope, as is already the case with nations and ideologies that have renounced it. This is why, in announcing the Gospel we free people who are truly in need of the Gospel, even though they may feel satisfied with themselves.

God gave them up to their inner cravings (v. 24). Paul stresses the fact of homosexual relationships. In the Greek world, sexual relations especially between men were accepted and even praised by the greatest philosophers. Paul says: such an attitude is not the sign of a more open or free spirit, but comes from their ignorance of God.

This condemnation which only repeats those of the Old Testament (Lev 20:13) astonishes even Christians in the countries where the real religion is liberalism. Total sexual license with, in particular, the acceptance of such relationships flows from an idolatry proper to the liberal society, which has become a society of consumption. There, for those who are well off and in good health, the ideal is to satisfy every desire and profit from life to the maximum. Once God has been replaced by creatures, animals or fabricated articles, one can have him say everything, because, in fact *his glory* is not known and *darkness fills the mind*.

In fact, homosexual relationships are a form of idolatry of one's body. It is not, of course, a

question of condemning those inclined towards homosexuality, whether it be by nature, or much more often, through cultural deformation.

• **2.1** *You have no excuse, whoever you are...* Paul addresses the Jews, who wait for God's judgment on the world and are convinced that they will not be condemned, since they have the true religion. Paul reminds them of something we ourselves know: the greater our religious knowledge, the more arguments we have to justify our faults.

God will give glory... (v. 10). Paul has just condemned the injustice and wrongdoing of the pagan world. Now he recognizes that many who have not received a religious education do indeed live justly. In the next paragraph Paul affirms that:

– God will judge each one according to his own lights; our conscience will fully agree with this judgment of God on us;

– God also has sons and daughters among those who do not believe: he will judge them as he does for us, according to the path on which he has placed them.

On different occasions Paul opposes *letter* and *spirit* (vv. 27-29).

Letter denotes the written commandments that Jews observe but which remain exterior to them; the aim of these commandments was to lead them to conversion of heart: this is *the spirit* God wants. Two sets of words are in contrast in Paul's letters: flesh, old Covenant, commandments, law, letter... and Spirit, spirit, a new Covenant, promise...

judgment, when God will appear as just judge.

Rev 11:18 ⁶He will give each one his due, according to his actions. ⁷He will give everlasting life to those who seek glory, honor and immortality, and persevere in doing good. ⁸But anger and vengeance will be the lot of those who do not serve truth, but injustice. ⁹There will be suffering and anguish, for everyone committing evil, first the Jew, then the Greek. ¹⁰But God will give glory, honor and peace to whoever does good, first, the Jew, then, the Greek, ¹¹because one is not different from the other before God.

Ps 62:13; Mt 16:27
Dt 10:17; Acts 10:34; Eph 6:9; Jas 2:1; Lk 12:48; Acts 10:35

Everyone is judged by his conscience

¹²Those, who, without knowing the law, committed sin, will perish without the law; and whoever committed sin knowing the law, will be judged by that law. ¹³What makes us righteous before God is not hearing the law, but obeying it. ¹⁴When the non-Jews, who do not have the law, practice naturally, what the law commands, they are giving themselves a law, ¹⁵showing that the commandments of the law are engraved in their minds. Their conscience, speaking within them also shows it, when they condemn or approve their actions. ¹⁶The same is to happen on the day when God, according to my gospel, will judge people's secret actions, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Lk 8:21; Jas 1:22
1Cor 4:5

¹⁷But, suppose you call yourself a Jew: you have the law as foundation, and feel proud of your God. ¹⁸You know the will of God, and the law teaches you to distinguish what is better, ¹⁹and, so, you believe you are

Is 48:1; Mt 3:8
Mt 15:14; Jn 9:40

the guide for the blind, light in darkness, ²⁰a corrector of the foolish, and instructor of the ignorant, because you possess, in the law, the formulation of true knowledge. ²¹Well, then, you who teach others, why don't you teach yourself? If you say that one must not steal, why do you steal? ²²You say, one must not commit adultery, yet you commit it! You say, you hate idols, but you steal into their temples! ²³You feel proud of the law, yet, you do not obey it, and you dishonor your God. ²⁴In fact, as the Scripture says, *the other nations despise the name of God because of you.*

Lk 18:9

Ps 50:16

Is 52:5; Jas 2:7

²⁵Circumcision is of value to you, if you obey the law; but if you do not obey, it is as if you were not circumcised. ²⁶On the contrary, if those who are uncircumcised, obey the commandments of the law, do you not think that, in spite of them being pagans, they make themselves like the circumcised? ²⁷The one who obeys the law, without being marked in his body with circumcision, will judge you, who have been marked with circumcision, and who have the law, which you do not obey. ²⁸For external things do not make a true Jew, nor is real circumcision that which is marked on the body. ²⁹A Jew must be so interiorly; the heart's circumcision belongs to spirit, and not to a written law; he who lives in this way will be praised, not by people, but by God.

Jer 9:24; 1Cor 7:19

Eph 2:11; Phil 3:3; Col 2:11

What advantage is it to be a Jew?

3 • ¹Then, what is the advantage of being a Jew? And what is the use of circumcision? ²It is important from any point of view. In the first place,

Dt 4:6; Jn 4:22; Bar 4:4

• **3.1** *What is the advantage of being a Jew?* This is probably what the Jews will ask on hearing of salvation offered to those who do not know the law, which means the religion taught by God. The same question is asked by Chris-

tians in modern times from the very moment they no longer believe that anyone living without Christ and the Church will go to hell. They think: "How fortunate if we were like them: we would be saved without having to follow a

it was to the Jews that God entrusted his word.

³Well now, if some of them were not faithful, will their unfaithfulness do away with the faithfulness of God? Of course not! ⁴Rather, it will be proved, that God is truthful, *every human a liar*, as the Scripture says: *it will be proved, that your words are true and you will be the winner, if they want to judge you.*

⁵If our wickedness shows God to be just, would it be right to say that God is unjust when he gets angry and punishes us? (I speak in a human way.)

⁶– Not at all because, otherwise, how could God judge the world?

⁷– But if my lie makes the truth of God more evident, thus increasing his glory, is it correct to call me a sinner?

⁸– Then, your only choice would be to sin, so that good may come of it. Some slanderers say that this is my teaching, but they will have to answer for those words.

⁹Do we have, then, any advantage? Not really. For we have just demonstrated that all, Jews and non-Jews, are under the power of sin, ¹⁰as the Scripture says:

burdensome Christian morality!" Paul sees no advantage for the Jew, and we none for the Christian, except in terms of responsibility: God has entrusted his words to them.

In this way our baptism gives us membership with a minority called "people of God," to whom God entrusts a mission to the world, along with many others who go to God without explicit knowledge of his secrets and his Christ. Baptism is not an assurance that gives us the right to feel better than others.

We have just demonstrated that all, Jews and non-Jews, are under the power of sin (v. 9). This is the central sentence of the paragraph. The Jews must, like others, rely on faith and be converted. That is what they have difficulty in understanding, since they have always been believers. They think they are good and are true believers, because they have been instructed in the faith. They trust in being saved merely for being marked in their body by circumcision.

Nobody is good, not even one, ¹¹no one understands, no one looks for God.

¹²*All have gone astray and have become base. There is no one doing what is good, not even one.*

¹³*Their throats are open tombs, their words deceit.*

¹⁴*Their lips hide the poison of vipers, from their mouths come bitter curses.*

¹⁵*They run to where they can shed blood, ¹⁶leaving behind ruin and misery. ¹⁷They do not know the way of peace.*

¹⁸*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

¹⁹Now, we know, that whatever the Scripture says, it is said for the people of the law, that is for the Jews. Let all be silent, then, and recognize, that the whole world is guilty before God. ²⁰Still more: *no mortal will be worthy, before God, by performing the demands of the law. What comes from the law is the consciousness of sin.*

Faith, the way to salvation

• ²¹But, now it has been revealed, altogether apart from the law, as it was already foretold in the law and the prophets: ²²God makes us righteous

What comes from the law is the consciousness of sin (v. 20). The Jewish law, or the law of Moses, is that body of religious, liturgical, moral and social laws governing the people of Israel (see 7:4). In the letters of Paul, *the law* sometimes designates the Scriptures and at other times the Jewish religion. Many Jews thought that they deserved a reward for practicing the law, but Paul says: true holiness is neither the result of our works nor a reward for them.

• 21. Paul has developed two points: the world lives in sin; and the practice of the law is not enough to obtain salvation. He then presents the Good News: God has come to save us through Christ.

All fall short of the glory of God (v. 23). God is not satisfied with the actual state of humankind, even if the latter feel quite satisfied with their mediocre condition. He calls us to share his glory, that is, everything in God that makes him

9:6;
Ps 89:31;
Rev
11:11;
1Jn 1:9;
Ps
116:11;
51:6

11:32;
Gal
3:22;
1Jn 1:8

Ps 141:3

Ps 53:2

Ps 5:10;

Is 59:7;

Ps 10;

7:8;

36:2

4:15;

Ps 143:2;

Gal 2:16

by means of faith in Jesus Christ, and this is applied to all who believe, without distinction of persons. ²³Because all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴and all are graciously forgiven and made righteous, through the redemption effected in Christ Jesus. ²⁵For God has given him to be the victim, whose blood obtains us forgiveness, through faith.

So God shows us, how he makes us righteous. Past sins are forgiven, which God overlooked till now. ²⁶For, now, he wants to reveal his way of righteousness: how he is just, and how he makes us righteous, through faith in Jesus.

²⁷Then, what becomes of our pride? It is excluded. How? Not through the law and its observances, but through another law, which is faith. ²⁸For we hold, that people are in God's grace, by faith, and not because of all the things ordered by the law. ²⁹Otherwise, God would be the God of the

Jews; but is he not God of pagan nations as well? ³⁰Of course he is, for there is only one God, and he will save, by faith, the circumcised Jews, as well as the uncircumcised nations. ³¹Do we, then, deny the value of the law, because of what we say of faith? Of course not; rather, we place the Law in its proper place.

Abraham, father of the just

4 • ¹Let us consider Abraham, our father in the flesh. What has he found? ²If Abraham attained righteousness because of his deeds, he could be proud. But he cannot be this before God; ³because Scripture says: *Abraham believed God, who took it into account, and held him to be a just man.*

⁴Now, when someone does a work, salary is not given as a favor, but as a debt that is paid. ⁵Here, on the contrary, someone who has no deeds to show, but believes in him, who makes

great, happy and everlasting. God has created us to bring us into communion with him, and as he is out of reach, he reaches out his hand to us and makes us *just* (v. 21). We have already said in 1:17 that when Paul speaks of the justice of God he means God's way of making us upright in his eyes. God makes us *just and holy*.

Now, confronting all those who think they are *worthy before God* because of their own efforts, because they fulfill all the commandments, Paul says: true holiness must be given to us. For there is no other righteousness or holiness than sharing the perfection and love that are in God himself.

Paul finds it very hard to explain the mystery of salvation with the religious words available at the time, many of which refer to a violent God. He has just spoken of the *justice* of God, but has pointed out that this "justice" is before anything else, a merciful intervention that makes us holy. He spoke of *God's anger*, but the result of this anger is the coming of the Savior. He tells us now that God made Christ the *victim* we needed for the atonement of our sins; but we must not think that God, in anger, demands the suffering of an innocent victim. God is the one who provides the victim, and the coming of Jesus expresses the immensity of the Father's love. In a few words, Paul gives to these terms

a totally different and new meaning. The divine way of restoring justice is not by condemning, but by saving; by love God conquers evil in such a way that those who never knew love will be saved.

Many of the Jews converted to Christ thought it useful to continue practicing the religious prescriptions of Scripture, such as circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, cleansings, etc. (Col 2:16) and wanted other believers of the pagan world to observe them as well. Paul rejects that, because the law had two dimensions. On one hand, it was the divine teaching for human life, such as how to know God, not to kill, etc... and on the other, it was the law of the Jewish people, with all their own values, rites and customs, unlike that of any other nation. So, since God is God of all nations, he will not oblige them to give up their own culture and to live as the Jews do.

• **4.1** Paul then asks his Jewish brothers to go back to the sources of revelation. Long before the law was given to Moses, there was the faith of Abraham. That means that faith is both more fundamental and more universal. The *law*, instead, is a form of religion proper to the Jews and of value only for a period of their history. He asks: "How did Abraham become the

2Cor 4:6

2Cor 5:19; Eph 2:4

Lev 16:2; Heb 9; 1Jn 2:2; Eph 1:7

Acts 17:30

1Cor 1:29; Eph 2:9; Gal 6:13

10:12; Acts 15:11

Mt 5:17

Is 51:1; Mt 3:7

Gen 15:6; 12:1-3; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:20

11:6; Mt 20:1; Lk 17:7; Eph 2:10; Gal 2:16

sinners righteous before him: such faith is *taken into account*, and that person is held as righteous. ⁶David congratulates, in this way, those who become righteous, by the favor of God, and not by their actions: ⁷*Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven and whose offenses are forgotten*; ⁸*blessed the one, whose sin God does not take into account!*

⁹Is this blessing only for the circumcised, or is it also for the uncircumcised? We have just said, that, because of his faith, Abraham was made a just man, ¹⁰but when did this happen? After Abraham was circumcised, or before? Not after, but before. ¹¹He received the rite of circumcision, as a sign of the righteousness given him, through faith, when he was still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those uncircumcised who come to faith and are made just. ¹²And, he was to be the father of the Jews, provided that, besides being circumcised, they also imitate the faith Abraham showed before being circumcised.

¹³If God promised Abraham, or rather his descendants, that the world would belong to him, this was not because of his obeying the law, but because he was just, and a friend

of God, through faith. ¹⁴If, now, the promise is kept for those who rely on the law, then faith has no power, and nothing is left of the promise. ¹⁵For it is proper of the law, to bring punishment, and it is only when there is no law, that it is possible to live without breaking the law.

¹⁶For that reason, faith is the way, and all is given, by grace; and the promises of Abraham are fulfilled for all his descendants, not only for his children according to the law, but, also, for all the others, who have believed.

Abraham is the father of all of us, ¹⁷as it is written: *I will make you the father of many nations*. He is our father, in the eyes of Him, who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence, what does not yet exist, for this is the God in whom he believed.

¹⁸Abraham believed, and hoped against all expectation, thus, becoming the father of many nations, as he had been told: *See how many will be your descendants*. ¹⁹He did not doubt, although his body could no longer give life—he was about a hundred years old—and, in spite of his wife, Sarah, being unable to have children. ²⁰He did not doubt, nor did he distrust the promise of God, and, by being strong

friend of God and why is he taken as the model of believers? Was it because he believed in God's promises, or because he had received the rite of circumcision?" It is like asking a Christian today: "What is important, to believe in Christ, or to be baptized?"

The answer is clear; we become the friends of God by believing in his promises. The rite of baptism ratifies with a divine seal the gift of God and our commitment to him.

Therefore, baptism and the other sacraments are the "signs" of faith and have no value without faith. Baptism is the beginning of our living for God in the Christian community. Communion has no meaning unless we live in unity and share the fullness of the life of the Church.

Worthy of notice is the fact that Christian people are now less concerned with rites and

devotions that were so important to past generations. At the same time renewal movements give more stress to essentials: our faith and surrender to Christ.

Faith has no power (v. 14). Here Paul points out something that many times we fail to see. To believe in God who rewards good and obedience to his laws is already faith (Heb 11:6). This faith, however, consisting in respect and awareness of justice remains very far from Abraham's confidence in God's promise. Faith is found in every religion, but for Christians faith is everything.

He did not doubt although his body could no longer give life (v. 19). Abraham had a faith similar to the Christian who believes in the resurrection of Christ. We also are asked to believe in a God who gives life and for whom nothing is impossible.

Ps 32:1-2

Gen 17:9

Gen 12:2; 22:15; Heb 11:8; Gal 3:15

Gen 17:5; Ezk 37:11; Heb 11:19

Gen 15:5

Heb 11:11; Mk 9:23

Heb 6:15; Jer 32:17; Lk 1:35

in faith, he gave glory to God: ²¹ he was convinced, that, He who had given the promise, had power to fulfill it.

²² This was taken into account, for him to attain righteousness. ²³ *This was taken into account*: these words of Scripture are not only for him, ²⁴ but for us, too, because we believe in him, who raised Jesus, our Lord, from among the dead, ²⁵ he, who was delivered for our sins, and raised to life, for us to receive true righteousness.

Now we are at peace with God

5 • ¹ By faith, we have received true righteousness, and we are at peace with God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. ² Through him, we obtain this favor, in which we remain, and we even boast to expect the glory of God.

³ Not only that, we also boast even in trials, knowing that trials produce patience, ⁴ from patience comes merit;

merit is the source of hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because the Holy Spirit has been given to us, pouring into our hearts the love of God.

⁶ Consider, moreover, the time that Christ died for us: when we were still helpless and unable to do anything. ⁷ Few would accept to die for an upright person; although, for a very good person, perhaps someone would dare to die. ⁸ But see how God manifested his love for us: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us; ⁹ and we have become just, through his blood. With much more reason now he will save us from any condemnation. ¹⁰ Once enemies, we have been reconciled with God through the death of his Son; with much more reason, now we may be saved, through his life. ¹¹ Not only that, but we even boast in God because of Christ Jesus, our Lord, through whom we have been reconciled.

• **5.1** In this paragraph, Paul shares his own experience to help us discover changes in our life from the moment we have gone beyond the law or, for us: beyond any religion.

To begin with there is a feeling of peace: *we are at peace with God* (v. 1). Perhaps we felt well before, with no sin and no debt. The peace we now discover reveals our former emptiness: being alien to God, we were alien to a part of ourselves. It is only now that we are conscious of it, and what do we believe? We believe in the personal love of God for us and we see it in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Through him we obtain this favor in which we remain (v. 2). It is not necessary for us to "sense" it to be in this state and it would be a mistake to search for a group where we could be "sensitively" aware of God. That is a form of self-satisfaction, and such is not the way of God's true friends. It is not a matter of seeing or feeling but of believing what God does. Yet there are thousands of instances when we are conscious of this presence of God in us. Paul, who battled so much for Christ, says that it is in trials that we can discover the power of Christ working in us and making us mature (2 Cor 12:9).

And we even boast to expect the glory of God (v. 2). The great Christian hope, unknown to those who have not met Christ is the certitude of a destiny surpassing all that could be imagined, hoped for, experienced by the great-

est sages and mystics of all religions: total communion with God himself.

Hope does not disappoint us (v. 5). In contrast to the people of the Old Testament, who remained always in what was temporary or provisional while waiting for ultimate truth and justice, the Christian already experiences what we will one day fully enjoy. Something of that flavor or fragrance of the divinity *has been poured into our hearts* (v. 5) and that is the peace that God grants us when his Spirit comes to us.

Christ died for us when we were still sinners (v. 6). We are accustomed to hear about Christ dying for our sins, and often enough we are not touched, for his sacrifice seems to be far away and quite unreal. When by the grace of God we understand it, love suddenly pours from our hearts. Return love for love: this is the beginning of true conversion.

We have become just through his blood (v. 9). The text says precisely: *We have been justified*. Was the blood of Christ necessary? We have said with regard to 3:25 that Paul depended on the religious vocabulary of his time: the forgiveness of sins for the Jews was obtained by the blood of sacrificed victims. The prophets had already declared that the streams of blood from the temple were of no value without obedience to God. Certain people understood that the true sacrifice able to reconcile the world was the sufferings and humiliations of the faithful

1Cor
10:6

Is 53:6;
Mt
26:28;
1P 1:3;
Col 2:11

Is 9:6;
Mic 5:4;
Lk 1:79

Phil 3:9;
Is 53:5;
Eph 2:14;
Jn 14:16;
Col 1:27

2Cor
4:17;
12:9;
Jas 1:2

Ps 22:5;
25:3;
Gal 4:6

Tit 3:5;
1Jn 4:13

Tit
2:14;
1P 3:18

Jn 3:16;
15:13;
1Jn 3:16;
4:10

2Cor
5:18;
Eph 2:16;
Col 1:20

Adam and Jesus Christ

• ¹² Therefore, sin entered the world through one man; and through sin, death; and later on, death spread to all humankind, because all sinned.

¹³ As long as there was no law, they could not speak of disobedience, but sin was already in the world.

¹⁴ This is why, from Adam to Moses, death reigned among them, although their sin was not disobedience, as in Adam's case—this was not the true Adam, but foretold the other, who was to come.

¹⁵ Such has been the fall, but God's gift goes far beyond. All died, because of the fault of one man, but how much

more does the grace of God spread, when the gift he granted, reaches all, from this unique man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁶ Again, there is no comparison between the gift, and the offense of one man. The disobedience that brought condemnation was of one sinner, whereas the grace of God brings forgiveness to a world of sinners. ¹⁷ If death reigned through the disobedience of one and only one person, how much more, will there be a reign of life, for those who receive the grace, and the gift of true righteousness, through the one person, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Just as one transgression brought sentence of death to all, so, too, one

Gen 3;
Wis
2:24;
1Cor
15:21;
Jas 1:15

1Cor
15:45;
Col
1:15

2Tim
2:17;
Rev 20:4

minority of God's people (Is 52:13). Whatever the explanation given, the salvation of the world passes through the sufferings and the death of the innocent, and the people of God must accept to be among the victims of violence. So it is that the violent death and the blood shed by Jesus are part of God's language and also part of human experience. Paul knew this well, he who had taken part in the murder of Stephen (Acts 22:20).

• 12. Let us try to understand the thinking of Paul, inasmuch as he develops it here. In the first two chapters, he showed that without faith in Christ, humans lived in sin, including the Jews who had received the word of God. Then he asserted that salvation is brought about not by obedience to a law, but only by faith. Through this we are reconciled to God and we enter into a relationship of friendship with God who guides us towards the goal of the whole of life, which is to share the "glory" of God, or his life in eternity.

Paul now widens his horizon. Jesus has come not only to reconcile sinners, many sinners, but to save humanity as a whole. In modern terms, we would say that he came to save human history; in biblical language, he has come to save "Adam."

For Paul, as for the Jews of his time, Adam meant both the first human created by God and the whole of humankind. The children of Adam are only one with the ancestor whose name they bear. Indeed, from the beginning of humankind to the present generation, only one Adam comes to life, distrusting, rebellious and violent.

Sin entered the world through one man (v. 12). Here Paul refers to the narrative in Genesis, but not to insist, as others have done after him, on the importance of the sin committed by

the first human. In fact, Jesus did not speak of such sin, and the Scripture before him showed much reservation (see Wis 10:2 and Sir 49:16). Paul intends to point out a double solidarity that affects us: in Adam all humans are sinners, in Christ all have been reconciled. God created the world and has visited it to save the human race as a whole, united in Christ. This is why Paul puts the first parent of the old traditions in opposition to that that is the first in the plan of God. If the role of the first forebear remains very mysterious, Paul asserts clearly that humanity is not naturally at peace with God and that it cannot reach its goal as long as it is not saved by Christ.

We do not say that human nature is evil: God created it. It may perhaps be helpful to remember that during the 16th and 17th centuries, the history of the West was greatly influenced by the controversies about original sin. What nonsense was said (God had condemned all humankind to hell because of the sin of Adam)! This led to a reaction under the form of aggressive atheism in order to get rid of such a capricious and evil God. Thus it was asserted that humans are born good and that the society is guilty in making them evil.

The teaching of the apostles maintains that although human nature is good, we are born alienated. To speak to us of this situation, John uses two expressions: "the world" and "the ruler of this world," that is, the devil (see commentary on Jn 3:16 and 1 Jn 2:15). Paul, for his part, will talk of sin. In these passages, sin refers to the totality of forces that have imprisoned humankind and which bring it to evil. We are not totally responsible for the sins that at times we do without really willing them (7:16-24), and this proves our slavery and alienation. And Sin begins with our difficulty in recognizing truth and judging according to truth.

Is 53:11;
Phil 2:6;
Heb 5:8

man's good act has brought justification and light to all; ¹⁹and, as the disobedience of only one, made all sinners, so the obedience of one person, allowed all to be made just and holy.

7:8

²⁰The law itself, introduced later on, caused sin to increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹and, as sin caused death to reign, so grace will reign, in its own time, and, after making us just, and friends of God, will bring us to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Through baptism we died with Christ

6 • ¹Then, what shall we say? Shall we keep on sinning, so that grace

This *foretold the other Adam who was to come* (v. 14). To the picture of human destiny presented in Genesis (Chaps. 2 and 3), Paul presents in contrast another image, that of the crucified Christ. To the scene of sin near the forbidden tree, Paul compares that of redemption fulfilled on the "tree" of the cross. In the first scene there are three characters: Man (Adam), Sin (the serpent), Death. In the second, there are four: Man (Christ), Sin, Death and Justice (or new and holy life).

The gift of God more than compensated for sin (v. 16). The damage caused by sin from the very beginning increases each day; at times we feel crushed and powerless by the evil forces present everywhere. Paul, however, sees the greatness of the gift of God: while humankind increases and sin enters into all areas of society, God calls more people to free themselves.

There is something more. In this paragraph, somewhat complicated, Paul hints that the redemption of Christ does much more than correct the errors of humankind. God is not satisfied with helping us and making us better, for, after beginning to lift up men and women, he invites them to reign in life, which is to share his own glory.

How much more will there be a reign of life for those who receive grace (v. 17). Christ embraces all of us, gathers us in his sacrifice, and becomes the new head of humankind. Perhaps Paul is thinking at times of the salvation of only those who have listened to the Gospel, believed in Christ and entered the Church. Note however that he stresses the fact that Christ saves a *world of sinners*. Christ is the new Adam and the head not only of believers, but of humankind as well. Humans continue today to be drawn by the flood of evil originated by Adam. Humankind is also saved as a whole, as long as people try to lift up their brothers and sisters. He who does not share in this task loses

may come more abundantly? ²Can we live, again, in sin? Of course not: we are now dead regarding sin.

³Don't you know, that in baptism, which unites us to Christ, we are all baptized and plunged into his death? ⁴By this baptism in his death, we were buried with Christ and, as Christ was raised from among the dead by the glory of the Father, we begin walking in a new life. ⁵If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his, so shall we be, by a resurrection like his.

• ⁶We know, that our old self was crucified with Christ, so as to destroy what of us was sin, so that, we may

Col 3:
9-10

salvation, because what God wants is not "my" salvation but the salvation of Adam.

The law caused sin to increase (v. 20). It was an error to see the law as the great gift of God (yet the Old Testament said it!). Let us say rather that because of the law the Jews discovered much sooner than other nations how great was their need to be saved. Its first result was to increase sin, because from then on they knew what their duty was and did not do it.

• **6.1** *We are now dead regarding sin* (v. 2). If we say that the law has been abrogated we risk a misunderstanding. We do not mean that from now on we shall follow our instincts: we have been freed of a situation where the law seemed to govern everything, but in fact sin found in us an accomplice: distrust of God. *Dead to sin*: this means that sin no longer finds a response in us. *Dead*: it is indeed the right word since it has been a definitive step, one that is intimately linked to the death of Christ. To die with him so as to rise with him: this is the meaning of baptism.

In the early Church, mostly adults were baptized: they had been evangelized and committed themselves to the community of the holy people of God. Baptism followed a conversion. When Paul speaks of *baptism* we must understand that it takes in the entire journey through conversion, including catechumenate, initiation in Christian life... Otherwise, baptism would be no more than a rite.

We are all plunged into his death (v. 3). Baptism means entering into Christ to share the benefits of his sacrifice. It also means the acceptance of a complete change of life, that of Christ in his death and resurrection.

• **6.** *You must consider...* (v. 11). It is evident that baptism, even when received with faith, does not make us perfect immediately. Is it enough

no longer serve sin—⁷if we are dead, we are no longer in debt to sin. ⁸But, if we have died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him. ⁹We know, that Christ, once risen from the dead, will not die again, and death has no more dominion over him. ¹⁰For, by dying, he is dead to sin, once and for all, and, now, the life that he lives, is life with God.

1P 3:18;
Heb
9:26

8:3;
2Cor 5:2

1P 2:24

¹¹So you, too, must consider yourselves dead to sin, and alive to God, in Christ Jesus. ¹²Do not allow sin any control over your mortal bodies; do not submit yourselves to its evil inclinations, ¹³and do not give your members over to sin, as instruments to do evil. On the contrary, offer yourselves, as persons returned from death to life, and let the members of your body be as holy instruments, at the service of God. ¹⁴Sin will not lord it over you again, for you are not under the law, but under grace.

¹⁵I ask again: are we to sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? Certainly not. ¹⁶If you have given yourselves up to someone as his slave, you are to obey the one who commands you, aren't you? Now, with sin, you go to death, and by accepting faith, you go the right way. ¹⁷Let us give thanks to God, for, after

Jn 8:34

having sin as your master, you have been given to another, that is, to the doctrine of faith, to which you listen willingly. ¹⁸And being free from sin, you began to serve true righteousness—¹⁹you see, that I speak in a very human way, taking into account that you are not fully mature.

Gal
5:13;
Jn 8:36
12:1

There was a time, when you let your members be slaves of impurity and disorder, walking in the way of sin; convert them, now, into servants of righteousness, to the point of becoming holy.

²⁰When you were slaves of sin, you did not feel under obligation to righteousness, ²¹but what were the fruits of those actions, of which you are now ashamed? Such things bring death. ²²Now, however, you have been freed from sin and serve God. You are bearing fruit, and growing in holiness, and the result will be life everlasting. ²³So, on one side is sin: its reward, death; on the other side, is God: He gives us, by grace, life everlasting, in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Jn 15:8

Gal 5:8;
Jas 1:15

The Christian is not bound by the Jewish religion

7 • ¹You, my friends, understand law. The law has power only while a person is alive. ²The married

1Cor
7:39

for us to give our whole attention to commandments? What if the fear of temptation and daily faults paralyze us? Beware of scruples and guilt complexes! Paul proposes a different way: it is most important for us to believe that sin has no power over us. Our eyes will be fixed on Christ knowing that we belong to him and that he himself transforms us. Such an apparent carefree attitude serves us more effectively than nervousness. It is the way Saint Therese of Lisieux suggested for those who feel incapable of great things.

Do not allow sin any control over your mortal bodies (v. 12). The faithful, although conscious of belonging totally to Christ, commit sins every day. Their sins, however, do not deprive them of what is most important, trust in the Father, which allows them to stand up after each fall (1 Jn 2:1). They know that they are and always will be sinners whom God forgives,

as long as they try to amend and be better. We achieve freedom day by day by voluntarily submitting to the requirements of a better life.

In Paul's time there were cases of slaves being exchanged by owners. A free person with debts could sell himself to his debtor in payment of his debts. The comparison used by Paul teaches us to be meekly at the disposal of the Spirit, as slaves who are not owners of their own persons. Let us look at what the Spirit advises before making any decision.

The Christian's life must appear like slavery to whoever looks at it externally. Yet the Christian feels and knows himself to be free. The best example might be that of a mother totally dedicated to her sick child: she is totally free, because she has no other law than her love.

• **7.1** The last chapter presented Christ who

woman, for example, is bound, by law, to her husband while he is alive; but if he dies, she is free from her obligations as a wife. ³If she gives herself to another, while her husband is alive, she will be an adulteress; but once the husband dies, she is free, and if she gives herself to another man, she is not an adulteress.

⁴It was the same with you, brothers and sisters: you have died to the law with the person of Christ, and you belong to another, who has risen from among the dead, so that we may produce fruit for God. ⁵When we lived as humans used to do, the law stirred up the desires for all that is sin, and they worked in our bodies with fruits of death. ⁶But we have died to what was holding us; we are freed from the law, and no longer serve a written law—which was the old; with the spirit, we are in the new.

⁷Then, shall we say that the law is part of sin? Of course not! However, I would not have known sin, had it not been for the law. I would not be aware

of greed, if the law did not tell me: *Do not covet*. ⁸Sin took advantage of the commandment, to stir in me all kinds of greed; whereas, without a law, sin lies dead.

⁹First, there was no law and I lived. Then the commandment came, and gave life to sin, ¹⁰and I died. It happened, that the law of life had brought me death. ¹¹Sin took advantage of the commandment. It lured me, and killed me, through the commandment.

¹²But the law itself is holy, just and good. ¹³Is it possible, that something good, brings death to me? Of course not. This comes from sin, that may be seen as sin, when it takes advantage of something good, to kill: the commandment let sin appear fully sinful.

The law without Christ makes humans divided

• ¹⁴We know, that the law is spiritual; as for me, I am flesh, and have been sold to sin. ¹⁵I cannot explain what is happening to me, because I do not do what I want, but, on the

frees us from sin and death and becomes our only master. Then Christians of Jewish origin could ask: What about the law of the Old Covenant? Is it no longer of value? Was it not given by God himself?

You have died to the law (v. 4). The law was provisional: the time of the law ended with the death of Christ. Here we find one of Paul's great intuitions. The death of Jesus was seemingly no more than a minor event in the troubled history of the Jewish people under Roman occupation. Yet it is more than a turning point, a rupture in the history of the world. Before that time was the era of a minor humanity; after it, the time when God could act and make himself known fully and clearly (Gal 4). The death of Jesus marks the death of ancient history. The Christian way of counting the years from the death of Christ is not one among other possibilities: it responds to a reality.

The baptized Jews are no longer obliged to follow all the commandments of this law that was the supreme authority. Of course, many of the commandments deal with justice and mercy and are not to be neglected. Even so Christians are not left with a religion of commandments: faith in Jesus Christ, the only Savior, inspires all our actions.

We have died to what was holding us (v. 6). The law of Moses, the great gift of God to Israel was part of a provisional stage, when humankind was not entirely free. The Christians of today see in the laws an indication of God's will but reserve the right to act according to the criteria of their faith. No law or even religious decree can prevail over a well-informed conscience. An ordered life creates more beauty than any religious constitution could ever achieve.

See the same theme in 2 Corinthians 5:14: "if he died for all, then all have died."

First there was no law and I lived (v. 9). It would be erroneous to think that Paul is speaking about his own past. He is rather playing a role and speaks on behalf of Man (see commentary 5:12-14). The other actors in the drama are Sin, the Law and Death.

For the Jews the conclusion is clear: the law with its commandments had no power to renew the human person.

• 14. Paul describes the situation of the person who knows the commandments, but not the love of God. He is not a liberated person, but a divided one. Two opposing forces struggle within him; on one side the law that tells him what

2Cor
5:15;
Eph
2:15;
Col 2:14

Eph 2:3;
4:22

2Cor 3:6

20:17

5:13;
Jas 1:14;
1Cor
15:56

Lev
18:5;
Dt 4:1;
Ezk 20:1

Gen
3:13;
2Cor
11:3

Dt 4:8

Ps 51:1;
Jn 3:6;
Gal 5:17

contrary, the very things I hate. ¹⁶Well then, if I do the evil I do not want to do, I agree, that the law is good; ¹⁷but, in this case, I am not the one striving toward evil, but it is sin, living in me. ¹⁸I know, that what is right, does not abide in me, I mean, in my flesh. I can want to do what is right, but I am unable to do it. ¹⁹In fact, I do not do the good I want, but the evil I hate. ²⁰Therefore, if I do what I do not want to do, I am not the one striving toward evil, but sin, which is in me.

²¹I discover, then, this reality: though I wish to do what is right, the evil within me asserts itself first. ²²My inmost self, agrees and rejoices with the law of God, ²³but I notice in my body, another law, challenging the law of the spirit, and delivering me, as a slave to the law of sin, written in

my members. ²⁴Alas, for me! Who will free me from this being, which is only death? ²⁵Let us give thanks to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord!

So, with my conscience, I am a servant of the law of God, and with my mortal body, I serve the law of sin.

We have received the spirit

8 • ¹This contradiction no longer exists for those who are in Jesus Christ. ²For, in Jesus Christ, the law of the spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death. ³The law was without effect, because flesh was not responding. Then God, planning to destroy sin, sent his own Son, in the likeness of those subject to the sinful human condition; by doing this, he condemned the sin, in this human condition. ⁴Since then, the perfection

to do, and on the other *another law* in his *flesh*, that is, in his nature. He is not really free.

There is something well disposed within human beings: *the spirit*; and something that resists the demands of duty: *the flesh* (see Mk 14:38). *The flesh* does not mean the body; this word designates what in us is weak in face of duty and God's call to holiness. See commentary on 8:5.

Our liberty is impotent when faced with sin, that is, it can do nothing against the forces of evil dragging down all humankind. Dullness of spirit in our fellow workers, family problems, the general spread of pornography, selfishness and consumerism: the flesh within us becomes an accomplice in all these evils.

In this chapter Paul continues to play the role of the one who still does not know Christ and remains divided and enslaved. The next chapter will deal with the opposition between the spirit and the flesh for those who believe in Christ. For them there is a solution to their conflicts: they live in peace. And so Paul ends crying out: *who will free me...? Thanks be to God.*

• **8.1** After having shown at length the limitations of a religious law, a reality in every religion that stresses the observance of practices, Paul speaks of life in the spirit: for that is, first of all, Christian life. It would seem that what follows is a long theological discussion: and Paul is arguing the way he learned in the rabbinical schools. In fact, if we look closely, it is not the development of a thesis: all comes from the spiritual experience of Paul.

When a Christian believes he has received the Spirit of God, it is not merely because he has been told that confirmation gave him the Spirit. If in Christian life there is a characteristic experience it is that of the Spirit of God working in us. Of course we should always shun the temptation to want to experience through our senses the things of God instead of believing in his word: nevertheless there is a Christian experience. See commentary on Acts 21:5.

Paul, for his part, knows what life is when permanently directed by the Spirit: he has evaded the situation of the sinner divided between his conscience and his bad habits and found unity in his availability to God. He will boldly speak of total transformation for those who believe in Christ, even if later he had to recognize that this transformation is more in the process than in the accomplishment.

God sent his own Son (v. 3). Would he have sent him only to speak to us, to give us his laws, to give us great examples of divine love? The salvation that God gives us is quite different. Look at what happens when someone wants to help the marginalized: in vain do we assist them materially; they will not become responsible unless they themselves face their own problems. God knew that. It is not he who pities sinners and says: "How sad! So irresponsible! I will dress them up in white and forget their sins, so they may look holy and be seated at my side." God does not want to disguise reality, but to create humankind anew. So one of the human race must personally defeat Sin (that is, the power of death that keeps humankind paralyzed and divided).

Gen
6:5;
8:21;
Jer
10:23

1Cor
15:57

Jer
31:33;
Ezk
36:27;
2Cor
3:17;
Gal 5:18

2Cor
5:21;
Heb
2:14

Mt 5:17

intended by the law would be fulfilled, in those not walking in the way of the flesh, but in the way of the spirit.

Life through the spirit

Gal 5:16 • ⁵Those walking according to the flesh tend toward what is flesh; those led by the spirit, to what is spirit. ⁶Flesh tends toward death, while spirit aims at life and peace. ⁷What the flesh seeks is against God: it does not agree, it cannot even submit to the law of God. ⁸So, those walking according to the flesh cannot please God.

Jas 4:4; 1Jn 2:15
1Cor 3:16
1Cor 6:14; 2Cor 4:14

⁹Yet, your existence is not in the flesh, but in the spirit, because the Spirit of God is within you. If you did not have the Spirit of Christ, you would not belong to him. ¹⁰But Christ is within you; though the body is branded by death, as a consequence of sin, the spirit is life and holiness. ¹¹And, if the Spirit of him, who raised Jesus

from the dead, is within you, he, who raised Jesus Christ from among the dead, will also give life to your mortal bodies. Yes, he will do it, through his Spirit, who dwells within you.

¹²Then, brothers, let us leave the flesh and no longer live according to it. ¹³If not, we will die. Rather, walking in the spirit, let us put to death the body's deeds, so that we may live.

¹⁴All those who walk in the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God. ¹⁵Then, no more fear: you did not receive a spirit of slavery, but the spirit that makes you sons and daughters, and every time, we cry, "Abba! (this is Dad!) Father!" ¹⁶the Spirit assures our spirit, that we are sons and daughters of God. ¹⁷If we are children, we are heirs, too. Ours will be the inheritance of God, and we will share it with Christ; for, if we now suffer with him, we will also share glory with him.

Gal 4:6;
2Tim 1:7

Gal 3:4;
2Tim 2:12;
1P 4:13

He sent him... in the likeness (v. 3). In the likeness: Jesus carries on his shoulders the sins of others, but he did not commit any sin (Heb 2:14 and 4:15). Since the sacrifice of Christ the power of his Spirit has made believers capable of being victorious over the forces of death.

Through love and forgiveness God created a new world without rancor or desire of revenge or hidden remorse of conscience. We are at peace with him; we are at peace with each other.

- 5. The human life of Christ prepared the way for the communication of the Spirit to those who were to be adopted in order, later on, to be made divine, that is, transformed in God. First comes Christ, then the Spirit. This is why Paul reminded us first of the saving work of Christ (Chaps. 5 and 6); now he tells us about the Spirit.

Those walking according to the flesh. What flesh signifies has been discussed in part in the commentary on 7:14. Without doubt, Paul has in mind the inner conflicts that each of us experience, and *flesh* refers to a human reality that weighs upon us. Nature can never be regarded in its pure state; the human nature of people of this twenty-first century, with their instincts and desires, their images, the things that appear impossible to do away with, is mostly dependent on our education and culture. The tension we experience between *flesh* and *spirit* is partly the tension between our culture—the present liberal

culture with its unbridled search for pleasure and the latest craze—and the Spirit of Christ that seeks only the service of the Father. In such a context, the "resurgence" of sexual freedom among certain groups, which call themselves Christian, should not surprise us. They always speak of rights as if a Christian should have other rights before the Father of whom he should be a servant as Jesus had been and renounce himself.

In verse 5, we read, *tend towards what is flesh*. The Greek verb refers to what one keeps in his heart, his ambitions and plans. The same word appears in verse 7 which we translate as *seeks*. This refers to what our nature instinctively desires and what we plan whenever we conform to the ambitions of our contemporaries. *Flesh tends towards death... flesh seeks against God*: this may come as a shocking statement for us who live in a world estranged from faith, but where many good things happen nevertheless.

We simply say that the Spirit of God works even in places where people do not know him by name. Yet there is no life as long as people do not call in question the ready-made ideas. To *please God*, it will always be necessary to be among the marginalized, as Abraham was, that is, to run counter against *the flesh*.

Those walking according to the (v. 5). Should we write *according to the Spirit* or *according to the spirit*? In biblical culture spirit is both God's and ours. The spirit is what God gives

The universe, too, waits for its redemption

• 18 I consider, that the suffering of our present life cannot be compared with the glory that will be revealed, and given to us. 19 All creation is eagerly expecting the birth, in glory, of the children of God. 20 For, if now, the created world was unable to attain its purpose, this did not come from itself, but from the one who subjected it. But it is not without hope; 21 for even the created world, will be freed from this fate of death, and share the freedom and glory of the children of God.

2Cor
4:17

Ecl 1:2
Gen
3:17

Is 25:7;
65:17;
Rev 21:1;
2P 3:12

22 We know, that the whole creation groans and suffers the pangs of birth. 23 Not creation alone, but even ourselves; although the Spirit was given to us, as a foretaste of what we are to receive, we groan in our innermost being, eagerly awaiting the day, when God will give us full rights, and rescue our bodies as well.

Is 66:7;
Jn 16:21

2Cor
1:22;
Eph
1:14

24 In hope, we already have salvation. But, if we saw what we hoped for, there would no longer be hope: how can you hope for what is already seen? 25 So, we hope for what we do not see, and we will receive it, through patient hope.

Heb
11:1;
11:27;
1P 1:8

to humans; it is also their ready acceptance of God's action. In this paragraph we should sometimes use *spirit*, our spirit visited by God, at other times it would be necessary to say *spirit*, God's way of working in us; again at other times *Spirit* is God-who-communicates.

What Paul writes here is not a theory of what should take place in us, but what comes directly from his experience. The Spirit that has been given to him habitually possesses but a part of him, that is, *his spirit*. The rest, what he calls the *flesh* (it should be termed: the living reality, the basis of his psychology), continues to be what it was. Perhaps it can unwind more freely now that Paul is not always trying to repress it and subject it to the law as he attempted to do before (7:15-25). Actually, it *cannot be subjected*; it can only desire rest and nourishment, dreams of sex and well-being.

Paul then is present as from the outside to these desires of the flesh, but he is firmly filled with *the spirit*. His spirit is now under the influence of the Spirit and knows the joy of letting himself be carried along. Paul then continues to see and feel contradiction within himself (2 Cor 12:7), but it is no longer a bruising test of strength: he is taking part in a victory of the Spirit.

Paul does not forget that others are less advanced than he is and still have to painfully conquer their liberty. He does not tell them that the flesh is evil, but that we must put to death the *works of the flesh* (v. 13): what we call mortification.

The Spirit that makes you sons and daughters (v. 15). The Greek text could be: "Spirit of adoption" but also "spirit of sons having all the rights of their father" (like in Gal 4:5). In no way does Paul want to emphasize the difference we often make by saying: "Jesus is the only Son, and we, adopted children". Speaking like that, we place a barrier, slight though it be, between

God and us, and the Gospel does not so desire, from the moment we have known the Father.

Those led by the Spirit tend towards what comes from the Spirit. Then we begin to freely desire a new way of living in imitation of Christ. The desires of the Spirit animate our life. We experience them as an interior call, a security and a joy.

In following the desires of the Spirit we really feel free; this life, however, is demanding. Each day we have to go a little further in *putting to death the body's deeds* (v. 13), that is, everything that paralyzes us and makes us cling to this world. *Put to death*: we call it "mortification."

The Spirit assures our spirit that we are sons and daughters of God (v. 16). Whoever lives in the spirit lives in the light. While we remain firm in the teaching of Christ and share in the life of the Church, the Spirit gives us internal knowledge and joy in the things of God. The Spirit guides us and inspires us each day showing us how to please God.

• 18. The description of "living in the Spirit" continues. The believer who looks around notices that not only his community, but also the whole world is being transformed.

The glory that will be revealed and given to us. Though the Spirit dwells in our innermost being, we expect the transformation of our whole being. Now, though we have the peace of Christ, temptations and sufferings prevent us from enjoying glory and being fully free. With the transformation of our whole being (Paul calls it *the body*: v. 23) we shall reach the glorious freedom of the children of God.

It is impossible to consider the human being apart from this world in which we live. Are there elsewhere in the Universe other intellectual beings? Scripture does not speak of it: it merely tells us that all creation is guided by the same mystery of death and resurrection which marks

Lk 11:13;
Jas 4:5;
Gal 4:6

• ²⁶ Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us, without words, as if with groans. ²⁷ And he, who sees inner secrets, knows the desires of the Spirit, for he asks for the holy ones, what is pleasing to God.

1Cor
2:12

Who shall separate us from the love of God?

• ²⁸ We know that in everything, God works for the good of those who love him, whom he has called, according to his plan. ²⁹ Those whom he knew beforehand, he has also predestined, to be like his Son, similar to

Col 1:15;
Eph
1:11;
2Thes
2:13;
1Cor
15:49;
2Cor
3:18

our destiny and which the Son of God has taken on himself.

Who has *subjected it* (v. 20)? Is it God or humans? The result is hardly different. Paul shows us that sin has destroyed the order of nature. Some texts in the Old Testament show us nature standing for God against human crimes (Jer 14; Jon 3:7 and 4:11; Wis 5:17-20). It is certain that humanity has developed with aggressiveness and violence; hence the domination of women by men and the bellicose masculine spirit. Hence a science driven by the will to conquer nature: was not Adam's sin the will to take by force knowledge and happiness?

Scripture notices that the progress of society usually involves exploitation and servitude. Scientific discovery has been used to destroy millions of lives and the progress of the liberal world keeps more people marginalized living in misery than there are living at ease.

Modern science has justly shown that the people are the summit towards which the whole current of life tends. We must not forget that we are brothers/sisters to and in solidarity with all that has life. Scripture does not invite us to dream of a nature brought back to the state of an earthly paradise, to be enjoyed by a few rich people. It does not demand that animals be treated as persons with rights. True love respects the order of creation and the "love of animals" is not a substitute for true and responsible love that knows how to accept and commune with free persons.

All of nature has been entrusted to Adam: he must bring it back to God, using it in such a way that he himself becomes an offering to God (Rom 12:1 and 15:7). That is the meaning of the sacrifice of animals in the Old Testament. The growing concern about human responsibilities towards creation opens our eyes to an

him, so, that, he may be the Firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And so, those whom God predestined, he called; and those whom he called, he makes righteous; and to those whom he makes righteous, he will give his glory.

³¹ What shall we say after this? If God is with us, who shall be against us? ³² If he did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not give us all things with him? ³³ Who shall accuse those chosen by God: He takes away their guilt. ³⁴ Who will dare to condemn them? Christ, who died, and better still, rose, and is seated at the right hand of God, interceding for us?

Is 50:8

Heb
7:21

aspect of sin, but also obliges us to ask where our history is taking us.

Creation groans and suffers the pangs of birth (v. 22). We see in the world more contradictions and tensions than peaceful progress: in fact this earth is not our permanent residence. On the contrary it is a place of sorrow, and dark faith prepares us for what we await from God: we wait for our full status of sons and daughters. Nature cannot but participate with us at this *birth* (v. 22) of which the passion of Jesus is the sign. It will share in the "liberty and glory of the children of God": it would be difficult to think that resurrected persons will not have a place in a spiritualized and transfigured world.

• ²⁶. *We do not know how to pray.* We often think that we pray only when we are saying something and asking for things. Paul shows that words are not as important as the deep desire of the Spirit of God within us.

The Spirit intercedes for us. It is good to present our problems and worries to God, using words that the Spirit inspires. And still better when the Spirit invites us to remain in silent prayer and God communicates his peace to us.

• ²⁸. In the last pages Paul has described God's action in us through his Spirit. In fact, the providence of the Father covers all the events of our lives. Nothing happens in the world, in our family, in our lives merely by chance or because it was so destined.

Those whom he knew beforehand (v. 29). Paul stresses the Father's personal attention for each one of us. God knows us in Christ from the beginning of the world: children known before they are born, but also destined for a unique place in creation!

On reading this verse some have thought that

¹Cor 4:9;
²Cor 4:11

Ps 44:23

1^{Cor} 3:22;
Col 2:15

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Will it be trials, or anguish, persecution or hunger, lack of clothing, or dangers or sword? ³⁶As the Scripture says: *For your sake, we are being killed all day long; they treat us like sheep to be slaughtered.*

³⁷No, in all of this, we are more than conquerors, thanks to him, who has loved us. ³⁸I am certain, that neither death nor life, neither angels nor spiritual powers, neither the present nor the future, nor cosmic powers, ³⁹were they from heaven, or from the deep world below, nor any creature whatsoever, will separate us from the love of God, which we have, in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Why have the Jews not believed?

9 • ¹I tell you, sincerely, in Christ, and my conscience assures me

in the Holy Spirit, that I am not lying: ²I have great sadness and constant anguish for the Jews. ³I would even desire, that, I myself, suffer the curse of being cut off from Christ, instead of my brethren: I mean, my own people, my kin. ⁴They are Israelites, whom God adopted, and on them, rests his glory. Theirs, are the Covenants, the law, the worship and the promises of God. ⁵They are descendants of the patriarchs, and from their race, Christ was born, he, who, as God, is above all distinctions. Blessed be He forever and ever: Amen!

⁶We cannot say that the promise of God has failed. For not all Israelites belong to Israel. ⁷And not because they are of the race of Abraham, are they all his children, for it was said to him: *The children of Isaac will be called your descendants.* ⁸This means,

we are not really free, and that those elected by God are saved automatically. In fact, we do not read that some are elected for salvation, others not. Paul only says that they are elected to know Christ, which is not the same as salvation.

The kingdom of God extends much farther than the Church. The great majority of humankind do not know Christ and the Gospel. Yet God knows how to lead and save them, for the sacrifice of Christ saves all humankind. Paul is addressing believers and reminds them that to believe in Christ is a great personal grace; let them not be discouraged.

See also commentary on 9:14.

He called... makes righteous (v. 30) Whatever be the way we come to know Christ, it is a personal call of God who gives us the opportunity to believe.

God set us on a solid basis with himself. That goes far beyond an ordering on a moral level for those who needed it—and besides such an ordering does not guarantee that we always keep to the right path. More deeply something has been achieved in us, something has been sown in the world: we are the bearers of innumerable orderings from which a new conscience will originate and appear in humanity, during our lifetime or centuries later.

Who shall be against us? (v. 31). Paul is thinking of the evil surrounding us that frequently drags us down. He is thinking of the Day of Judgment when the accuser, the Spirit of Evil, could face us with the faults we have committed.

He thinks of our troubled conscience that often brings us remorse. None of these will be stronger than the love and forgiveness of Christ. The believer should not be alarmed at his repeated faults or doubt the love of God, but try to live according to the truth.

• **9.1** Paul, being a Jew, shares the worries of the few Jews who have believed in Christ. Why did the chosen people not recognize their Savior? If they were a chosen nation, why were so few selected?

It is the same worry of Catholic families when their children do not go to church or when teenagers declare they have lost their faith. It is the same uneasiness we feel in the course of a mission: those who habitually go to church are perhaps the hardest to lead to conversion and are the ones that most obstruct the evangelization of outsiders.

Faith is not transmitted in heritage from father to son, mother to daughter. There have certainly been times and cultural systems where a whole nation followed the same religion and apparently shared the same faith. The Book of Acts shows how on several occasions the conversion of the head of the family brought about the baptism of the whole household (Acts 11:14; 16:33). Faith however will always be a grace of God. In our days people have acquired complete autonomy and live in a world where all beliefs meet: faith can no longer be a family possession.

32:32

4:22;
19:5;
Is 40:5;
25 7:14;
Eph 2:12

1:3;
1Jn 5:20;
Tit 2:13

Num 23:19;
Is 55:10

2:28;
Mt 3:9;
Jn 8:39;
Gen 21:12

1^{Cor} 10:18;
Gal 6:16

that the children of God are not identified with the race of Abraham, but only with the children born to him, because of the promise of God. ⁹To such a promise, this text refers: *I shall return about this time, and Sarah will have a son.* ¹⁰And, listen: Rebecca, the wife of our father Isaac, became pregnant, ¹¹and, before the twins were born, or had done anything, right or wrong, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, ¹²not on the merits, but of who is called, she was told: *The elder will serve the younger,* ¹³as the Scripture says: *I chose Jacob and rejected Esau.*

God is not unjust

• ¹⁴Shall we say, that God is unjust? Of course not. ¹⁵However, God said to Moses: *I shall forgive whom I forgive,*

and have pity on whom I have pity. ¹⁶So, what is important is, not that we worry or hurry, but that God has compassion. ¹⁷And he says in Scripture, to Pharaoh: *I made you, Pharaoh, to show my power in you, and for the whole world to know my name.* ¹⁸And so, God takes pity on whom he wishes, and hardens the heart of whomsoever he wishes.

¹⁹Maybe you say: "Why, then, does God complain, if it is impossible to evade his decision?" ²⁰But you, my friend, who are you, to call God to account? Should the clay pot say to its maker: Why did you make me like this? ²¹Is it not up to the potter, to make from the same clay, a vessel for beauty, and a vessel for menial use?

²²Thus, God endures, very patiently, vessels that deserve his wrath,

• 14. In this paragraph, Paul already anticipates the objection: "If God calls whomever he wishes, will our act of faith really be free?" (v. 19). This is and will always be a mystery. Paul does not intend to explain this, but asserts that God grants to whomever he wishes the grace of coming to Christ (see Jn 6:44). The experience of his conversion in which God took his freedom by force, as he does with the great prophets, brings him to use very strong words which seem to negate our freedom, especially in verse 22 which can be translated more strongly as: "if God endured with patience vessels prepared to be broken."

We have two observations on this:

Paul uses Old Testament texts in which God speaks of saving or destroying the people of Israel (v. 27), of loving Israel, giving it good land, and of giving poor land to the people of Esau or Edom (v. 13), of making Pharaoh more stubborn to bring him to defeat (v. 17). All these are problems of collective failures or salvation, at the level of history, which Paul employs to clarify a historical fact: a great majority of the Jewish people did not recognize Christ. It would be very risky to draw from these conclusions about the responsibility of those who believe and those who do not. We will fall into a still greater confusion if we would apply this text, as others have done, to individual salvation, and discuss about those who will go to heaven and those who will be condemned. It is clear that this question has nothing to do with the argument of Paul: to know God is a grace which God gives to whomever he wills, but he surely

gives other graces that other people be saved without knowing Christ.

Then we take note that all speakers, including Paul, say at times words that are somewhat excessive which will be clarified later by showing other aspects of the same reality. We ought to see other words of Scripture to re-establish the balance. If God calls us to a relationship of love and faithfulness with him (Hos 2:21), it is precisely because we are free and responsible (Sir 15:14). If someone says that God has destined someone for hell, how could he call him and demand that he live a holy life? It would be the cruelest of jokes.

PREDESTINATION

We must not confuse two different ideas of *predestination*.

For Paul, *predestination* refers to the loving plan of God *from the very beginning*. It was then that God decided how to lavish on each of us the riches of his love through his Son. See commentary on Ephesians 1:5.

It was not the same for the people of the sixteenth century, like Luther, Calvin and many Catholic theologians with them. They thought that God created man without worrying about his possible sin or providing for the coming of Christ. As a result of Adam's sin, the Justice of God condemned all his descendants to hell. Then the Mercy of God decided to save some of them by sending Jesus. This *predestination after the sin* would mean that no one could escape this blessing or this curse of God.

Paul, speaking of *predestination*, only praised

Gen
18:10

Gen
25:23;
1Thes
1:4;
2P 1:10

Mal
1:2-3

Dt 32:4
33:19

Tit 3:5;
Phl 3:12;
9:16

4:21

Is 29:16;
Wis
12:12;
Job 11:7;
38:2

Jer 18:6;

Is 45:9

2:4;
3:26

fit to be broken, and through them, he wants to show his wrath, and the extent of his power. ²³But, he also wants to show the riches of his glory in others, in vessels of mercy, prepared for glory. ²⁴And he called us, not only from among the Jews, but from among the pagans, too, ²⁵as he said, through the prophet Hosea: *I will call "my people," those that were not my people, and "my beloved," the one who was not beloved.* ²⁶And in the same place, where they were told, "You are not my people," they will be called children of the living God.

Eph 1:4;
2:4

Hos 1:9;
2:25

Hos 2:1

Is 6:13;
10:22;
Zep
3:12

Is 1:9

²⁷With regard to Israel, Isaiah proclaims: *Even if the Israelites are as numerous as the sand of the sea, only a few will be saved.* ²⁸This is a matter that the Lord will settle in Israel, without fail or delay. ²⁹Isaiah also announced: *If the Almighty Lord had not left us some descendants, we would have become like Sodom and similar to Gomorrah.*

³⁰What are we saying, then? That the pagans, who were not aiming at true righteousness, found it (I speak of righteousness through faith); ³¹while Israel, striving to observe a law of righteousness, lost the purpose of the law. ³²Why? Because they relied on the observance of the law, not on faith. And they stumbled over the stumbling stone (Christ), ³³as it was said: *Look, I am laying in Zion a stone, that will make people stumble, a rock, that will make them fall; but whoever relies on him will not be deceived.*

Lk 18:9

Is 28:16;
8:14;
Lk 2:34;
Mt 21:42

They tried to achieve their own righteousness

10 • ¹My brothers and sisters, I wish, with all my heart, that the Jews be saved, and I pray to God for them. ²I can testify, that they are zealous for God, but this is not the way. ³They don't know God's way of righteousness, and they try to achieve their own righteousness: this is why

Acts
22:3

2Cor
3:14;
1Tim
1:14;
Phil 3:9

God for his overflowing love. They, instead, were obsessed by concern for their own salvation, thinking of a whimsical God who perhaps had destined them to hell. Luther escaped from this obsession by stressing the merciful Jesus more than a frightening God.

In that same despairing century our Lord Jesus made several apparitions asking people to honor his Sacred Heart, so reminding us that he was only love for us. It is not "Jesus" only who is a loving God. The Father who predestines us is love just as his Son is love.

Speaking of predestination, we say:

– God, who is not controlled by time, has no before or after. He sees and determines at the same time the beginning and the end for each of us. No life fails because of the negligence or bad faith of God (Rom 8:28; Jas 1:13). No one can prevent his saving plans (Rom 8:37).

– Our salvation is a gift of God. No one can believe and please God unless he has been called (Rom 11:5; Phil 2:13). No one is to be proud of his merits or demand a reward (Eph 2:9; Phil 3:9).

– God is the one who works everything in us, as long as we open ourselves to his action. Those who refuse to be receptive are responsible for their own condemnation. The Church therefore speaks of "predestination" to express

this saving work; but she has never spoken of predestination with regard to hell. Compare Matthew 25:34, the kingdom prepared for you, with 25:41, the fire reserved for the Devil.

Only a few will be saved (v. 27). Jews, who have believed in Christ, instead of complaining, should give thanks to God for having called them. God saves the world by means of small groups and, even in the Church, not many people take the Gospel seriously: because this is also a grace of God.

Now Paul explains why the Jews lost the purpose of the law (v. 31). They wanted to become holy relying on their own efforts. In this, some Christians today resemble them. They feel quite sure of their actions and are content with their lives. This presumption prevents them from seeing themselves as sinners.

They try to achieve their own righteousness (10:3). Many Christians likewise would like to come to God with hands full when, in fact, Christ invites us just to receive. In this way we receive the sacraments, not because we are worthy, but by extending our open hands humbly.

• **10.1** Paul continues to develop the same theme of Israel's unbelief using the Jewish method of discussion of the time. He distinguishes in Scripture various lines of thought. Apparently a

they did not enter God's way of righteousness. ⁴For Christ is the aim of the law, and it is, then, that the believer reaches this righteousness.

⁵Moses, indeed, speaks of becoming just through the law; he writes: *The one who obeys the law will find life through it.* ⁶But the righteousness coming from the faith says, instead: *Do not say in your heart: Who will go up to heaven?* (because, in fact, Christ came down from there) ⁷or *who will go down to the world below?* (because, in fact, Christ came up, from among the dead). ⁸True righteousness, coming from faith, also says: *The word of God is near you, on your lips and in your hearts.* This is the message that we preach, and this is faith.

⁹You are saved, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and, in your heart, you believe that God raised him from the dead. ¹⁰By believing from the heart, you obtain true righteousness; by confessing the faith with your lips, you are saved. ¹¹For Scripture says: *No one who believes in him will be ashamed.* ¹²Here, there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; all have the same Lord, who is very generous with whoever calls on him. ¹³Truly, *all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*

¹⁴But how can they call upon the name of the Lord without having believed in him? And how can they believe in him, without having first heard about him? And how will they hear about him, if no one preaches about him? ¹⁵And how will they preach about him, if no one sends them? As Scripture says: *How beautiful are the feet of the messenger of good news.* ¹⁶Although, not everyone obeyed the good news, as Isaiah said: *Lord, who has believed in our preaching?* ¹⁷So, faith comes from preaching, and preaching is rooted in the word of Christ.

¹⁸I ask: Have the Jews not heard? But, of course, they have. Because the voice of those preaching *resounded all over the earth, and their voice was heard, to the ends of the world.* ¹⁹Then, I must ask: *Did Israel not understand? Moses was the first to say: I will make you jealous of a nation that is not a nation, I will excite your anger against a senseless nation.* ²⁰Isaiah dares to add more: *I was found by those not looking for me; I have shown myself to those not asking for me.* ²¹While referring to Israel, the same Isaiah says: *I hold out my hands the whole day long to a disobedient and rebellious people.*

great number of Old Testament texts only speak of fidelity in keeping the commandments but other texts make more of the gratuity of God's gift. This once more makes clear that there is not "one" religion of the Scriptures: it is not enough to read any text and take it literally (which is called "fundamentalism"). Scripture gives us a series of testimonies where we recognize a path and a pedagogy from God. Throughout the centuries and in different cultures, Jewish and then Greek, he leads his people to the fullness of truth.

We have, perhaps, become used to a "progressive" view of history, rather as if all had to develop or "radiate" from what exists. Yet Jesus has shown that times succeed one another but are not alike. If there is progress, and in a sense that is evident, it happens through upheavals and changes of perspectives.

Even in the Church there have been turning points in the course of last century. We must surely abandon the idea of a Church that, starting from western Christianity would by means of missions gradually extend to the rest of the world. Paul points out a different perspective: the current of grace could desert zones it had previously enriched to make other lands fruitful. He affirms that it is not caprice on God's part; for him it is a matter of bringing the whole of humanity to maturity and he alone knows the way. We note at the same time how he defends the privileged role of the Jewish people. The same could be said of our ancient Christian bastions: their role, much less prominent, surely remains decisive, in as much as a remnant still remains faithful.

A remnant of Israel has been saved2Cor
11:21;
Phil 3:5

11 • ¹And so I ask: Has God rejected his people? Of course not! I, myself, am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ²No, God has not rejected the people he knew beforehand. Don't you know what the Scripture says of Elijah, when he was accusing Israel before God? ³He said: "*Lord, they have killed your prophets, destroyed your altars, and I alone remain; and now they want to kill me.*" ⁴What was God's answer? "*I kept for myself seven thousand who did not worship Baal.*" ⁵In the same way, now, there is a remnant in Israel, those who were chosen, by grace. ⁶It is said: by grace, not because of what they did. Otherwise, grace would not be grace.

1S12:22;
Ps94:14;
Jer31:371K
19:101K
19:18

9:6-13

⁷What then? What Israel was looking for, it did not find, but those whom God elected found it. The others hardened their hearts, ⁸as Scripture says: *God made them dull of heart and mind; to this day, their eyes cannot see nor their ears hear.* ⁹David says: *May they be caught and trapped at their banquets; may they fall, may they be punished.* ¹⁰*May their eyes be closed so that they cannot see and their backs be bent forever.*

Dt 29:3;
Is 29:10Ps 69:
23-24**Do not despise those who stumbled**

¹¹Again, I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall? Of course not. Their stumbling allowed salvation to come to the

pagan nations, and, this, in turn, will stir up the jealousy of Israel. ¹²If Israel's shortcoming made the world rich, if the pagan nations grew rich with what they lost, what will happen when Israel is restored?

Mt 8:11;
21:43

¹³Listen to me, you who are not Jews: I am spending myself, as an apostle to the pagan nations, ¹⁴but I hope my ministry will be successful enough to awaken the jealousy of those of my race, and, finally, to save some of them. ¹⁵If the world made peace with God, when they remained apart, what will it be, when they are welcomed? Nothing less than, a passing from death to life.

1Cor
9:222Cor
5:17

¹⁶When the first fruits are consecrated to God, the whole is consecrated. If the roots are holy, so will be the branches. ¹⁷Some branches have been cut from the olive tree, while you, as a wild olive tree, have been grafted in their stead, and you are benefiting from their roots and sap. ¹⁸Now, therefore, do not be proud, and despise the branches, because you do not support the roots, the roots support you. ¹⁹You may say, "They cut off the branches to graft me." ²⁰Well and good! But they were cut off because they did not believe, while you stand, by faith. Then, do not pride yourself on this too much, rather, beware: ²¹if God did not spare the natural branches, even less will he spare you.

Eph
2:15

Is 7:9

THE DESTINY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

• **11.1** The two paragraphs 11-24 and 25-32 speak of the destiny of the Jewish people. As Jesus had announced, the Jews were dispersed throughout the world, becoming a nation without territory, united only through its law, its traditions and the certitude of it being God's chosen people.

In times that still ignored the respect of those of other religions, a great number of Jews formed minority groups in Christian countries. It is a fact that people convinced of being the

faithful of the one and only God quite naturally become insupportable to others (Es 9). The Jews then have suffered from Christian fanaticism equal to their own. Christians did not see that their faith condemned religious fanaticism. They thought Israel was being punished for the crime of its ancestors in condemning Jesus: they saw in the tragedy of Israel, as in the survival, a sign from God.

In the course of last century Christians have become conscious of the non-violent character of the Gospel and that their vocation is to be a

²² Admire, at the same time, both the goodness and severity of God: he was severe with the fallen, and he is generous with you, as long as you remain faithful. Otherwise, you will be cut off. ²³ If they do not keep on rejecting the faith they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them back again. ²⁴ If you were taken from the wild olive tree, to which you belonged, and, in spite of being a different species, you were grafted into the good olive tree, it will be much easier, and natural, for them to be grafted into their own tree.

Israel will be saved

• ²⁵ I want you to understand the mysterious decree of God, lest you be too confident: a part of Israel will remain hardened, until the majority of pagans have entered. ²⁶ Then, the whole of Israel will be saved, as Scripture says: *From Zion will come the Liberator, who will purify the descendants of Jacob from all sin.* ²⁷ And this is the Covenant I will make with

them: I will take away from them their sins.

²⁸ Regarding the gospel, the Jews are opponents, but it is for your benefit. Regarding election, they are beloved, because of their ancestors; ²⁹ because the call of God, and his gifts, cannot be nullified.

³⁰ Through the disobedience of the Jews, the mercy of God came to you who did not obey God. ³¹ They, in turn, will receive mercy, in due time, after this disobedience, that brought God's mercy to you. ³² So, God has submitted all to disobedience, in order to show his mercy to all.

³³ How deep are the riches, the wisdom and knowledge of God! His decisions cannot be explained, nor his ways understood! ³⁴ *Who has ever known God's thoughts? Who has ever been his adviser?* ³⁵ *Who has given him something first, so that God had to repay him?* ³⁶ For everything comes from him, has been made by him and has to return to him. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

Dr 4:37;
Num
23:19

Gal 3:22

1Cor
2:11;
Jer
23:18

Is 40:13

Job 41:3

1Cor
8:6;
Heb
2:10

Is 59:
20-21;
Jer
31:33

minority in the world: this has been a big step forward. It is time then to re-evaluate the role of the Jewish people, another minority given a place in history by God. They have not ceased being active in the world, often in saying what we ourselves should have said and did not and do not say. It seems that God willed this emulation between Jews and Christians, as Paul understands it. He clearly affirms that at the end of the world Israel would be reconciled with Christ and that Jews and Christians would recognize that their separate histories are one.

• 25. The destiny of the Jewish people is of great interest to us since we have the same ancestors. The first Christians never thought they were breaking away from the Jewish people (Acts 13:26-32; 26:22). On the contrary, they were the ones who had welcomed the Savior for whom they were all waiting. A new people, not a different one, had started with them (Ps 22:32) since they were *the remnant of Israel*.

Our faith is rooted in historical events, in the Old Testament as well as in the New. This is why the Gospels give a prominent place to the national catastrophe and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70, as Jesus had announced. Accord-

ing to Luke, this tragedy of the rejected Savior will mark the destiny of the Jewish people until the time of the pagans is fulfilled, that is to say, until the end of history (Lk 21:24). The Gospel does not say more.

Here, however, Paul is asking us not to confuse two things. On one hand, God is calling those he wants to know Christ and to believe in him, anywhere in the world; and to them, God entrusts his greatest and most secret works. God may multiply the calls to a given people, as it happened in Christian lands for ten centuries and then God can leave this people outside the great current of faith. In this sense, most Jewish people eschewed that call. However, that cannot cancel God's promises to the Jewish people. God has made them into a special people with a unique mission that they continue to fulfill for the salvation of the world.

This should serve to invite us to rethink our own experience of the Church. Even if there are not many Christians who are conscious of being called by God and of their evangelical vocation, the Church as the Christian people, continues to fulfill its mission: it is necessary for the salvation of the world and the "powers of death will not prevail over it."

Christian life: be concerned for others6:11;
15:16;
1P 2:5

12 • ¹I beg you, dearly beloved, by the mercy of God, to give yourselves, as a living and holy sacrifice, pleasing to God; that is the kind of worship for you, as sensible people. ²Don't let yourselves be shaped by the world where you live, but, rather, be transformed, through the renewal of your mind. You must discern the will of God: what is good, what pleases, what is perfect.

Eph
4:23;
2Cor
3:18;
5:17;
Phil 1:10

³The grace that God has given me, allows me to tell each of you: don't pretend too much, but think with sober judgment, each, according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

2Cor
10:13;
Phil 2:3

• **12.1** Paul here begins the second part of his letter: as in his other letters, he will try to be more practical here than in the first part.

Give yourselves as a living and holy sacrifice pleasing to God. It is not only Sunday that belongs to God—even if the weekly Eucharist is essential to Christian life. It is not only specific duties that we are to accomplish. God wants all that springs from our person.

Don't let yourselves be shaped by the world where you live (v. 2). We are invaded by propaganda, fashion, and songs without considering the weight of our cherished past. All that is *the world*: it encloses us in its logic and its would-be necessities. Yet we should be free for our heart to be only for God! We however become accustomed to what everyone does and still more to the sweet slavery of money. Without being aggressive or pessimistic the Christian will always challenge the world.

Be transformed by the renewal of your mind (v. 2). Before adopting a rule of life, you must first have its spirit. You do not imitate St. Francis by wearing a habit: you must first be shattered by the love of the poor Christ. Christian renewal springs from new criteria, from a new vision of existence, of the modern world and of our liberty. Baptism that makes new Christians of us, initiates a renewal of our spirit enlightened by God. See Ephesians 4:3.

You must discern the will of God. Following the best rules is not enough; we must constantly force ourselves to discover, meditate and understand the will of God in all the events of our life.

See, the body is one (v. 4). See 1 Corinthians 12. We all form one body and we cannot give up our responsibility. Where Christians are very

• ⁴See, the body is one, even if formed by many members, but not all of them with the same function. ⁵The same with us; being many, we are one body in Christ, depending on one another. ⁶Let each one of us, therefore, serve, according to our different gifts. Are you a prophet? Then give the insights of faith. ⁷Let the minister fulfill his office; let the teacher teach, ⁸the one who encourages, convince.

1Cor
12:12;
10:17;
Eph
5:30

You must, likewise, give, with an open hand, preside with dedication, and be cheerful in your works of charity.

• ⁹Let love be sincere. Hate what is evil and hold to whatever is good. ¹⁰Love one another and be considerate. Out

much in a minority, they usually depend a lot on the community that takes much of their time: this is the case Paul has in mind. He stresses that each one has his specific function in the Church: we are far from religious practice where the mass has mostly "listeners" who are silent.

• 4. From the way he speaks about Christian community, Paul lets us know that in his time it was not organized as in our churches today. In the early Church not everything depended upon priests educated apart from the common people and sent to the Christian communities from outside. As we said in Acts 14:23, the community elected a council of elders or presbyters, approved by the apostles. The most respected among them were the "prophets." The body of presbyters, who had authority over the Church, were those who celebrated the Eucharist.

Everybody's gifts were taken into account by the organization, which considered also as gift the ability to serve in the Church. See Ephesians 4:11 and commentaries on 1 Timothy 4:14.

Throughout history the Church has had to change its organization and constantly adjust itself to new social structures and cultural development.

Give with an open hand (v. 8). Paul passes from the good discharge of ministries to the ministry of love for others.

• 9. Verses 9-13 presents a program of Christian life. Rather than the commandments concerning external acts, Paul stresses internal attitudes and dispositions.

Do not return evil for evil (v. 17). A demanding commandment of forgiveness so often formulated by Jesus. It is a false wisdom that would

do one another, in mutual respect.

Col 4:2 ¹¹Be zealous in fulfilling your duties. Be fervent in the spirit, and serve God.

Eph 6:18; 1P 4:9 ¹²Have hope and be cheerful. Be patient in trials and pray constantly.

¹³Share with other Christians in need. With those passing by, be ready to receive them.

Mt 5:38; 1Cor 12:26 ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless, and do not wish evil on anyone.

¹⁵Rejoice with those who are joyful, and weep with those who weep.

Pro 3:7 ¹⁶Live in peace with one another. Do not dream of extraordinary things; be humble and do not hold yourselves as wise.

1Thes 5:15; 1P 3:9 ¹⁷Do not return evil for evil, but let everyone see your good will.

¹⁸Do your best to live in peace with everybody.

Heb 12:14 ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but let God be the one who punishes, as Scripture says: *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.*

Lev 19:18; Dt 32:35; Heb 10:30 ²⁰And it adds: *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him to drink;*

Pro 25: 21-22

by doing this you will heap burning coals upon his head. ²¹Do not let evil defeat you, but conquer evil with goodness.

Submission to authority

13 ¹Let everyone be subject to the authorities. For there is no authority that does not come from God, and the offices have been established by God. ²Whoever, therefore, resists authority, goes against a decree of God, and those who resist deserve to be condemned.

³In fact, who fears authority? Not those who do good, but those who do evil. Do you want to be without fear of a person in authority? Do good and you will receive praise. ⁴They are the stewards of God, for your good. But if you do not behave, fear them, for they do not carry arms in vain; they are at the service of God when they judge and punish wrongdoers.

⁵It is necessary to obey, not through fear, but as a matter of conscience. ⁶In

Jn 19:11;
Mt 22:16;
1Tim 2:1;
1P 2:13;
Tit 3:1;
Pro 8:15

advise us to return evil for evil, mean behavior for mean behavior, a tooth for a tooth... It is also false wisdom (v. 16) to strive to be noticed by adopting customs of a higher social class, or to dream of a life without material problems, or to regard more highly moneyed people, the powerful or good speakers.

• **13.1** In the world where Paul lived, many people sought in religion an evasion from their family tasks and social duties (see 2 Thes 3:6-12). Paul stresses the “mystical” aspect of Christian life, but does not want such an evasion, so opposed to all his biblical formation. He will therefore insist on civil obedience in the context of a society far removed from our democracies of today.

This text of Paul has been distorted in the past by authoritarian governments, who after imposing their law by violence, expected to be obeyed as if they were the legitimate servants of God and the public good. It is still distorted today in many places—supposed colonies of imperialist countries; central power sees to the sending of preachers who will invite Christians to be silent in the face of injustice and economic plunder, using this paragraph to support their message. It is quite true that in a sense public

servants are “God’s agents.” But do we not also find in Scripture that the devil gives power to those that serve him (Lk 4:5-7; Rev 13:1-9; Jn 12:31 and 14:30)?

Paul and his readers lived in a world where hardly anyone doubted the legitimacy of Roman authority. And as neither the common good nor peace can exist without authority and obedience, Paul declares that obedience to established authority comes from God. When he speaks of those who *resist authority* he has in mind those who try to impose their own interests or the interest of the group. What he does not accept is an anti-social attitude, a point that will arise in 1 Peter 2:12 and Titus 3:1 when authority begins to mistrust Christians.

No one may use these words to condemn those who resist for reason of conscience. In any case, it is only to God that a Christian submits his conscience. When the authorities demand something that is against truth and justice, he resists with the means his conscience reveals to him, ready to suffer punishment provided by human laws, and even to give his life. The great majority of the martyrs the Church honors today were condemned in their time as subversive persons and enemies of social order.

They are the stewards of God for your good

the same way, you must pay taxes, and the collectors are God's officials. ⁷Pay to all what is due them; to whomsoever you owe contributions, make a contribution; to whom taxes are due, pay taxes; to whom respect is due, give respect; to whom honor is due, give honor.

Jn 13:34;
Col 3:14

⁸Do not be in debt to anyone. Let this be the only debt of one to another: Love. The one who loves his or her neighbor fulfills the law. ⁹For the commandments: *Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not covet*, and whatever else, are summarized in this one: *You will love your neighbor as yourself.* ¹⁰Love cannot do the neighbor any harm; so love fulfills the whole law.

Lev 19:18;
20:13-17;
Dt 5:17-21

1Cor 13:4;
Mk 19:18

Children of the light

• ¹¹You know what hour it is. This is the time to awake, for our salva-

tion is, now, nearer than when we first believed; ¹²the night is almost over, and day is at hand. Let us discard, therefore, everything that belongs to darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³As we live in the full light of day, let us behave with decency; no banquets with drunkenness, no promiscuity or licentiousness, no fighting or jealousy. ¹⁴Put on, rather, the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not be led by the will of the flesh nor follow its desires.

Eph 5:8;
1Thes 5:4;
1Cor 7:26

The weak and the strong

14 • ¹Welcome those weak in faith and do not criticize their scruples. ²Some think they can eat any food, while others, less liberated, eat only vegetables. ³If you eat, do not despise those who abstain; if you abstain, do not criticize those who eat, for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who

1Cor 10:25

(v. 4). We have to ask, then, if authority promotes goodness. When the laws favor only a minority, or allow corruption, or are oppressive to the poor, they are not at the service of God: let us remember Isaiah 5:8; 10:1-3; Amos 5:7-12.

The believer recognizes but one Lord: he will not accept that certain magnates become real "lords" capable of eliminating those who oppose their absolute power.

Jesus, for his part, refused to take part in politics (Mk 12:13-17), but he did not speak against those who wished to participate. He was free enough to denounce authority and to break the most sacred laws when they became oppressive.

During the past century the Church has reminded us very often that no authority can deprive a human being of his rights, and that everyone should be careful to elect authorities who serve the common good. In these matters, let us hear the doctrine of the Church: *Gaudium et Spes* 73-76.

• 11. *You know what hour it is. This is the time to awake.* Paul was just recalling the duties of a Christian in this world and he already turns to the opposite direction: beware of settling down in this world. The Christian is always awaiting the coming of Christ.

During the first thirty years of the Church, all waited for the imminent return of Jesus. When it became clear to them that history was being extended, they began thinking more of each

one's last end: it was then that they would meet Christ. In the present century we have come to realize that history is going towards an end and that we not only have to be ready for the last hour, but that we must also work for the evangelization of the world. The Gospel is the power that, directly or indirectly, brings all human history to maturity; by living holy and responsible lives we hasten the coming of the kingdom of God (2 P 3:11-12).

• **14.1** Were the people in Paul's audience really different from us? Reminding them of great truths, were they capable of smoothing the blocks that make community life so difficult?

Welcome those weak in faith. The Christians of Rome were mainly recruited among foreigners. Jews or Greeks came from different cultures and religions and had not wholly rejected their ancient customs. If the Jews wanted special meat, the vegetarians for their part would only complicate the problem. If the Jews had their Sabbath, others had their days of "fasting" and days of ill omen. In the beginning people were courteous towards one another; but then with time and pride, they did not fail to provoke a neighbor "in a spirit of faith."

Paul reminds us of what Jesus had taught (Mk 7:19): there is no food or drink that is forbidden. Paul rejects, however, the disputes about all these things. *Do not criticize their scruples.* Whoever has overcome common prejudices must respect the conscience of others. Each must sacrifice his own comfort for the well-

Jas 4:11; Mt 7:1 are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? Whether he stands or falls, the one concerned is his master. But he will not fall, for his master is able to keep him standing.

Gal 4:10; Col 2:16 ⁵Some judge one day to be better than the other; let us act according to our own opinion. ⁶The one who distinguishes among days, does that for the Lord; and the one who eats, eats for the Lord and in eating, gives thanks to the Lord. And the one who does not eat, does it for the Lord, and gives him thanks as well.

1Cor 3:23; 2Cor 5:15 ⁷In fact, none of us lives for himself, nor dies for himself. ⁸If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. Either in life or in death, we belong to the Lord; ⁹It was for this purpose that Christ both died and came to life again, to be Lord, both of the living and of the dead.

Acts 10:42 ¹⁰Then you, why do you criticize your brother or sister? And you, why do you despise them? For we will all appear at the tribunal of God. ¹¹It is written: *I swear by myself—word of the Lord—every knee will bend before me, and every tongue shall give glory to God.* ¹²So each of us will account for himself before God.

Gal 6:5 ¹³Therefore, let us not continue criticizing one another; let us try, rather, never to put in the way of our brother anything that would make him stumble or fall. ¹⁴I know, I am sure of this in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself, it is only unclean for those who consider it unclean. ¹⁵But if you hurt your brother or sister because of a certain food, you are no

longer walking according to love. Let not your eating cause the loss of one for whom Christ died.

¹⁶Don't put yourself in the wrong with something good. ¹⁷The kingdom of God is not a matter of food or drink; it is justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸and if you serve Christ in this way, you will please God and be praised by people. ¹⁹Let us look, then, for what strengthens peace and makes us better.

²⁰Do not destroy the work of God because of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat. ²¹And it may be better not to eat meat, or drink wine, or anything else that causes your brother or sister to stumble.

²²Keep your own belief before God, and happy are you, if you never act against your own belief. ²³Instead, whoever eats something, in spite of his doubt, is condemned by his conscience, because whatever we do against our conscience is sinful.

15 ¹We, the strong and liberated, should bear the weakness of those who are not strong, instead of pleasing ourselves. ²Let each of us bring joy to our neighbors, helping them for the good purpose, for building up. ³Christ, himself, did not look for his own contentment, as Scripture says: *The insults of those insulting you fell upon me.* ⁴And we know, that whatever was written in the past, was written for our instruction, for both perseverance and comfort, given us by the Scripture, sustain our hope.

being of others when this is required. We find similar difficulties when Christians of different backgrounds, races or political groups have to live together. It is an opportunity for them to show respect for one another.

Whatever we do against our conscience is sinful (v. 23): an important affirmation of the liberty of conscience. Perhaps it is often forgot-

ten; but St. Thomas Aquinas himself reminds us that no law or religious authority should be followed against our conscience. It is, therefore, a grave responsibility to acquire good criteria through readings, conversations, reading the Scriptures, knowing that the Spirit is at work in all the life of the Church.

Gal 5:22; 1Thes 1:6

1Cor 7:15; 14:26

1Cor 8:13

Jas 4:17

Ps 69:10

1Cor 10:11; 2Tim 3:16; 1Mac 12:9

Phil 2:2 ⁵May God, the source of all perseverance and comfort, give to all of you, to live in peace in Christ Jesus, ⁶that you may be able to praise, in one voice God, Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord.

• ⁷Welcome, then, one another, as Christ welcomed you for the glory of God. ⁸Look: Christ put himself at the service of the Jewish world, to fulfill the promises made by God to their ancestors; here, you see God's faithfulness. ⁹The pagans, instead, give thanks to God for his mercy, as Scripture says: *Because of that, I will sing and praise your name among the pagans.* ¹⁰And, in another place: *Rejoice, pagan nations, with God's people.* ¹¹And, again: *Praise the Lord, all people, and let all nations speak of his magnificence.* ¹²Isaiah says: *A descendant of Jesse will come who will rule the pagan nations and they will hula in him.*

¹³May God, the source of hope, fill you with joy and peace, in the faith, so, that, your hope may increase, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul feels responsible for the Christians of Rome

• ¹⁴As for me, brothers and sisters, I am convinced, that you have goodwill, knowledge, and the capacity to advise each other; ¹⁵nevertheless, I have written boldly in some parts of this letter, to remind you of what you already know. I do this, according to the grace God has given to me, ¹⁶when I was sent to the pagan nations. I dedicated myself to the service of the Good News of God, as a minister of Christ Jesus, in order to present the non-Jews to God, as an agreeable offering, consecrated by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷This service of God is, for me, a cause of pride, in Christ Jesus.

¹⁸Of course, I would not dare to speak of other things, but what Christ, himself, has done, through me, my words and my works, ¹⁹with miracles and signs, by the power of the Holy Spirit—so, that, non-Jews may obey the faith. In this way, I have extended the Good News to all parts, from Jerusalem to Illyricum.

²⁰I have been very careful, however, and I am proud of this, not to preach

1:9;
12:1;
Phil 2:17

2Cor
10:15

• **15.7** In this twofold attitude of God toward the Jews and the "nations," that is to say non-Jews, Paul sees a manifestation of the two great qualities that prophetic tradition attributes to God: *grace* and *fidelity*. What Paul is saying here certainly goes beyond the case of Jews and non-Jews. Two applications of this can be given.

First, for the Christian community. As Jesus stated to the Pharisees, we know that no elitist group by itself constitutes Jesus' Church. It can only be in the truth if it constantly has two groups, on one hand, those who have matured in fidelity, inheriting the faith and sacrifices of their parents and persevering in the community and on the other hand, those who come from the outside and who have undergone a strong personal conversion. Naturally, this creates conflicts and it requires sacrifices from everyone but this is where God likes to work.

In addition, this text helps us to understand that God only reveals himself to a minority while at the same time, God was saving all human beings.

• **14.** Here we see how gentle Paul was. He has the authority of an apostle of Christ and is able to solve the problems of the Church of Rome. Yet, he takes great care not to create divisions or rivalries, and he shows respect for the founders and leaders of the Roman community.

As a minister of Christ Jesus (v. 16). This term must not be interpreted as meaning what we understand by the Church's priests. The first Christians did not use the word *priest* to designate their ministers, in order not to confuse them with the Jewish or pagan ministers who offered victims to God. Here, however, Paul compares himself to them. He does not present burnt offerings to God, but instead, *he presents the pagans* and reconciles them to God. This is the new and spiritual worship (12:1) that the apostles offer to God.

Still today there is danger of forgetting the difficult and often misinterpreted work of reconciling persons who have become both liberated and aware of their human worth. Only those who dedicate themselves to this evangelization can rightly celebrate the Eucharist.

in places where Christ is already known, and not to build upon foundations laid by others. ²¹Let it be as Scripture says: *Those not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.*

Help for the Christians in Jerusalem

• ²²This work has prevented me from going to you. ²³But, now, there is no more place for me in these regions, and, as I have wanted for so long, to go and see you, ²⁴I hope to visit you, when I go to Spain. Then, you could help me go to that nation, once I have fully enjoyed your company.

²⁵Right now, I am going to Jerusalem, to help that community. ²⁶Know, that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia have decided to make a contribution, for the poor among the believers of Jerusalem. ²⁷They have decided to do that, and, in fact, they were indebted to them. For the non-Jews have shared the spiritual goods of the Jews, and, now, they must help them materially. ²⁸So, I am to complete this task, and give over the amount that has been collected. Then, I will go to you, and from there, to Spain. ²⁹And I am sure, that when I go to you, I will go with all the blessings of God.

Acts
19:21;
2Cor
8-9;
Gal 2:10

1Cor
9:11;
Gal 6:6

³⁰I beg of you, brothers and sisters, by Christ Jesus our Lord, and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in the fight, praying to God, for me; ³¹pray, that I may avoid the snares of the enemies of faith in Judea, and, that, the community of Jerusalem may welcome the help I bring. ³²And so, I will go to you with joy, and, God willing, be refreshed in your company. ³³The God of peace be with you. Amen.

2Cor
13:11;
Phil 4:9

Greetings

16 • ¹I recommend to you, our sister, Phoebe, deaconess of the church of Cenchreae. ²Please receive her, in the name of the Lord, as it should be among brothers and sisters in the faith, and help her in whatever is necessary, because she helped many; among them, myself.

Acts
18:18

³Greetings to Prisca and Aquilas, my helpers in Christ Jesus. ⁴To save my life, they risked theirs; I am very grateful to them, as are all the churches of the pagan nations. ⁵Greetings also to the church that meets in their house. Greetings to my dear Epaphroditus, the first in the province of Asia to believe in Christ. ⁶Greet Mary, who worked so much for you.

Acts
18:2;
18:26

⁷Greetings to Andronicus and Junias,

• 22. The trip to Spain would mean going farther than Rome, center of the known world. This gives us an idea of how zealous Paul was in creating new communities in all parts of the world, without waiting for the newly founded ones to attain perfection. Today the mission is not beyond Rome or overseas: every Christian community should investigate beyond the frontiers of a "nice" area where a person feels at home. Then, perhaps, millions of others would be discovered who live at close range but nevertheless are "far away."

I am going to Jerusalem to help that community (v. 25). The attempt of the Jerusalem community to have common ownership of all their possessions had failed (Acts 2:44). So Paul organizes a collection for them in all the Greek communities, hoping this caring assistance would strengthen the links between Christians of Greek origin and Jewish Christians. It

is often difficult to avoid tensions in the Church between groups of different cultures or classes. Quite often, it is even difficult to dialogue. Then the service of love will make hearts agree where minds cannot come to an understanding.

• **16.1** This last chapter of the letter to the Romans is not found in the oldest existing papyrus of Paul's letters. It only has the final hymn 16:25-27. On the other hand, it seems that this chapter was added after the blessing of 15:33. Throughout this letter, Paul was very calmly and prudently addressing a church he did not know and had not founded and suddenly, he is sending greetings to countless persons close to him. A little later, Paul issued a strong warning (vv. 17-19).

The most convincing explanation is that Paul wrote this letter to the Romans from Corinth. He must have sent a copy to Ephesus that he

my relatives and companions in prison; they are well known apostles and served Christ before I did.

⁸Give greetings to Ampliatus, whom I love so much in the Lord. ⁹Greetings to Urbanus, our fellow worker, and to my dear Stachys. ¹⁰Greetings to Apelles, who suffered for Christ, and the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greetings to my relative Herodion and those in the household of Narcissus, who work in the Lord's service. ¹²Greetings to Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who toil for the Lord's sake. ¹³Greetings to Rufus, elected of the Lord, and his mother who was a second mother to me. ¹⁴Greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers and sisters staying with them. ¹⁵Greetings to Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas and all the holy ones in Christ Jesus with them. ¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send their greetings.

A warning

• ¹⁷Brothers and sisters, I beg of you, to be careful of those who are causing divisions and troubles, in teaching you a different teaching, from the one you were taught. Keep away from them, ¹⁸because those persons do not serve Christ our Lord, but their

own interests, deceiving, with their soft and entertaining language, those who are simple of heart. ¹⁹Everybody knows, that you are very obedient, and because of that, I am happy, but I want you to be sensible in doing good, and firm against evil. ²⁰The God of peace will soon crush Satan, and place him under your feet.

May Christ Jesus, our Lord, bless you. ²¹Timothy, who is with me, sends you greetings, and so do Lucius, Jason and Sosipatros, my relatives.

²²I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, send you greetings in the Lord.

²³Greetings from Gaius, who has given me lodging and in whose house the church meets. Greetings from Erastus, treasurer of the city, and from our brother Quartus. (²⁴)

²⁵Glory be to God!

He is able to give you strength, according to the Good News I proclaim, announcing Christ Jesus.

Now is revealed the mysterious plan, kept hidden for long ages in the past.

²⁶By the will of the eternal God it is brought to light, through the prophetic books, and all nations shall believe the faith proclaimed to them.

²⁷Glory to God, who alone is wise, through Christ Jesus, for ever! Amen.

had left the previous year. The version intended for the Romans was that of the old papyrus, while the longer traditional text was the copy sent to Ephesus. Paul must have added this personal page.

• 17. *Brothers and sisters, I beg of you to be careful.* There is no letter of Paul without this warning against divisions and against those

who preach a "different Gospel." The doctrine of the Church is the doctrine of the apostles, the witnesses of Jesus. There is a hierarchy, that is, a legally constituted authority, and Paul demands obedience in matters of faith.

The last sentence is a prayer of thanksgiving to God. It is similar to another prayer, more developed, with which he begins the letter to the Ephesians.

Mk
15:21

1Cor
16:20;
2Cor
13:12;
1Thes
5:26

Tit 1:10;
3:10

Phil 3:19

1:8;
1Cor
14:21

Phil 4:9;
Gen 3:15

Eph
3:20;
Col 1:26

Rev 10:7;
Rom 1:5;
2Cor
10:5;
Rev 7:12;
Eph 3:21