

# 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 towards 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 the Bible, 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 in 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 whole bible.

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 catalogues 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.

**1** • <sup>1</sup>From Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, an apostle called and set apart for God's Good News, <sup>2</sup>the very promises he foretold through his prophets in the sacred Scriptures, <sup>3</sup>regarding his Son, who was born in the flesh a descendant of David, <sup>4</sup>and 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, <sup>5</sup>and for the sake of his Name, we received grace and mission in all the nations, for them to accept the faith. <sup>6</sup>All of you, the elected of Christ, are part of them, you, the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy: <sup>7</sup>May God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, give you grace and peace.

1Cor 1:1;  
Gal 1:1Is 52:7;  
61:1;  
Mk 1:1;  
1:14Phi 2:9;  
1P 1:21;  
1Cor 3:10;  
Gal 2:8Eph 1:14;  
6:1719:5;  
1Cor 1:2;  
1P 2:9

### Paul longs to visit them

<sup>8</sup>First 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. <sup>9</sup>And 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. <sup>10</sup>I pray constantly that, if it is his will, he make it possible for me to visit you. <sup>11</sup>I long to see you and share some spiritual blessings with you to strengthen you. <sup>12</sup>In that

way, we will encourage each other by sharing our common faith.

<sup>13</sup>You must know, brothers and sisters, that many times I have made plans to go to you, but till now I have been prevented. <sup>14</sup>I 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. <sup>15</sup>Hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

12:1;  
15:16

1Cor 9:19

1Thee  
3:2

• **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.

1:1 • <sup>16</sup>For 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. <sup>17</sup>This 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 under God's "wrath"

• <sup>18</sup>For 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. <sup>19</sup>For everything that could have been known about God was clear to them: God himself made it plain. <sup>20</sup>Because 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, <sup>21</sup>for they knew God and did not glorify him as was fitting, nor did they give thanks to him. On the contrary, they lost themselves in their reasoning and darkness filled their minds.

<sup>22</sup>Believing themselves wise, they

Ps 8:3;  
19:2

Wis 13:4;  
1Cor  
1:21

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

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

became foolish: <sup>23</sup>they exchanged the Glory of the immortal God for the likes of mortal human beings, birds, animals and reptiles. <sup>24</sup>Because of this God gave them up to their inner cravings; they did shameful things and dishonored their bodies.

<sup>25</sup>They exchanged God's truth for a lie; they honored and worshiped created things instead of the Creator, to whom be praise for ever, Amen!

<sup>26</sup>Because of that, God gave them up to shameful passions: their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. <sup>27</sup>Similarly, the men, giving up natural sexual relations with women, were lustful of each other, they did, men with men, shameful things, bringing upon themselves the punishment they deserve for their wickedness. <sup>28</sup>And 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.

<sup>29</sup>And so they are full of injustice, perversity, greed, evil; they are full of jealousy, murder, strife, deceit, bad

will and gossip. <sup>30</sup>They commit calumny, offend God, are haughty; they are proud, liars, clever in doing evil. They are rebellious towards their parents, <sup>31</sup>senseless, disloyal, cold-hearted and merciless. <sup>32</sup>They 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** • <sup>1</sup>Therefore, you have no excuse, 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. <sup>2</sup>We know that the condemnation of God will justly reach those who commit these things, <sup>3</sup>and do you think that by condemning others you will escape from the judgment of God, you who are doing the same?

<sup>4</sup>This would be taking advantage of God and his infinite goodness, patience and understanding, and not to

Mt 7:2

Wis  
11:23;  
2P 3:9;  
Lk 13:7Mk 7:21;  
1Cor 6:9;  
Gal 5:19;  
1Tim 1:9;  
Rev 21:8

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.* 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

realize that his goodness is in order to lead you to conversion. <sup>5</sup>If your heart becomes hard and you refuse to change, then you are storing for yourself a great punishment on the day of judgment, when God will appear as just judge.

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

### Everyone is judged by his conscience

<sup>12</sup>Those 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. <sup>13</sup>What makes us righteous before God is not hearing the Law, but obeying it. <sup>14</sup>When the non-Jews, who do not have law, practice naturally what the Law commands, they are giving themselves a law, <sup>15</sup>showing 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. <sup>16</sup>The 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.

<sup>17</sup>But suppose you call yourself a Jew: you have the Law as foundation and feel proud of your God. <sup>18</sup>You know the will of God and the Law teaches you to distinguish what is better, <sup>19</sup>and so you believe you are the guide for the blind, light in darkness, <sup>20</sup>a corrector of the foolish and instructor of the ignorant, because you possess in the Law the formulation of true knowledge. <sup>21</sup>Well, then, you who teach others, why don't you teach yourself? If you say that one must not steal, why do you steal? <sup>22</sup>You say one must not commit adultery, yet you commit it! You say you hate idols, but you steal in their temples! <sup>23</sup>You feel proud of the Law, yet you do not obey it, and you dishonor your God. <sup>24</sup>In fact, as the Scripture says, *the other nations despise the name of God because of you.*

<sup>25</sup>Circumcision is of value to you if you obey the Law; but if you do not obey, it is as if you were not circumcised. <sup>26</sup>On the contrary, if those who are uncircumcised obey the commandments of the Law, do you not think that, in spite of being pagans, they make themselves like the cir-

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, new covenant, promise...

Ezk 7:19;  
Rev 6:17

Rev  
11:18

Ps  
62:13;  
Mt 16:27

Dt 10:17;  
Acts  
10:34;  
Eph 6:9;  
Jas 2:1;  
Lk 12:48;  
Acts  
10:35

Lk 8:21;  
Jas 1:22

1Cor 4:5

Is 48:1;  
Mt 3:8

Mt 15:14;  
Jn 9:40

Lk 18:9

Ps 50:16

Is 52:5;  
Jas 2:7

Jer 9:24;  
1Cor 7:19



cumcised? <sup>27</sup>The 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. <sup>28</sup>For external things do not make a true Jew nor is real circumcision that which is marked on the body. <sup>29</sup>A 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.

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

### What advantage is it to be a Jew?

**3** <sup>1</sup>Then, what is the advantage of being a Jew? And what is the use of circumcision? <sup>2</sup>It is important from any point of view. In the first place, it was to the Jews that God entrusted his word.

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

<sup>3</sup>Well now, if some of them were not faithful, will their unfaithfulness do away with the faithfulness of God? Of course not. <sup>4</sup>Rather, it will be proved that God is truthful, *every human a liar*, as the Scripture says: *it will be proved that your words are*

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

*true and you will be winner if they want to judge you.*

<sup>5</sup>If 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.)

<sup>6</sup>– Not at all because, otherwise, how could God judge the world?

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

<sup>8</sup>– 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.

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

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

*Nobody is good, not even one,*

Ps 14:  
1-3

*<sup>11</sup>no one understands, no one looks for God.*

Ps 53:2

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

• **3.1** *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.*

*What is the advantage of being a Jew? (v. 1). 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 Christians 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 burdensome Christian mo-*

*ality!" 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.*

*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 Bible 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.*

Ps 5:10

<sup>13</sup> *Their throats are open tombs, their words deceit.*

<sup>14</sup> *Their lips hide poison of vipers, from their mouth come bitter curses.*

Ps 5:10;

Is 59:7;

Ps 10:

7-8;

Gal 3:26

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

<sup>18</sup> *There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

<sup>19</sup> Now 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. <sup>20</sup> Still 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.

4:15;

Ps 143:2;

Gal 2:16

### Faith, the way to salvation

• <sup>21</sup> But, now it has been revealed altogether apart from the Law, as it

was already foretold in the Law and the Prophets: <sup>22</sup> God makes us righteous by means of faith in Jesus Christ, and this is applied to all who believe, without distinction of persons. <sup>23</sup> Because all have sinned and all fall short of the Glory of God; <sup>24</sup> and all are graciously forgiven and made righteous through the redemption effected in Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> For 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. <sup>26</sup> For now he wants to reveal his way of righteousness: how he is just and how he makes us righteous through faith in Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> Then what becomes of our pride? It is excluded. How? Not through the Law and its observances, but through another law

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

• 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 lack the glory of God.* 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 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 at 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 the Bible, 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

which is faith. <sup>28</sup>For we hold that people are in God's grace by faith and not because of all the things ordered by the Law. <sup>29</sup>Otherwise, God would be the God of the Jews; but is he not God of pagan nations as well? <sup>30</sup>Of course he is, for there is only one God and he will save by faith the circumcised Jews as well as the uncircumcised nations. <sup>31</sup>Do 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.

10:12;  
Acts  
15:11

Mt 5:17

### Abraham, father of the just

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

Is 51:1;  
Mt 3:7Gen  
15:6;  
12:1;  
Gal 3:6;  
Jas 2:2011:6;  
Mt 20:1;  
Lk 17:7;

<sup>4</sup>Now, when someone does a work, salary is not given as a favor,

but as a debt that is paid. <sup>5</sup>Here, on the contrary, someone who has no deeds to show but believes in Him who makes sinners righteous before him: such faith is *taken into account* and that person is held as righteous. <sup>6</sup>David congratulates in this way those who become righteous by the favor of God, and not by their actions: <sup>7</sup>*Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven and whose offenses are forgotten;* <sup>8</sup>*blessed the one whose sin God does not take into account!*

Ps 32:  
1-2

<sup>9</sup>Is 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, <sup>10</sup>but when did this happen? After Abraham was circumcised, or before? Not after, but before. <sup>11</sup>He 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. <sup>12</sup>And he was to be the father of the

Gen 17:9

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 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.

*He did not doubt although his body could no longer give life.* 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.

*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.

Jews, provided that besides being circumcised, they also imitate the faith Abraham showed before being circumcised.

Gen 12:2; 22:15; Heb 11:8; Gal 3:15  
 13 If 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. 14 If now the promise is kept for those who rely on the Law, then faith has no power and nothing is left of the promise. 15 For 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.

16 For 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.

Gen 17:5; Ezk 37:1; Heb 11:19  
 Abraham is the father of all of us, 17 as it is written: *I will make you 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.

Gen 15:5  
 Heb 11:11; Mk 9:23  
 18 Abraham believed and hoped against all expectation, thus becoming father of many nations, as he had been told: *See how many will be your descendants.* 19 He did not doubt although his body could no longer give life—he was about a hun-

dred years old—and in spite of his wife Sarah being unable to have children. 20 He did not doubt nor did he distrust the promise of God, and by being strong 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 any-

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

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

• 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

thing. <sup>7</sup>Few would accept to die for an upright person; although, for a very good person, perhaps someone would dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But see how God manifested his love for us: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us <sup>9</sup>and we have become just through his blood. With much more reason now he will save us from any condemnation. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Not only that; we even boast in God because of Christ Jesus, our Lord, through whom we have been reconciled.

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

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

### Adam and Jesus Christ

• <sup>12</sup>Therefore, sin entered the world through one man and through

sin, death, and later on death spread to all humankind, because all sinned. <sup>13</sup>As long as there was no law, they could not speak of disobedience, but sin was already in the world. <sup>14</sup>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.

<sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>Again, there is no comparison between the gift and the offense of one man. The disobedience that brought condemnation was

1Cor  
15:45;  
Col 1:15

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

*Hope does not disappoint us.* 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 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 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

of one sinner, whereas the grace of God brings forgiveness to a world of sinners. <sup>17</sup>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.

<sup>18</sup>Just as one transgression brought sentence of death to all, so, too, one man's good act has brought justification and light to all; <sup>19</sup>and as

the disobedience of only one made all sinners, so the obedience of one person allowed all to be made just and holy.

<sup>20</sup>The Law itself, introduced later on, caused sin to increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup>and 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.

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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.* 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.

*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 re-

### Through baptism we died with Christ

**6** • <sup>1</sup>Then, what shall we say? Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may come more abundantly? <sup>2</sup>Can we live again in sin? Of course not: we are now dead regarding sin.

<sup>3</sup>Don't you know that in baptism which unites us to Christ we are all baptized and plunged into his death? <sup>4</sup>By 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, so we begin walking in a new life. <sup>5</sup>If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his so we shall be by a resurrection like his.

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

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

<sup>11</sup>So you, too, must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup>Do not allow sin any control over your mortal bodies; do not submit yourselves to its evil inclinations, <sup>13</sup>and 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 instru-

1P 3:18;  
Heb 9:26

8:3;  
2Cor 5:2

1P 2:24

Col 3:  
9-10

demption 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 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...* It is evident that baptism, even when received with faith, does not make us perfect immediately. Is it enough for us to give our whole attention to com-

ments at the service of God. <sup>14</sup>Sin will not lord it over you again, for you are not under the law, but under grace.

<sup>15</sup>I ask again: are we to sin because we are not under the Law, but under grace? Certainly not. <sup>16</sup>If 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. <sup>17</sup>Let us give thanks to God for, after having sin as your master, you have been given to another, that is, to the doctrine of faith, to which you listen willingly. <sup>18</sup>And being free from sin, you began to serve true righteousness—<sup>19</sup>you see that I speak in a very human way, taking into account that you are not fully mature.

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.

<sup>20</sup>When you were slaves of sin, you did not feel under obligation to righteousness, <sup>21</sup>but what were the fruits of those actions of which you are now ashamed? Such things bring death. <sup>22</sup>Now, 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. <sup>23</sup>So 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.

### The Christian is not bound by the Jewish religion

**7** • <sup>1</sup>You, my friends, understand law. The law has power only while a person is alive. <sup>2</sup>The married 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. <sup>3</sup>If she gives her-

mandments? 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 Thérèse of Lisieux suggested for those who feel incapable of great things.

*Do not allow sin any control over your mortal being.* 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 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

Jn 8:34

Gal 5:13;  
Jn 8:36

12:1

Jn 15:8

Gal 5:8;  
Jas 1:151Cor  
7:39



self 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.

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

Eph 2:3; 4:22  
2Cor 3:6  
20:17  
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 through the Law. I would not be aware of greed if the Law did not tell me: *Do not covet.*

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

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

Gen 3:13; 2Cor 11:3

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.

Dt 4:8

**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 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,

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

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

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

living in me. <sup>18</sup>I 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. <sup>19</sup>In fact I do not do the good I want, but the evil I hate. <sup>20</sup>Therefore, if I do what I do not want to do, I am not the one striving towards evil, but Sin which is in me.

<sup>21</sup>I discover, then, this reality: though I wish to do what is right, the evil within me asserts itself first. <sup>22</sup>My inmost self agrees and rejoices with the law of God, <sup>23</sup>but 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. <sup>24</sup>Alas, for me! Who will free me from this being which is only

death? <sup>25</sup>Let 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** • <sup>1</sup>This contradiction no longer exists for those who are in Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>For, in Jesus Christ, the law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>The 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

1Cor  
15:57

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

2Cor 5:21;  
Heb 2:14

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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.

Mt 5:17 human condition. <sup>4</sup>Since then the perfection 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 • <sup>5</sup>Those walking according to the flesh tend towards what is flesh; those led by the spirit, to what is spirit. <sup>6</sup>Flesh tends towards death, while spirit aims at life and peace. <sup>7</sup>What the flesh seeks is against God: it does not agree, it cannot even submit to the law of God. <sup>8</sup>So, those walking according to the flesh cannot please God.

Jas 4:4;  
1Jn 2:15

<sup>9</sup>Yet 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. <sup>10</sup>But Christ is within you; though the body is branded by death as a consequence of sin, the spirit is life and holiness. <sup>11</sup>And 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.

<sup>12</sup>Then, brothers, let us leave the flesh and no longer live according to

1Cor  
3:16

1Cor  
6:14;  
2Cor  
4:14

So one of the human race must personally defeat Sin (that is, the power of death that keeps humankind paralyzed and divided).

*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 cul-

ture—the present liberal culture with its unbribed 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 Spirit (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 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

it. <sup>13</sup>If not, we will die. Rather, walking in the Spirit, let us put to death the body's deeds so that we may live.

<sup>14</sup>All those who walk in the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God. <sup>15</sup>Then, 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!" <sup>16</sup>the Spirit assures our spirit that we are sons and daughters of God. <sup>17</sup>If we are children, we are heirs, too. Ours will be the inheritance of God and we

Gal 4:6;  
2Tim 1:7

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

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

will share it with Christ; for if we now suffer with him, we will also share Glory with him.

### The universe, too, waits for its redemption

• <sup>18</sup>I consider that the suffering of our present life cannot be compared with the Glory that will be revealed and given to us. <sup>19</sup>All creation is eagerly expecting the birth in glory of the children of God. <sup>20</sup>For if now the created world was unable to attain its purpose, this did not come from itself,

2Cor  
4:17

Ecl 1:2;  
Gen 3:17

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? The Bible does not speak of it: it

but from the one who subjected it. But it is not without hope; <sup>21</sup>for even the created world will be freed from this fate of death and share the freedom and glory of the children of God.

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

<sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pangs of birth.

Is 66:7;  
Jn 16:21

<sup>23</sup>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.

2Cor  
1:22;  
Eph 1:14

<sup>24</sup>In hope we already have salvation. But if we saw what we hoped for, there would no longer be hope:

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

how can you hope for what is already seen? <sup>25</sup>So we hope for what we do not see and we will receive it through patient hope.

• <sup>26</sup>We are weak, but the Spirit comes to help us. How to ask? And what shall we ask for? We do not know, but the spirit intercedes for us without words, as if with groans. <sup>27</sup>And He who sees inner secrets knows the desires of the Spirit, for he asks for the holy ones what is pleasing to God.

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

1Cor  
2:12

### Who shall separate us from the love of God?

• <sup>28</sup>We know that in everything

merely tells us that all creation is guided by the same mystery of death and resurrection which marks 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; Jn 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?

The Bible 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. The Bible 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.

The whole 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 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.

• <sup>26</sup> 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.

• <sup>28</sup> In the last pages Paul has described God's action in us through his Spirit. In fact,

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

1Cor 4:9;  
2Cor  
4:11

Ps 44:23

1Cor  
3:22;  
Col 2:15

God works for the good of those who love him, whom he has called according to his plan. <sup>29</sup>Those whom he knew beforehand, he has also predestined to be like his Son, similar to him, so that he may be the Firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup>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.

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

<sup>31</sup>What shall we say after this? If God is with us, who shall be against us? <sup>32</sup>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?

<sup>37</sup>No, in all of this we are more than conquerors, thanks to him who has loved us. <sup>38</sup>I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor spiritual powers, neither the present nor the future, nor cosmic powers, <sup>39</sup>were 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.

Is 50:8  
Heb 7:21

<sup>33</sup>Who shall accuse those chosen by God: he takes away their guilt. <sup>34</sup>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?

**Why have the Jews not believed?**

**9** • I tell you sincerely in Christ, and my conscience assures me in the Holy Spirit that I am not lying:

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.

to know Christ, which is not the same as salvation.

*Those whom he knew beforehand.* 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!

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.

*He calls them.* Whatever be the way we come to know Christ, it is a personal call of God who gives us the opportunity to believe.

See also commentary on 9:14.

*He made them just and upright.* God put us in order, in an order pleasing to him. 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?* 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.

*Those whom he knew beforehand* (v. 20). On reading this verse some have thought that 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

• **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

32:32 <sup>2</sup>I have great sadness and constant anguish for the Jews. <sup>3</sup>I 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. <sup>4</sup>They are Israelites whom God adopted, and on them rests his Glory. Theirs are the covenants, the Law, the worship and the promises of God. <sup>5</sup>They 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!

4:22; 19:5; Is 40:5; 2S 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

1Cor 10:18;

<sup>6</sup>We cannot say that the promise of God has failed. For not all Israelites belong to Israel. <sup>7</sup>And 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.* <sup>8</sup>This means 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. <sup>9</sup>To such a promise this text refers: *I shall return about this time and Sarah will have a son.* <sup>10</sup>And listen: Rebecca, the wife of our father Isaac, became pregnant, <sup>11</sup>and before the twins were born, or had done anything right or wrong, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, <sup>12</sup>not on the merits but of who is called, she was told: *The elder will serve the younger,* <sup>13</sup>as the Scripture says: *I chose Jacob and rejected Esau.*

Gal 6:16

Gen 18:10

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

Mal 1:2-3

**God is not unjust**

• <sup>14</sup>Shall we say that God is unjust? Of course not. <sup>15</sup>However God said to Moses: *I shall forgive whom I forgive and have pity on whom I*

Dt 32:4

33:19

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 the 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.

• 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, es-

pecially 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

*have pity.* <sup>16</sup>So what is important is not that we worry or hurry, but that God has compassion. <sup>17</sup>And 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.* <sup>18</sup>And so God takes pity on whom he wishes, and hardens the heart of whomsoever he wishes.

<sup>19</sup>Maybe you say: "Why then does God complain, if it is impossible to evade his decision?" <sup>20</sup>But 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? <sup>21</sup>Is it not up to the potter to make from the same clay a vessel for beauty and a vessel for menial use?

<sup>22</sup>Thus God endures very patiently vessels that deserve his wrath, fit to be broken, and through them he wants to show his wrath and the extent of his power. <sup>23</sup>But he also wants to show the riches of his Glory in others, in vessels of mercy prepared for glory. <sup>24</sup>And he called us, not only from among the Jews, but from among the pagans, too, <sup>25</sup>as 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.* <sup>26</sup>And in the same place where they were told: *"You are not my people," they will be called children of the living God.*

<sup>27</sup>With regard to Israel, Isaiah proclaims: *Even if the Israelites are as*

2:4;  
3:26Eph 1:4;  
2:4Hos 1:9;  
2:25

Hos 2:1

Is 6:13;  
10:22;  
Zep 3:12Tit 3:5;  
Phil 3:12;  
9:16

4:21

Is 29:16;  
Wis  
12:12;  
Job 11:7;  
38:2Jer 18:6;  
Is 45:9

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 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 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; James 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.



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

<sup>30</sup> What are we saying, then? That the pagans who were not aiming at true righteousness found it (I speak of righteousness through faith); <sup>31</sup> while Israel, striving to observe a law of righteousness, lost the purpose of the Law. <sup>32</sup> Why? Because they relied on the observance of the Law, not on faith. And they stumbled over the stumbling stone (Christ), <sup>33</sup> as 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.*

### They tried to achieve their own perfection

**10** <sup>1</sup> My brothers and sisters, I wish with all my heart that the Jews be saved and I pray to God for

them. <sup>2</sup> I can testify that they are zealous for God, but this is not the way. <sup>3</sup> They don't know God's way of righteousness and they try to achieve their own righteousness: this is why they did not enter God's way of righteousness. <sup>4</sup> For Christ is the aim of the Law and it is then that the believer reaches this righteousness.

<sup>5</sup> Moses, indeed, speaks of becoming just through the Law; he writes: *The one who obeys the Law will find life through it.* <sup>6</sup> But 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) or who will go down to the world below? (because in fact Christ came up from among the dead).* <sup>8</sup> True 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.

<sup>9</sup> You 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. <sup>10</sup> By be-

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 perfection* (v. 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 like beggars.

• **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 the Bible various lines of thought. Apparently a 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 Bible: it is not enough to read any text and take it literally (which is called "fundamentalism"). The Bible 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

Acts  
22:32Cor  
3:14;  
1Tim  
1:14;  
Phil 3:9Gal 3:24;  
2Cor  
3:16;  
Heb 8:13

Lev 18:5

Dt 9:4;  
30:12

Dt 30:14

Acts  
2:38;  
1Cor  
12:3;  
Phil 2:11

Is 1:9

Lk 18:9

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

lieving from the heart, you obtain true righteousness; by confessing the faith with your lips you are saved.

Is 28:16 <sup>11</sup>For Scripture says: *No one who believes in him will be ashamed.*

Gal 3:28; Acts 10:34 <sup>12</sup>Here there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; all have the same Lord, who is very generous with whoever calls on him. <sup>13</sup>Truly, *all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*

<sup>14</sup>But 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? <sup>15</sup>And 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.* <sup>16</sup>Although not everyone obeyed the good news, as Isaiah said: *Lord, who has believed in our preaching?* <sup>17</sup>So, faith comes from preaching, and preaching is rooted in the word of Christ.

Is 52:7 <sup>18</sup>I ask: Have the Jews not heard?

Is 53:1

Ps 19:5

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.* <sup>19</sup>Then 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 crazy nation.* <sup>20</sup>Isaiah dares to add more: *I was found by those not looking for me, I have shown myself to those not asking for me.* <sup>21</sup>While referring to Israel, the same Isaiah says: *I hold out my hands the whole day long to a disobedient and rebellious people.*

Dt 32:21

Is 65:1

Is 65:2

**A remnant of Israel has been saved**

**11** • <sup>1</sup>And 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. <sup>2</sup>No, 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? <sup>3</sup>He

2Cor 11:21; Phil 3:5

1S 12:22; Ps 94:14; Jer 31:37

1K 19:10

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.

**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 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.

said: *“Lord, they have killed your prophets, destroyed your altars, and I alone remain; and now they want to kill me.”* <sup>4</sup>What was God’s answer? *“I kept for myself seven thousand who did not worship Baal.”* <sup>5</sup>In the same way now there is a remnant in Israel, those who were chosen by grace. <sup>6</sup>It is said: by grace, not because of what they did. Otherwise grace would not be grace.

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

1K 19:18

9:6-13

Dt 29:3;  
Is 29:10Ps 69:  
23-24Mt 8:11;  
21:431Cor  
9:222Cor  
5:17

### Do not despise those who stumbled

<sup>11</sup>Again 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. <sup>12</sup>If Israel’s shortcoming made the world rich, if the pagan nations grew rich with what they lost, what will happen when Israel is restored?

<sup>13</sup>Listen to me, you who are not Jews: I am spending myself as an apostle to the pagan nations, <sup>14</sup>but I hope my ministry will be successful enough to awaken the jealousy of those of my race, and finally to save some of them. <sup>15</sup>If 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.

<sup>16</sup>When the first fruits are consecrated to God, the whole is consecrated. If the roots are holy, so will be the branches. <sup>17</sup>Some 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. <sup>18</sup>Now therefore, do not be proud and despise the branches, because you do not support the roots, the roots support you. <sup>19</sup>You may say, “They cut off the branches to graft me.” <sup>20</sup>Well 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: <sup>21</sup>if God did not spare the natural branches, even less will he spare you.

<sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>If they do not keep on rejecting the faith they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them back again. <sup>24</sup>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

• <sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>Then the

Eph 2:15

Is 7:9

Is 59:  
20-21;  
Jer  
31:33

• 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 peo-

ple (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

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.* <sup>27</sup> *And this is the covenant I will make with them: I will take away from them their sins.*

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

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

<sup>33</sup> How deep are the riches, the wisdom and knowledge of God! His decisions cannot be explained, nor his ways understood! <sup>34</sup> *Who has ever known God's thoughts? Who has*

*ever been his adviser?* <sup>35</sup> *Who has given him something first, so that God had to repay him?* <sup>36</sup> For everything comes from him, has been made by him and has to return to him. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

**Christian life:  
be concerned for others**

**12** • <sup>1</sup> I 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. <sup>2</sup> Don'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.

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

Job 41:3  
1Cor 8:6;  
Heb 2:10

6:11;  
15:16;  
1P 2:5

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

2Cor  
10:13;  
Phil 2:3

Dt 4:37;  
Num  
23:19

Gal 3:22

1Cor  
2:11;  
Jer  
23:18

Is 40:13

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. According 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."

• **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.* 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

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

•<sup>9</sup> Let love be sincere. Hate what is evil and hold to whatever is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another and be considerate. Outdo one another in mutual re-

spect. <sup>11</sup> Be zealous in fulfilling your duties. Be fervent in the Spirit and serve God.

Col 4:2

<sup>12</sup> Have hope and be cheerful. Be patient in trials and pray constantly. <sup>13</sup> Share with other Christians in need. With those passing by, be ready to receive them.

Eph 6:18;  
1P 4:9

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not wish evil on anyone.

Mt 5:38;  
1Cor  
12:26

<sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who are joyful, and weep with those who weep.

<sup>16</sup> Live in peace with one another. Do not dream of extraordinary things; be humble and do not hold yourselves as wise.

Pro 3:7

<sup>17</sup> Do not return evil for evil, but let everyone see your good will. <sup>18</sup> Do your best to live in peace with every-

1Thes  
5:15;  
1P 3:9

Heb  
12:14

still more to the sweet slavery of money. Without being aggressive or pessimistic the Christian will always challenge the world.

*Inner renewal must transform you.* 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 will know what God wants.* 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.

*Take for example our body.* See 1 Corinthians 12. We all form one body and we cannot give up our responsibility. Where Christians are very 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.* Paul passes from the good discharge of ministries to the ministry of love for others.

• 9. Verses 9-13 present 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 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.

body. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but let God be the one who punishes, as Scripture says: *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.* <sup>20</sup>And it adds: *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him to drink; by doing this you will heap burning coals upon his head.* <sup>21</sup>Do not let evil defeat you, but conquer evil with goodness.

### Submission to authority

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

**13** <sup>1</sup>Let 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. <sup>2</sup>Whoever, therefore, resists authority goes against a

decree of God, and those who resist deserve to be condemned.

<sup>3</sup>In 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. <sup>4</sup>They 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.

<sup>5</sup>It is necessary to obey, not through fear but as a matter of conscience. <sup>6</sup>In the same way you must pay taxes, and the collectors are God's officials. <sup>7</sup>Pay to all what is due

• **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 the Bible 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* (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.

them; to whomever 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  
Lev 19:18; 20:13-17; Dt 5:17-21  
1Cor 13:4; Mt 19:18  
 8 Do 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 fulfilled the Law. 9 For 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.* 10 Love cannot do the neighbor any harm; so love fulfills the whole Law.

### Children of the light

Eph 5:8; 1Thes 5:4; 1Cor 7:26  
 11 You know what hour it is. This is the time to awake, for our salvation is now nearer than when we first believed; 12 the 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. 13 As 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. 14 Put on, rather, the Lord Jesus Christ, and

do not be led by the will of the flesh nor follow its desires.

### The weak and the strong

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

5 Some judge one day to be better than the other; let us act according to our own opinion. 6 The 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.

7 In fact, none of us lives for himself, nor dies for himself. 8 If 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; 9 It was

1Cor  
10:25

Jas 4:11;  
Mt 7:1

Gal 4:10;  
Col 2:16

1Cor  
10:30;  
1Tim 4:4

1Cor  
3:23;  
2Cor  
5:15

• 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 for-

Acts 10:42 for this purpose that Christ both died and come to life again to be Lord both of the living and of the dead.

10 Then 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. 11 It is written: *I swear by myself—word of the Lord—every knee will bend before me, and every tongue shall give glory to God.* 12 So each of us will account for himself before God.

13 Therefore, 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. 14 I 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. 15 But 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.

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

20 Do not destroy the work of God because of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for you to make oth-

ers fall by what you eat. 21 And it may be better not to eat meat, or drink wine, or anything else that causes your brother or sister to stumble.

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

**15** 1 We, the strong and liberated, should bear the weakness of those who are not strong, instead of pleasing ourselves. 2 Let each of us bring joy to our neighbors helping them for the good purpose, for building up. 3 Christ himself did not look for his own contentment, as Scripture says: *The insults of those insulting you fell upon me.* 4 And 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. 5 May God, the source of all perseverance and comfort, give to all of you to live in peace in Christ Jesus, 6 that you may be able to praise in one voice God, Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord.

• 7 Welcome, then, one another, as Christ welcomed you for the glory of God. 8 Look: Christ put himself at the service of the Jewish world to fulfill

bidden. 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-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 forgotten; 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 Bible, knowing that the Spirit is at work in all the life of the Church.

• **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

1Cor  
8:13

Jas 4:17

Ps 69:10

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

Phil 2:2

Acts  
10:42Is 49:18;  
45:23

Gal 6:5

Mt  
15:11;  
Acts  
10:15Gal 5:22;  
1Thes  
1:61Cor  
7:15;  
14:26



Ps 18:50 the promises made by God to their ancestors; here you see God's faithfulness. <sup>9</sup>The 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.* <sup>10</sup>And in another place: *Rejoice, pagan nations, with God's people.* <sup>11</sup>And again: *Praise the Lord, all people and let all nations speak of his magnificence.* <sup>12</sup>Isaiah says: *A descendant of Jesse will come who will rule the pagan nations and they will hope in him.*

Dt 32:43

Ps 117:1

Is 11:10

<sup>13</sup>May 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

• <sup>14</sup>As for me, brothers and sisters, I am convinced that you have goodwill, knowledge and the capacity to advise each other; <sup>15</sup>nevertheless I have written boldly in some parts of this letter to remind you of what you already know. I do this ac-

ording to the grace God has given to me <sup>16</sup>when 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. <sup>17</sup>This service of God is for me a cause of pride in Christ Jesus.

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

<sup>18</sup>Of course, I would not dare to speak of other things but what Christ himself has done through me, my words and my works, <sup>19</sup>with 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.

<sup>20</sup>I have been very careful, however, and I am proud of this, not to preach in places where Christ is already known, and not to build upon foundations laid by others. <sup>21</sup>Let it be as Scripture says: *Those not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.*

2Cor  
10:15

Is 52:15

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* (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.

### Help for the Christians in Jerusalem

•<sup>22</sup> This work has prevented me from going to you. <sup>23</sup> But now there is no more place for me in these regions, and as I have wanted for so long to go and see you, <sup>24</sup> I 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.

<sup>25</sup> Right now I am going to Jerusalem to help that community. <sup>26</sup> Know that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia have decided to make a contribution for the poor among the believers of Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> They 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. <sup>28</sup> So 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. <sup>29</sup> And I am sure that when I go to you, I will go with all the blessings of God.

<sup>30</sup> I 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; <sup>31</sup> pray

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. <sup>32</sup> And so I will go to you with joy and, God willing, be refreshed in your company. <sup>33</sup> The God of peace be with you. Amen.

2Cor  
13:11;  
Phil 4:9

### Greetings

**16** • <sup>1</sup> I recommend to you our sister Phoebe, deaconess of the church of Cenchreae. <sup>2</sup> Please 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.

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

<sup>7</sup> Greetings to Andronicus and Junias, my relatives and companions

Acts  
18:18

Acts  
18:2;  
18:26

• 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 way.”

*I am going to Jerusalem to help that community.* 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 had left the previous year. The version

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

1Cor  
9:11;  
Gal 6:6

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

<sup>8</sup>Give greetings to Ampliatus, whom I love so much in the Lord.

<sup>9</sup>Greetings to Urbanus, our fellow worker, and to my dear Stachys.

<sup>10</sup>Greetings to Apelles, who suffered for Christ, and the family of Aristobulus.

<sup>11</sup>Greetings to my relative Herodion and those in the household of Narcissus, who works in the Lord's service.

<sup>12</sup>Greetings to Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who toil for the Lord's sake. <sup>13</sup>Greetings to Rufus, elected of the Lord, and his mother who was a second mother to me. <sup>14</sup>Greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers and sisters staying with them. <sup>15</sup>Greetings to Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas and all the holy ones in Christ Jesus with them.

<sup>16</sup>Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send their greetings.

### A warning

• <sup>17</sup>Brothers 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, <sup>18</sup>because 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.

<sup>19</sup>Everybody 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. <sup>20</sup>The God of peace will soon crush Satan and place him under your feet.

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

<sup>22</sup>I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, send you greetings in the Lord.

<sup>23</sup>Greetings 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. (<sup>24</sup>)

<sup>25</sup>Glory 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.

<sup>26</sup>By 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.

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

1:8;  
1Cor  
14:21

Phil 4:9;  
Gen 3:15

Mk  
15:21

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

Tit 1:10;  
3:10

Phil 3:19

Eph 3:20;  
Col 1:26

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

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.

• **16.17** *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.

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