

THE HUMAN CONDITION IN ROMANS¹

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FROM SOLUTION TO PLIGHT

More than any other New Testament document, Paul's letter to the Romans has determined our common understanding of sin. Many students of Paul think that his theology moves from solution to plight.² This movement is clear when one considers Paul's underlying theological cast of mind. For Paul, the encounter with the risen Christ has made a profound difference in how he views his ancestral faith. This movement needs to be understood as the basis for all of his arguments, even when it does not appear to be explicit. Romans is a case in point. Although Paul begins with a summary statement of the gospel, he does not explicate it in any detail until we come to 3:21. Nor does Paul go out of his way to discuss his theological presuppositions. For him, theology properly so called, our contemplation of God's self-revelation, is an assumption he shares with his readers.³ They are those who know and worship God. This shared faith and his

¹ Thanks to those who asked questions and made comments about this paper during the Second European Theology Conference held at NTC in April 2000. In light of these comments, I have made one or two modifications to the version read at the conference.

² The phrase is associated with E P Sanders. Although some recent scholars have retreated from this view (see, for example, F Thielman, *From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework to Understanding Paul's View of the Law in Galatians and Romans*, SnovT 61 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), the structure of Romans both confirms and nuances that conclusion. Paul starts his discussion with theos-ology (1:1 – 'the gospel of God'; 1:3 – 'concerning his Son'; 1:16 – 'power of God for salvation'; 1:17 – 'righteousness of God is revealed'). Discussions that fail to address the theological significance of 1:1-17 can miss the fact that it is the gospel of God through Christ Jesus that comes first in Paul's thinking. Thus, he sets out the solution offered in Christ *en nuce*. Before he explicates it further, he moves to a description of the human condition beginning in 1:18.

³ The contingent demands of Paul's discussion even in Romans are important to note. See J C Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia/Edinburgh: Fortress/T & T Clark, 1980), who makes this coherence-contingency axis the major interpretative grid for understanding Paul. There are parallels to the decision to address the topic of 'Original Sin' in a theology conference. The participants at this conference clearly agreed with the premise that Trinity and Incarnation are *theologically* antecedent. They also agreed on the broad contours of the solution, if not the precise details. But the contingent need to address this topic is evident on a number of fronts. For some, a 'right conception of sin' is taken to be foundational for holiness theology. In their view, one can only understand 'Christian holiness' if one understands sin correctly. Their theologies are constructed on their 'doctrine' of sin. In light of this view, this conference had as one of its goals an attempt to give a more biblically coherent account of the human condition apart from Christ. This essay addresses the plight but is intended to set it in the context of *the solution on offer in Romans*. Secondly, popular theological metaphors used to illuminate both solution and plight are almost always determined on the basis of the perceived plight, not in terms of the solution. People start with the plight because, to put it theologically, this is the inevitable outworking of the self-centred mindset. Humanity in its condition often responds to God's grace from the awareness of its plight, not through contemplation of the

background in Second Temple Judaism is an indispensable backcloth for understanding all of Paul's thinking.

This, of course, is precisely where issues of continuity and discontinuity arise. Paul's reading of the story of God is held in common with his Jewish kinfolk.⁴ But Paul parts company with them in the conclusion. As Paul now understands it, the end of the story has been radically altered. God has already acted decisively now, supremely seen in the apocalyptic event of Christ's resurrection.⁵ The turning point of the ages has arrived⁶ and God's ultimate good purposes are already affecting the present, albeit in anticipatory fashion.⁷ The biblical story is now understood as coming to its climax in Christ, thereby giving a new coherence to the whole story.⁸

To be sure, enormous questions arise: if God through Christ is welcoming the Gentiles into his new people and the Jews are not also coming to Christ, has God simply terminated his promises to Israel? Or, has he responded to Israel's unfaithfulness by being unfaithful himself? Can God really be trusted to keep his promises to the Gentiles as well?⁹

These are not idle theological questions; their practical implications in the Roman house churches¹⁰ could well have been enormous.¹¹ Paul enters into a sustained

solution. Thirdly, and most crucially, many of us believe that our current stock of metaphors for both solution and plight need to be re-visited, with a view to freshening them up. All metaphors require renewal or they lose their potency as illuminators of their referent. We need to 're-metaphorise' our language in ways appropriate for the twenty-first century while remaining true to scripture and the best of tradition.

⁴ See N T Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) for a full discussion of the worldview of Second Temple Judaism.

⁵ See N T Wright, 'Romans and the Theology of Paul', *Pauline Theology, Vol III, Romans*, eds David M Hay and E Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress Augsburg, 1994), 34, 'What the creator/covenant god was supposed to do for Israel at the end of history, this god had done for Jesus in the middle of history' (his emphasis).

⁶ See, for example, E Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980ET), and Beker, *Paul*.

⁷ J C Beker, *The Triumph of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), J A Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 1990, rev ed).

⁸ See, for example, the work of Richard B Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), N T Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991) and J D G Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

⁹ Of course, Paul has a variety of reasons for writing Romans. See A J M Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988). But included amongst them must have been some attempt to address these very real questions which his gospel was throwing up with respect to his ancestral faith (see esp Rom 9–11).

¹⁰ For discussion on the readership of Romans and the makeup of the Roman Christian community, see the essays in Karl P Donfried, *The Romans Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991, revised).

¹¹ Wright, 'Romans', 35 suggests a danger of 'proto-Marcionism' in which Gentiles could easily fall prey to an anti-Jewish sentiment which simply marginalised the Jews.

theological discussion in response to them. His strategy seems to be to restate his gospel, God's solution offered in Christ to the human condition. By careful appeal to the story of Israel, Paul hopes to show the validity of his gospel. In the first instance, Paul argues, although 'God called Abraham to deal with the problem of Adam,'¹² Israel became part of the problem, as the history of his own people amply demonstrated. Nevertheless, God is faithful to his promises. But how? Answer—they all come to their focus in Christ, the goal to which the law and the prophets always pointed (1:4; 3:21-26; 10:4). Furthermore, despite present evidence to the contrary (see 9–11), he confidently affirms that, however mysterious the way might be, God will also redeem Israel (11:26-30) and thereby bring his salvation offered in Christ to fulfilment, to Jew first and also to the Gentiles (1:16-17).

At the heart of the gospel is Paul's understanding of the righteousness of God.¹³ Many scholars now agree with Ziesler¹⁴ that '...the verb 'justify' is used relationally, often with the forensic meaning 'acquit', but that the noun, and the adjective **dikaio**" have behavioural meanings.'¹⁵ But even when the forensic sense is present, the words 'are forensic in the Hebrew sense, i.e. they represent restoration of the community or covenant relationship.'¹⁶ A crucial point follows: 'This divine righteousness always was, and remained throughout the relevant Jewish literature, the *covenant faithfulness of God*.'¹⁷ But this was never limited to Israel. '...[T]he covenantal idea itself *always included in principle* the belief that when the creator/covenant god acted on behalf of Israel, this would have a direct relation to the fate of the whole world, to the rooting out of evil and injustice from the whole creation.'¹⁸ God has always acted righteously and is doing so now by 'justifying the ungodly' through the atoning sacrifice of his son (3:21-26).

A great deal more work needs to be done on our understanding of the doctrine of the atonement, which seems to be dominated by legal metaphors which are less

¹² Wright, 'Romans', 33.

¹³ This continues to be hotly debated between those who hold the juridical understanding of Paul's forensic language in terms of guilt and pardon, and those who wish to anchor his understanding more firmly in the OT notion of righteousness and justice.

¹⁴ J A Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry*, SNTSMS 20 (Cambridge: CUP, 1972). D J Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), 79-90, is one of those who does not follow Ziesler, maintaining the Reformed view of 'justification' against Ziesler, stating, somewhat surprisingly, that 'It is now generally agreed that **dikaio**" in Paul means not 'make righteous' but 'declare righteous,' or 'acquit' on the analogy of the verdict pronounced by a judge' (86).

¹⁵ Ziesler, *Righteousness*, 1.

¹⁶ Ibid, 20.

¹⁷ Wright, 'Romans', 33, his emphasis.

¹⁸ Ibid, 34, his emphasis.

prominent in Paul than is often thought.¹⁹ It is certainly arguable that the more likely semantic and historical context for understanding righteousness is to be found in Israel's own story and covenant. In so far as the metaphor is legal, it has to do predominantly with restorative justice at the gate, renewed participation in the covenant or vindication of the people against the enemies of God. Likewise, redemption should be seen, not against the background of the manumission of slaves or their purchase in the slave-market but primarily in terms of the Exodus ransom from slavery and the return from Exile. This also tilts the interpretation of salvation in the direction of corporate notions, so crucial to the 'in Adam'/'in Christ' language Paul uses. Consequently, God's restoring of people to a right relationship with himself is more than just the anticipated final verdict of individual pardon brought forward into the present.²⁰ It is also increasingly difficult to sustain the tired division between an 'imputed' and 'imparted' righteousness in Romans.²¹ Justification needs to be understood in a relational and restorative context.²² Transformation as well as declaration is the goal of God's righteous activity.

¹⁹ See Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott F Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994 ET), 82, 'Although the doctrinal tradition of the church continues up to the present time to speak of the appeasing of an angry God through the blood of Christ, or also of a satisfaction which takes place by means of Jesus' sacrificial death toward the God who has been injured in regard to his majesty through sin, there is no talk at all of this in the apostle's texts concerning atonement-reconciliation.'

²⁰ *Contra Moo*, 87. See also Andrew T Lincoln 'From Wrath to Justification: Tradition, Gospel, and Audience in the Theology of Romans 1:18 - 4:25', *Pauline Theology, Vol III Romans*, eds David M Hay and E Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress Augsburg, 1994), 148, who thinks that 'the imagery of the lawcourt predominates through the language of justification. God's righteousness is the power by which those unable to be justified on the criterion of works are set right with him and being set in a right relationship with God involves his judicial verdict of pardon'.

²¹ See N T Wright, 'New Exodus, New Inheritance: the Narrative Substructure of Romans 3-8', *Romans and the People of God, Festschrift for Gordon D Fee*, eds Sven K Soderland and N T Wright (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 33, 'An older flattening out of these nuances into the either/or of "forensic" and "ethical" meanings simply fails to catch what Paul is talking about.' See also Stuhlmacher, 63f, who thinks that justification is a legal act of the creator God but it is 'therefore at the same time an act of new creation, by virtue of which those who are justified participate in the glory and righteousness which exists in God's presence. Hence, the dogmatic distinction...between a justification which is first only reckoned legally (forensic-imputed) and a justification which is creatively at work (effective) is...an unbiblical distinction.' But see Moo, loc cit, where the notion of imputed righteousness still underlies his analysis.

²² See Klyne Snodgrass, 'The Gospel in Romans: A Theology of Revelation', *The Gospel in Paul: Studies in Corinthians, Galatians and Romans*, Festschrift for Richard N Longenecker, JSNTSS 108 (Sheffield: SAP, 1994), 314, who argues 'justification is not the category under which revelation is subsumed, but rather justification is subsumed under and comprehended from the category of revelation. Now the debate about whether justification is to be understood as "declarative" or "effective" (a making righteous) is nuanced differently, for focus on the revelation of God means that God is met in the gospel, not merely that God says something. One is not merely declared righteous; rather one is transformed by encounter with the powerful God who places people in right relation to himself.'

THE PRIMAL SIN [1:18-32]

Paul would not be unusual amongst Second Temple Jews in turning to the primeval narratives to explain the human condition.²³ Paul has already introduced the universality of the gospel (1:17). Now he begins a section which leads to the conclusion that ‘all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin’ (3:9).²⁴ Paul defends this indictment by focusing initially upon the Gentile world. But human alienation is not peculiar to Gentiles. Not only does the story of alienation start from the beginning of the human story, membership in ethnic Israel does not exempt them from any criticism (Rom 2).

God’s wrath is being revealed against ALL *ungodliness* (**ajsebeia**) and *wickedness* (**ajdikia**). *Ungodliness* points directly to wrong relationship with the creator. *Wickedness* points to wrong relationships within the created order—perverted and misused natural desires that lead to personal disintegration and social dysfunction. They suppressed the truth about God.²⁵ This probably includes the truth about the created order and its creaturely relationship to the creator in which the harmonious relations were intended to work according to nature.²⁶ Morna Hooker describes the plight in graphic terms: ‘man did not only exchange the worship of the true God for that of idols; he also exchanged intimate fellowship with God for an expression which was shadowy and remote, and he exchanged, too, his own reflection of the glory of God for the image of corruption’.²⁷

What has happened to reach this sorry state? First, Paul’s starting point is implicit but clear: it is not fallen humanity but God’s good creation. He never explains the

²³ See Richard N Longenecker, ‘The Focus of Romans’, *Romans and the People of God*, Festschrift for Gordon D Fee, eds Sven K Soderland and N T Wright (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), who argues that Adam does not feature in Romans 1. He states ‘...[T]he narrative of 1:18-32 unfolds in terms of humanity’s decline into idolatry and immorality during the course of history—without any reference to Adam’s sin; whereas in 5:12-21 (probably also in 7:7-13) the focus is on the disobedience of the “one man” and how his transgression has affected all human beings. The diagnosis of 1:18-32, of course, may be built upon Wisdom of Solomon 13:1-14:31 and/or similar Jewish traditions... nonetheless, while the story of Adam’s sin in Genesis 2–3 was certainly retained within the Jewish Scriptures, it seems not to have been widely used as an explanation of humanity’s predicament in Early Judaism (except in *4 Ezra* 3:7-8, 21-22; 7:116-26 and *2 Baruch* 23:4; 48:42-43; 54:15; 56:5-6)’ (63).

²⁴ All quotations are taken from the NRSV or else my own translation.

²⁵ Interestingly enough, in Acts 17 Paul sees an altar to the unknown God. In Romans, Paul argues that God could have been known to the Gentiles but that they have suppressed the truth.

²⁶ The term ‘nature’ can sometimes give the wrong impression, that is, that nature is somehow an independent object or entity which just ‘is’ and that we somehow operate outside of it and use it. But the more biblical perspective is ‘creation’, that is, the created order including humanity as created by and sustained by the love of the creator God. See Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Edinburgh/Nashville: T & T Clark/Abingdon, 1998), 253f, ‘While creation encompasses nature, when you say nature you have not said creation.’

²⁷ M D Hooker, ‘Adam in Romans 1’, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 83.

origin of sin in Romans but he is quite clear that sinfulness is not the *natural* state of humanity.²⁸ Second, God is absolved of all responsibility. God is not the origin of human folly nor is there a design fault in creation. What is more, God has continued to reveal himself: creation itself points to the eternal power and divine nature of the creator God who, though invisible, reveals himself in his creation.²⁹ But this is not all—they actually knew God.³⁰ However this is explained, it is part of the story.³¹

It is only after Paul has linked the revelation of God's wrath to human ungodliness and wickedness that he describes the spiral into chaos. He does so in a series of statements and consequences that cumulatively make up the picture of the alienated state of the Gentile world. At root, the dysfunctional society in which the Gentiles live is due to what Dunn describes as misdirected religion. When this primary relationship is twisted, all other relationships are distorted. This is neither an unexpected sequence of events, nor a new notion with Paul.³² Nor is it an impersonal outworking of 'the way things are' in any sort of Deistic fashion. But it does indicate that humankind was created to live in an ongoing appropriate and natural relationship with the creator God and within the created order.

For Paul, then, the human condition is a consequence of distorted relationships. Once the primal relationship was distorted, darkened minds, perverted desires and chaotic social relationships followed as night follows day. The chaos in the world is the open and running sore of human alienation from God. God has allowed humans to assert their independence from him and in doing so, suffer the consequences of their choices. They are acting against nature, the way things were intended to be, with the inevitable result of chaos. Although Paul does not mention the Fall, this section gives the impression of a grand sweep of the human

²⁸ This point will become clear in 5:12ff.

²⁹ This theme, of course, is a recurrent one in the Old Testament, most notably in the Psalms. See Lincoln, 138, '...[W]hereas Wisdom talks of a failure in natural theology, not having succeeded in reasoning from the creation to the Creator, Paul talks of a failure to respond to natural revelation, suppressing a knowledge of God that has already been given.'

³⁰ As Moo, 106, admits, this is unexpected. But, according to Moo, Paul cannot mean a knowledge of God which leads to salvation because that kind of knowledge of God '*must* lead to reverence and gratitude' [my emphasis]. Moo thinks that Paul has a natural theology which 'leads not to salvation but to the demonstration that God's condemnation is just: people are without excuse'. This view faces enormous problems when one comes to interpret Romans 2.

³¹ The debate over 'natural theology' comes to the surface here and cannot be addressed within the confines of this paper. Suffice it to say that, although Moo's reading of this passage is possible, he is hampered in considering any alternative view that might help address the difficulties in chapter two. His commitment to the 'irresistible grace' of high Calvinism, that is, if God reveals himself savingly to anyone, it is an *effective* revelation which leads to salvation, is consistent with this overall theological stance which is maintained throughout his fine commentary.

³² The consequences of refusal of the appropriate relationship with God were already known in the Wisdom tradition, especially from Wisdom 13.

declension from a place and time where a) it worshipped the Creator, and b) acted according to *nature*.

IN ADAM...IN CHRIST [5:12-21]

Perhaps no passage in Romans is more in danger of being analysed in such a way that the forest becomes obscured by the trees. Romans 5:12-21 concludes the section already begun in 5:1-11, where Paul has set out the gospel in summary form.³³ If Adam³⁴ lurks in the shadows in chapter one, he now takes his place as one of the major protagonists in chapter 5:12-21. But Israel's failure is also on view.³⁵ Paul has clear reasons for this. The purpose of God's salvation offered in Christ is not restricted to Israel. God's purpose is to redeem all of humanity, both Jews and Greeks, who together would become the agents of his good purposes. The solution on offer is a universal one.³⁶ Paul elaborates on this solution in terms of the problem, that is, the superabundance of God's grace in Christ being manifested by putting right what was wrong in Adam and thereby advancing the promise of God to Abraham through Christ (chapter 4).³⁷

³³ Paul introduces a point, the importance of which will only be seen later in the epistle: 'God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (5:5). In chapter 8, he will speak extensively of the Holy Spirit indwelling the new people of God and the love between the creator God and his people as well as the love in the relationships within the new people of God (see 8:15, 35, 37, 39; 13:8). The motivational centre for the new people of God will not, therefore, be the spirit of slavery but that of sonship—love-based response rather than coercion.

³⁴ Some scholars insist that 'there is every reason to think that Paul read Genesis 2–3 as a historical account of real people' (Moo, 325). Others, like Dunn, remind us that 'the ancients were more alert to the diversity of literary genres than we usually give them credit for...[Paul's] concern and point are not dependent on the resolution of any tension between questions of history or myth...This is the language of universal experience, not of cosmic speculation' (Dunn, *Theology*, 94f, and citing Dunn, *Romans*, 272). Noble's 'Excursus on "the Fall"' in his *Prologomena* (see p 7) seems closer to Moo than Dunn, believing N P Williams' conclusions to be 'unassailable that Christian theology is bound to hold to the paradoxical doctrine of the Fall as an event within the temporal created order, i.e., within time'. Noble's observation may be sufficiently vague to accommodate a wider range of views than Moo (and Carson, whom Moo cites) would allow.

³⁵ Frank Thielman, 'The Story of Israel and the Theology of Romans 5–8', *Pauline Theology, Vol III Romans*, eds David M Hay and E Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress Augsburg, 1994), 149, notes, 'The fundamental point of Paul's discussion in 5:12-21, then, is that Christ is God's answer to the disasters created by Adam's sin and Israel's violation of the covenant' (181).

³⁶ This is really demanded of Paul's whole argument here. Those who argue that Paul does not proclaim a gospel that is universally effective do not grasp fully either Paul's narrative or the inner logic of his theology. The whole point of Jesus' coming in the flesh and being crucified as the representative man and the Messiah of Israel is that all the good purposes of God come to focus on Israel. Paul is equally clear, of course, that not all individuals accept this good news—his agonised discussion in Romans 9–11 echoes the lament of the OT prophets. But the postulation of a limited atonement based upon God's eternal predestination of the elect represents the triumph of cold logic over the inner narrative of the text. See Moo, 342f for a recent restatement of the view that this passage shows an atonement of limited effect.

³⁷ See the summary and very helpful analysis of the big picture in Wright, *Climax*, 35-40: 'The task of the last Adam, was not merely to begin something new, but to deal with the problem of the old; not

The critical verse for our purposes is, of course, v 12. Unfortunately for exegetes and theologians, ‘the internal structure of v 12 is unclear’.³⁸ The verse is an *anacolouthon*, a grammatically incomplete sentence.³⁹ It seems that the sense of the verse opening as it stands is not completed until v 18ff. There Paul virtually repeats the comparison introduced by ‘just as’ in v 12. Paul’s overall point then becomes clear: ‘just as sin came into the world through the one man’ (12a), ‘so also through one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous’ (19b).

Paul’s opening statement now makes explicit what he had only hinted at in chapter one: *sin came into the world through one man* (**di jehof ajqrwpou hl amartia eij' toh kosmon eijshlqen**). The language he uses is important. First, it is not that Adam, the sinner, introduces sin to the world but rather that Adam, the first human, is the one through whom sin gained entry into the world. It follows that sin is *not* the natural consequence of creatureliness, at once clear when the primeval narratives are seen as the limn Paul uses here. Adam introduces sin into the world, but all of humanity since Adam has entered into the human condition in a context in which sin is already ‘in’ the world. This is the notion of corporate solidarity that is essential to the notion of ‘in Adam’ just as it is essential to the notion of ‘in Christ’. Neither notion can be understood in terms of genetic inheritance.

Second, *death came through sin* (**kai/dial/th" amartia" ol qanato"**). Paul is, of course, particularly interested in ‘spiritual’ death.⁴⁰ This notion may also come from Paul’s reading of the primeval narratives. According to Gen 2:7, the creation of ‘Adam from ‘Adamah is followed by the gift of life directly from God—the breath of life.⁴¹ Disobedience in the garden does not lead to immediate physical death. Indeed, the narrative suggests that God perceives that the fall has produced in humans the desire for independent immortality which might lead them to ‘take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’ (Gen 3:22). Neither the primeval narratives nor Paul address the question of whether humans (would have) died before the Fall (or indeed, animals, fruit flies, or vegetation!).

merely to give life, but to deal with death...His role was that of obedience, not merely in place of disobedience but in order to undo that disobedience...Jesus, as last Adam, had revealed what God’s saving plan for the world had really been—what Israel’s vocation really had been—by enacting it, becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross’ (38ff).

³⁸ Moo, 318.

³⁹ For full details and analysis of the various options here, see C E B Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Vol 1*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 272n5 and Moo, 318n19.

⁴⁰ See 5:17, where ‘life’ does not refer, at least primarily, to physical life but to ‘spiritual’ life. See Stuhlmacher, 86.

⁴¹ The first creation story also uses the phrase ‘breath of life’ to describe every breathing creature. But the creation of the other living creatures in Genesis 2 is not completed with God breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. The difference may be insignificant, merely showing the special care God has given to the creation of the man.

Paul's main point is clear, however, and is made explicit in the next statement: *death spread to all* (**kailoutw eij' panta" ajqrwpou" olqanato" dihlqen**). Death as it is currently present and experienced in the world came through sin and the universality of sin is demonstrated by the universality of death. To put it in other words, the visible manifestation of the corporate solidarity that entails from Adam's sin is (physical) death. But once sin enters the world, death itself, inextricably linked to sin, becomes a power.

Third, the *crux interpretum* occurs in v 12c with the celebrated phrase **eif j w% pante" hmaron**. Despite the impressive arguments of the Roman Catholic scholar J A Fitzmyer, the *translation* of the phrase has now almost certainly been settled in the direction of *because all have sinned*.⁴² Two main reasons may be given for this conclusion. First, this seems to make the best sense of Paul's argument here. Paul seems to be making his case by drawing attention to the demonstrable fact that humanity suffers death, and therefore, there is a causal connection between sin and death; he is not, however, making an explicit causal connection between Adam's sin and individual human sin. Death entered the world through Adam's sin and since Adam death has repeated itself in humanity since Adam because no one escapes the power of sin.⁴³ Elsewhere Paul reminds his readers that *as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive* (1 Cor 15:22), a point which is compatible with his argument here. Second, translating this phrase as a causal conjunction seems to accord well with Paul's other uses of the phrase in 2 Cor 5:4 and Eph 3:15.⁴⁴

The implications of the phrase are as disputed as ever. On the one hand, does it mean that all share in the consequence of death because all personally participate in sin? The principle of individual responsibility for actions was already well established in the OT (see Ezekiel 18). C K Barrett writes, 'Once the connexion between sin and death has been established, Paul moves onward:...all men sin, and all men die because they sin; but Paul does not add here that they sin, or that they die, because they are physically descended from Adam. Nowhere, even in v 19, does Paul teach the direct seminal identity between Adam and his

⁴² NRSV. See Cranfield, 274-279, who sets out the arguments in favour of 'because of'. J A Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 413-417, translates 'with the result that.' He gives three options. First, the phrase could be understood as introducing a *genuine relative clause* but rejects each of the eight alternative readings under this head. Second, the phrase has been understood as equivalent to a *conjunction*, but he also rejects the reading of the phrase as a *causal conjunction*, against BAGD and most modern and many ancient NT scholars, and chooses the third option, a *consecutive conjunction*, meaning 'with the result that, so that.' Moo, 321, while admitting the case for 'because' may not be as watertight as some scholars think, still considers it the best translation.

⁴³ So Moo, 323.

⁴⁴ But see Fitzmyer, 415, who is only prepared to admit that 2 Cor 5:4 is a good example, but 'because' is certainly not the only possible translation even here.

descendants.’⁴⁵ But Barrett is not dismissing the pernicious character of sin as a power. Even more crucially, he writes, ‘Paul does not think of sin as a *thing* which, like an heirloom, may be handed down from father to son. Sin is a living, active, almost a personal, agency, and all sin needed was a means of entry into the race. Once this was found it did not need to be propagated—by sexual relations, or descent, or in any other way; it propagated itself.’⁴⁶

On the other hand, does it mean that all sinned ‘in Adam’, that is, that all humanity was somehow present in Adam’s sin or repeats in its existence that same sin? One particularly important variation on this theme, associated with Augustine, has come to dominate the Western Christian theological consensus, at least at the popular level. A review of Augustine’s understanding is not the purpose of this paper. Peter Stuhlmacher, however, summarises the concerns many biblical scholars have. I quote him at length.

Although in 5:12ff. the apostle clearly sees in sin and death an unavoidable human destiny, he does not express here (or elsewhere in his letters) the thought of an original death or of original sin. This notion is to be traced back, above all, to the interpretation of Rom. 5:12 in the Latin church. Here the Latin translation of Paul’s phrase, ‘because all sinned,’ with *in quo omnes peccaverunt* was understood as a relative pronoun clause and related to Adam, so that the meaning became, ‘in whom they all have sinned.’ But more than anything else, the interpretation of the church father Augustine (354-430) became decisive. He takes as his starting point the idea ‘that all have sinned in that first man, because all were in him at that time when he sinned, and from then on sin is inherited through birth’ (*Contra duas Epistolas Pelagianorum* 4.4, 7).⁴⁷

If, as Stuhlmacher states, this passage *is not* about original sin, we are still under obligation to say precisely what Paul *is* saying in this passage. At the least, he is saying that all sin and all die because they sin, as Barrett thinks. Moo pushes the point slightly further: ‘the causal nexus between sin and death, exhibited in the case of Adam, has repeated itself in the case of every human being. No one, Paul makes clear, escapes the reign of death because no one escapes the power of sin.’⁴⁸ But is Moo making Paul sound too individualistic?

In a paper delivered to the Fiftieth National Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society in 1998, Mark Rapinchuk calls Moo’s conclusion into question. Taking his cue from those who emphasise Paul’s corporate thinking in the whole of Romans, and starting from the solution Paul offers in Christ, he

⁴⁵ C K Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1962, 1971), 111.

⁴⁶ C K Barrett, *From First Adam to Last: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: A & C Black, 1962), 20.

⁴⁷ Stuhlmacher, 86.

⁴⁸ Moo, 323.

argues that Paul cannot mean *inherited* universal sin but rather ‘the universal nature of sin in that it affects all peoples. It is not his concern to speculate about the transmission or imputation of Adam’s sin to all men [sic] **without exception.**’⁴⁹ Rapinchuk is particularly impressed with the universalistic language Paul uses to describe the effect of the free gift that *leads to justification and life for all* (v 18). But, he contends, Paul is not a universalist. Therefore he must be referring to the fact that the free gift reaches all peoples, both Jew and Gentile. ‘It is time,’ Rapinchuk concludes, ‘to move beyond an insistence on reading Romans 5 as an exposition of original/inherited sin, which leads to unnecessary hermen-eutical maneuverings to avoid absolute Universalism. It is time we let Paul say what he intended to say, no more and certainly no less.’⁵⁰

Confirmation of Rapinchuk’s view may be gleaned elsewhere in Romans. Even in the much-cited statement in 3:9b, Paul’s primarily thinks of groups: *we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin.* The catena of six OT texts Paul cites (3:10-18) supports this view. All five Psalm citations contrast the wicked who are not God’s people (= Gentiles) with the righteous (= Israel). But the final citation from Isaiah refers directly to the people of Israel, thus confirming Paul’s point that Jews as well as Greeks, are under the power of sin. Paul is not here speaking of individuals.

The notoriously difficult (on some readings) Romans 2:7, 10, 13-15⁵¹, on the other hand, appears to point to individuals: For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When the Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts (2:13-15a).

Space precludes a full treatment of this text here.⁵² Suffice it to say that I find most of the attempts to explain this passage to be desperate, and unnecessary, expedients to avoid what Paul is actually saying, generally based upon a priori

⁴⁹ Mark Rapinchuk, ‘Universal Sin and Salvation in Romans 5:12-21’, a paper read at the Fiftieth National Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society (1998) and published on microfiche as part of *Evangelical Theological Society Papers* (ETS – 5018, 1999), 7, his emphasis.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵¹ See the discussions in the commentaries, and in particular the work of E P Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Fortress, 1983), 123-135, and H Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Fortress, 1986), 107, who see this as a problem of inconsistency in Paul.

⁵² The usual interpretations of this passage include, a) Paul is here speaking of Christians, b) Paul is simply setting forth the standards by which God will judge and is therefore speaking hypothetically, either because he is explaining how things would have been had Christ not come, or, c) because the power of sin in fact prevents anyone from keeping the commands, d) Paul is referring to non-Christians who respond to the light they have with obedience to the commandments produced with the aid of God’s grace, e) God actually gives the grace which leads to justification to those who earnestly seek him. See Moo, 140, for a similar analysis.

views concerning the theme of justification by faith. If, however, justification by faith is a subset of the revelation of the righteousness of God, then the problems become less acute.⁵³ Here, Paul seems to be indicating that there are individuals who follow *what the law requires written on their hearts*, a phrase directly echoing Jer 31:31ff.

Paul is not, of course, speaking of righteousness which comes from within oneself apart from God, nor that there are persons who live outside the human condition already described in 1:18-32. Clearly, as Snodgrass observes, ‘in the context of 1:18-23, the description of those who are obedient and obtain life (2:7, 10, 13, 15, 26-27) assumes the obedience is a result of the activity of God in their lives.’ He continues, ‘one cannot understand Pauline soteriology apart from the larger framework of the biblical soteriology of both testaments. If chapter two does *not* assume the intervention of God, then Paul has got himself into the frightful jam that most scholars think he has.’⁵⁴ Exactly so!

Does, then, this cursory glance at chapters 2 & 3 mean that Rapinchuk’s conclusion is correct? For one who takes her starting place from within Reformed understanding of ‘irresistible grace’ and a ‘limited atonement’, I think it is decisive. The language in Romans 5:12-21 is inescapably universalistic. Furthermore, Paul cannot be speaking of an all-inclusive reign of sin which is met by a strictly limited reign of righteousness. Such a reading makes a nonsense of Paul’s ‘how much more’ (vv 15, 17) and turns it into a ‘how much less’. Therefore, Paul must be speaking of people groups in both cases, not individuals. Only that way can one sustain both of these Reformed notions.

But it does not necessarily follow that we have really exhausted Paul’s point. After all, Paul had not read Calvin or Augustine. If Paul is proclaiming an unlimited atonement, which I think is inescapable in this passage, then Paul is talking about the corporate reconciliation of humanity with God. God’s action in Christ is the reconciliation of all to himself. At the same time, that there are those who persist in their rebellion against God is the sad testimony of scripture and experience alike. But Paul does not thereby circumscribe the range of the solution on offer, despite the fact that the response is not yet as great as he might have hoped.

This passage, then, is about two groups—‘in Adam’ and ‘in Christ’—and not primarily about individuals within the group. Hence, the usual focus on the fate of each *individual* caught in the nexus of sin and death, tends to obscure Paul’s main point. Paul wishes to argue that the *corporate solidarity* that flows from the righteous obedience of the one righteous person, Jesus Christ, is more than a match for the *corporate solidarity* that flows from Adam. The solidarity in Christ leads to abundance of grace, the free gift of righteousness exercised in dominion

⁵³ See note 22 above.

⁵⁴ Snodgrass, ‘Revelation’, 305-306.

in life, and to justification and life for all which is set against the solidarity of sin and death in Adam.⁵⁵ Consequently, ‘...the interpreter should not reduce...[these verses] only to a discussion of the implications of justification for the individual believer. By using biblical language for the restoration of God’s people, they constantly situate the individual within the wider community’.⁵⁶

What, then, can be gleaned from this passage which might help us understand the human condition in Romans? First, sin’s entrance *in the world* was not an essential dimension to creatureliness. Hence, human sinfulness is an unnatural rather than the natural state of humanity. Second, (spiritual) death is the consequence of sin. Third, Paul sees a *solidarity of humanity* in Adam. There is ‘a continuum in life ending in death which stretches from Adam to the present. What precisely first constituted that continuum remains unclear. But that it began with Adam (was in operation effectively from the beginning) is clear enough. And that it is continuing human sin which maintains that continuum is also clear.’⁵⁷ Fourth, it is also the *activity of people* that produces in humanity its just desert (6:23). In Stuhlmacher’s words, ‘...sin is at the same time one’s fate and one’s act, for which one is responsible. While his gospel of justification is to be interpreted without the dogmatic doctrine of original sin and original death, the intention of the apostle’s statement must still be maintained. He refers unmistakably to the fact that with and since Adam, death and sin are inescapable.’⁵⁸

THE REIGN OF SIN [6:12-23]

If Paul thinks primarily of solidarity in sin in Romans 5; in Romans 6 he thinks primarily of sin as a power affecting all people groups, Jew and Gentile alike. Paul’s contrast between being ‘in Adam’ and ‘in Christ’ is now taken further in response to the outrageous suggestion that the superabundance of God’s grace should encourage people to *continue in sin* (6:1). The notions of *solidarity* in the human condition and sin as a *power* are brought into juxtaposition with the notion of sin as the chaos-causing and peace-shattering *behaviour* that emerges within that solidarity and under that power.

The metaphor of power is important. In 5:12-21, Adam’s transgression is the entry point for sin’s baleful reign. Now he spells out more clearly that the

⁵⁵ This abundance of grace is necessary because, as Wright, *Climax*, 37, notes, ‘Christ did not begin where Adam began. He had to begin where Adam ended, that is, by taking on to himself not merely a clean slate, not merely even the single sin of Adam, but the whole entail of that sin, working its way out in the ‘many sins’ of Adam’s descendants and arriving at the judgement spoken of in 1:32; 2:1-16; and 3:19-20.’

⁵⁶ Thielman, 195.

⁵⁷ Dunn, *Theology*, 95. Moo, 328n61 states that Paul ‘affirms the reality of a solidarity of all humanity with Adam in his sin without being able to explain the exact nature of that union.’

⁵⁸ Stuhlmacher, 86.

problem is not Adam per se, it is sin.⁵⁹ Sin entered the world through one man. But once the fall occurred, the consequences were inevitable and all pervasive, affecting Jew and Gentile alike.

Paul's gospel has an apocalyptic framework, with the contrast between 'the present age' held in the thralldom of 'sin' and 'death' with their unwilling servant 'law', and 'the age to come', which has already been inaugurated in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.⁶⁰ The resurrection is, for Paul, the key apocalyptic event. But Paul has not taken his framework over from Jewish or pagan sources without modification. Hence, in comparison to the great flowering of then current speculation about the unseen powers, Paul's views seem particularly vague and ill defined.⁶¹ In Romans 8:35-38, Paul expresses his utmost confidence in the overwhelming love of Christ. He concludes: 'For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'⁶² When he refers to the *powers*, he seems to think of 'heavenly beings, subordinate to God and his Christ, with the potential to intervene between God and his creation, and hostile to his purpose and people.'⁶³

Paul never underestimates the reality of the powers. But Paul was no Frank Peretti. For Paul, any sort of cosmic dualism of equals was impossible and unthinkable, and furthermore and crucially, the powers were already defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ (see Col 2:8-23). Although opposition to God's good purposes continued, 'no eventuality, no dimension of reality, no created being, however heavenly, however powerful, could defeat God's purpose in Christ.'⁶⁴

Far more important for Paul are two spheres of power: the reign of sin and death on the one hand, and the reign of God through Christ Jesus on the other. Those

⁵⁹ If Paul was ever concerned with Adam per se, he no longer figures prominently in the story except as an implicit cipher (see, perhaps, chapter 7) for humanity in the thralldom of sin.

⁶⁰ See, in particular, the three volumes by J C Beker, *Paul the Apostle; Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), and *The Triumph of God*. See also E Käsemann.

⁶¹ For what follows, I am indebted to the excellent discussion in Dunn, *Theology*, 104-110. See also the important trilogy by Walter Wink, *The Powers 1: Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); *The Powers 2: Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); *The Powers 3: Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

⁶² This is not Paul's only hint of the powers. See also 1 Cor 15:24; Col 1:16; Eph 1:20-21; Eph 6:12.

⁶³ Dunn, *Theology*, 106.

⁶⁴ Idem. Dunn suggests in light of this that the mythological gap between Paul and the modern world is less wide than Bultmann and others might have thought and that Paul had already 'engaged in his own demythologization at this point. For he did believe in spiritual powers and treated the subject with immense seriousness. But the spiritual powers he focused his theological and pastoral concern on were not the 'rulers and authorities' but the powers of sin and death' (110).

who are in Adam are within the reign of sin and death. Those who are in Christ are in the reign of God through Christ. Paul is at pains to emphasise the absurdity of living in two spheres at once, the sphere of 'sin' and the sphere of 'Christ'. The language Paul uses here is transfer language. Those who are in Christ have been transferred from the realm of sin's dominion to the realm of God. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, he tells his readers, 'you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus' (v 11). To be sure, as Ziesler notes, 'this transfer from the rule of Adam/sin to the rule of Christ is not a smooth one. It requires a death, especially to sin...To die and rise with Christ is thus to move from the Old to the New Age, to come to life in the power of that New Age, so that one is no longer under the power of sin and no longer 'in Adam'.⁶⁵

For Paul, then, sin is a power. It exercises its baleful authority over those who are in the solidarity of Adam. Its reign depends upon the allegiance of its servants. It might even be argued that sin's 'existence' is entirely parasitic, that is, it feeds upon the manifestations of its own rule.

'SIN THAT DWELLS IN ME' [7:17-20]

The slavery of people under sin—Paul thinks first of his Jewish background but most of what is stated applies to humankind in general—has been described earlier. Now Paul takes the argument just a bit further. Sin has actually taken over the flesh and is directing people whether they wish to or not. As Ziesler comments, 'All are trapped and controlled by the power of sin whether they like it or not...Sin is slavery, although it begins by consent.'⁶⁶ Paul puts it this way: 'In fact, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me' (7:17).⁶⁷ What does Paul mean?

Paul now thinks that salvation through national identity and observance of the law is impossible. Jews as well as Gentiles are enslaved to sin. But Paul is careful to avoid any sense that the law is the *cause* of sin. Rather, sin has used the law for its own ends. Despite what we might have concluded from his statement in 7:9, 'I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died', Paul refuses to blame the law. In fact, 'the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good' (7:12). The culprit, Paul states, is sin: 'it was sin, working death in me through what is good' (7:13b). Sin, not the law, has brought the Jewish people to their current plight in which the law has proved to be powerless to redeem. The law, however, remains 'spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin' (7:14)

⁶⁵ J A Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, TPINTC (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Trinity, 1989), 153f.

⁶⁶ Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity*, 76.

⁶⁷ The phrase 'sin that dwells in me' has been translated tendentiously in the NIV as 'sinful nature', giving an unfortunate reified connotation to indwelling sin.

Just as sin has perverted the law and used it for its own nefarious purposes, so sin has invaded, as it were, humanity and now ‘dwells’, like a squatter, within. Some of Paul’s earlier language could have implied that sin was only external, an outside force or power which could be resisted, perhaps even in one’s own strength. But this is not his intention. Sin is not wholly external. This removes ‘the devil-made-me do-it’ from the litany of human self-justification because, as Moo puts it, “‘I’ am ultimately at fault; certainly not the law, not even sin. It is ‘me’ and my ‘carnality,’ my helplessness under sin that enables sin to do what it does. ‘Sin’ has invaded my existence and made me a divided person, willing to do what God wants but failing to do it’.⁶⁸ Paul’s corporate language here is clearly personal as well, perhaps even autobiographical.

Second, Paul is saying that the power of sin has subverted even the desire to obey God. People, therefore, are powerless to save themselves because even their motivation has become tainted due to sin’s invasion of human existence. The solution to this plight, therefore, must be more than the defeat of the powers. That would be dealing with the enemy without. Humankind exists in fallen flesh that is subject to and *invaded* by sin. This is why Paul’s solution to the condition is set out so succinctly and clearly in 8:3—‘For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh’. The key phrase here, *the likeness of sinful flesh*, is very carefully and tightly worded. Paul excludes a docetic view while at the same time reminding us that Jesus is not ‘God changed into a man’, but became a human while remaining God.⁶⁹ Even more importantly, the words can be taken to mean that Christ took on our fallen humanity and redeemed it. This is not to be understood in any static, once-for-all-time sense, however. He was born into our existence, lived in our fallen flesh, sanctifying it by his ongoing perfect obedience and in his death and resurrection defeated sin and death. In a footnote, C E B Cranfield suggests that ‘Christ’s life before his actual ministry and death was not just a standing where unfallen Adam had stood without yielding to the temptation to which Adam succumbed, but a matter of starting from where we start, subject to all the evil pressures which we inherit, and using the altogether unpromising and unsuitable material of our corrupt nature to work out a perfect, sinless obedience.’⁷⁰ By taking on our human condition just as we are, he defeated sin through his obedient life and death and made it possible, through the Spirit, that the inner dynamic of the law might be fulfilled in us.

⁶⁸ Moo, 451.

⁶⁹ See Cranfield, 381.

⁷⁰ Cranfield, 383n2.

THE 'WRETCHED I' [7:24]

Although most commentators now take the view that 'the wretched I' of chapter seven refers to the experience of non-believers, there are significant exegetical voices raised against this position.⁷¹ They are followed in this interpretation by a range of theologians and others. Some in the holiness movement have seen this chapter as referring to the experience of the not yet entirely sanctified. This was not Wesley's view. William M Greathouse agrees, arguing that it 'cannot be construed as depicting *Christian* experience'.⁷² But, says Moo, 'the interpretation of vv 14–25 in terms of "normal" Christian experience was typical of Lutheran and Reformed theology right into the twentieth century and is still widespread'.⁷³

J I Packer is a case in point.⁷⁴ Packer concludes a recent essay by stating that he remains 'a convinced and unrepentant Augustinian with regard to the "wretched man"'.⁷⁵ Packer's main reason for this position seems to be its usefulness 'as a bulwark against any idea of salvation by one's own effort, and a proof that apart from God's sovereign grace all are lost'.⁷⁶ Augustine's interpretation was also important, in Packer's view, for facing down '...both the Wesleyan heart-perfectionism of pure love out of a cleansed inner being and the Higher Life act-perfectionism of unflawed, Spirit-empowered performance despite the continuance of indwelling sin in the saint's spiritual system.'⁷⁷

To be fair, Packer remains a convinced Augustinian because this interpretation also fits his reading of scripture. In particular, he focuses upon the tension which exists between the already and the not yet in Paul's theology. Packer writes, 'The two ages overlap, and Christians are anchored in both, so that language proper to both is appropriate, indeed necessary, for describing their condition theologically ... Christians have a two-sided experience: the uplifting of the Spirit and the downdrag of sin both operate, and bewilderment results.'⁷⁸

⁷¹ The most important of these is Dunn, in several publications, most recently in *Theology*, 472-477. See the full and helpful discussion in Moo, 421-431.

⁷² William M Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1998), 106.

⁷³ Moo, 444.

⁷⁴ J I Packer, 'The "Wretched Man" Revisited: Another Look at Romans 7:14-25', *Romans and the People of God*, Festschrift for Gordon D Fee, eds Sven K Soderlund and N T Wright (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans/CUP, 1999), 70-81.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 81.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 71. He continues, 'Luther, Calvin and all the magisterial Reformers except Bucer and Musculus invoked the passages as exegeted by Augustine to show that there is sin in the best Christians' best works and all that we do, however good by comparison with what we once did and others do still, falls short of perfection, both motivational and substantive, and so cannot gain merit in God's sight.'

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 72. Packer believes, that '...the incompleteness of sanctification in this life can be established with certainty from the NT even without endorsing Augustine's identification of the "Wretched man"'.
⁷⁸ Packer, 78.

This eschatological tension brings Cranfield and Dunn to a similar conclusion.⁷⁹ Dunn thinks that the crux of the matter ‘is whether Paul saw the transition from present age to age to come, from Adam to Christ, as abrupt, totally discontinuous, and without any overlap whatsoever.’⁸⁰ In his view, those who see Romans 7 as referring to the pre-Christian experience underestimate the power of sin and death and their effect upon Christians who are ‘still caught in the nexus of sin and death’.⁸¹

Most scholars agree that the ‘between the times’ character of the present experience of the people of God runs like a thread in all of Paul’s theology, and Packer and Dunn are quite right to draw careful attention to it. Paul frequently reminds his readers of the ‘not yet’ of our present experience. Although he is not always consistent, in general Paul makes a distinction between ‘body’ (*swma*) and ‘flesh’ (*sarx*). Generally, ‘body’ denotes *a being in the world* whereas ‘flesh’ denotes *a belonging to the world*. ‘...In broader terms, we could say that Paul’s distinction between *soma* and *sarx* made possible a positive affirmation of human createdness and creation and of the interdependence of humanity within its created environment.’⁸² The body, however, is mortal. Paul expresses the tension particularly in chapter 8:

But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you...We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (8:10-11, 22-23).

⁷⁹ Cranfield, 356, sees this as describing ‘two different aspects, two contemporaneous realities, of the Christian life, both of which continue so long as the Christian is in the flesh.’

⁸⁰ Dunn, *Theology*, 475.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 476. He thinks that the view which takes 7:5 as a statement of fact ‘simply promotes an idealistic and unrealistic perspective, for which post-baptismal sin is impossible in theory and theologically and pastorally disastrous in practice’ (475).

⁸² Dunn, *Theology*, 72. He continues, 73, ‘Sadly, however, this potential in Paul’s theology was soon lost as the distinction itself was lost to sight...in the “Hellenization” of Christian thought the negative overtones of fleshliness become more and more attached to human bodiness, and not least to the creative function of sexuality...Concupiscence, sexual desire, came to be regarded by definition as wicked..., original sin was thought to be transmitted by human procreation. The results of such denigration of sexuality continue to distort Christian attitudes to gender till this day. A recovery of Paul’s distinction between human bodiness, to be affirmed and rejoiced in, and human fleshliness, always to be guarded about and against, could be a major contribution to ongoing theological reflection in such areas.’

Christians live in ‘the mortal body’ which is subject to death and decay because of sin.⁸³ The mortal body will only be fully redeemed at the resurrection. Creation itself likewise shares in the consequences of the human condition. This is why the creation groans in eager anticipation of its redemption from its current futility. Christians echo the groaning of all of creation, awaiting the redemption of our bodies. Resurrection is the hope of believers and the ultimate hope of all of God’s created order.

The ‘not yet’ for Christians also includes life in the created order which itself is subject to decay (8:21). Christians suffer and are weak, in solidarity with creation itself, living as they do in mortal flesh, fashioned from the dust of the earth and as part of creation. The intended relationship of humankind to the created order, non-sentient as well as sentient, is also distorted. The ultimate redemption of creation awaits the ultimate redemption of the people of God. Furthermore, the legacy of humanity’s own participation as slaves of sin remains, a point more evident in his other epistles (see esp 1 Cor 15). For many, scripture’s teaching at this point is confirmed in existential reality. Christians remain caught in the nexus of sin and death, part of their daily experience as believers.

Thirdly, as noted above, Paul also reminds us that the cosmic opposition to God’s rule has not yet ended, even if it has already, in principle, been defeated. Although Paul’s picture is not unremittingly bleak, we live in a hostile environment in solidarity with people who remain alienated from God and a created order that is also subjected to futility. Therefore, as Stuhlmacher says, ‘although the Christian is not “a sinner and righteous at the same time”, the Christian is nonetheless “righteous and open to temptation at the same time,” and will remain this way until he or she is taken by Christ into eternal glory (cf Phil 3:20f).’⁸⁴ Appropriate attention to this eschatological tension excludes all forms of triumphalism, challenging to those in the holiness movement who tend towards sinless perfectionism.⁸⁵

But this picture of mortality, damage, and vulnerability is balanced by the ‘already’ experience of the Christian. Even in this ‘between the times’ existence, Paul is quite clear that the Christian life is not to be characterised by a divided mind: ‘To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace...But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.’ (8:6-9) Clearly, the ‘mind set on the flesh’ is an orientation of

⁸³ According to Beker, *Paul*, 288, cited by Moo, 491n104, the ‘mortal body’ is to be distinguished from the body of sin that is crucified with Christ (6:6).

⁸⁴ Stuhlmacher, 116.

⁸⁵ Fuller attention to it in charismatic circles may act as an important corrective to an ‘over-realised eschatology.’

life⁸⁶ which contrasts with the mind set on God. For Paul, these are two opposite directions, not competing interests within the same person. Those who walk according to the flesh indicate by their lives that they have their minds set, not on the will of God, but on the things of the flesh. The language here is reminiscent of that in chapter 6 where those who have died to sin are reminded that they must no longer serve sin lest they, once again, enter into slavery to it. Rather, they are to live according to the Spirit. Paul reminds them that, in contrast to their earlier condition in which he talked of the *sin that dwells within me* (7:17), now he says *the Spirit of God dwells in you* (8:9). Hence, while Christians remain in mortal/fallen flesh and retain creaturely solidarity in Adam, they are now part of the new solidarity in Christ and that is to determine their essential existence (8:10—‘If Christ is in you, then although the body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit is life because of righteousness’). The mind is set on the Spirit.

Secondly, the already of the Christian life is one in which the whole life is continuously offered to God in grateful response to the grace proffered in Christ (12:1-2). In this context, the character is transformed by the renewal of the mind (see the contrast to the darkened mind of 1:21). Although Paul does not say so in Romans 12, he elsewhere thinks of this as a process (cf Phil 3:12-15). Indeed, the remaining chapters of Romans are not just an added paraenetic section tacked on to the end of Paul’s theological section. They are an essential part of Paul’s theology, the way the new people of God are to live out their mission of reflecting the love of God to the world within their own community. Paul doesn’t say much about ‘new creation’ in Romans, but it is a major theme elsewhere in describing the already of ‘in Christ’ existence.

Thirdly, and in direct response to Dunn and Packer, it is very difficult indeed to see how 7:14, ‘I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin’, can be a description of believers in light of the indicates of chapter 6 and, in particular, ‘But thanks to God that you, having once been slaves of sin,...you, having been sent free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness’ (6:17).⁸⁷ One must take the tension between the already and the not yet with the utmost seriousness. The view outlined above does just that. Dunn’s critique borders on caricature—it is simply wrong to suggest that those who do not think Paul describes the normal Christian life in Romans 7 think that the eschatological tension is resolved in favour of eliminating the ‘not yet’. But to describe Paul’s view of the Christian life in terms of Romans 7 rather than Romans 8, as Augustine and most people in the Reformed tradition seems to me to tip the balance too far towards a pessimism which does not take full account of Paul’s optimism of grace. The Augustinian

⁸⁶ As Cranfield, *Romans*, 387 points out, Paul’s use of the term ‘flesh’ here is not quite the same as Gal 2:20. In Galatians, Paul is speaking of the continued existence of the Christian in this present life, not the mindset of the Christian. Paul warns against the ‘desires of the flesh’ in Gal 5:16.

⁸⁷ Had Paul been a modern writer, he may well have put inverted commas around ‘slaves of righteousness’ in light of what he states in Romans 8:15-17.

interpretation of Romans 7 which uses the 'wretched I' to describe the normal Christian life is open to question.

'ORIGINAL SIN' IN ROMANS

How, then, can we sum up Paul's understanding of the human condition in Romans? Perhaps a few statements with which Paul might agree might be proposed. Paul probably thinks that:

1. Sin entered the good created order through the rebellion of humankind against its creatureliness and its creator. Once this primary relationship was distorted, all other relationships were distorted. Instead of a God-centred orientation leading to shalom, humanity became self-centred and self-deceived leading to chaos.
2. Sin is *like a power* given entrance into the world through human rebellion. Once let loose in the world, sin has perverted both the flesh and the law so that humanity is enslaved to sin and the law is rendered impotent in its salvific purpose. Sin propagates itself in humanity in a parasitic fashion by clouding motivation leading to selfish behaviour and then feeding upon this relationship-distorting behaviour. Now the law is powerless to save; it can only expose sin.
3. Sin is also *like a communicable disease* in humanity. The symptoms of the disease are all-pervasive and all-encompassing in the created order. The disease affects humanity in all dimensions so that the human condition could be described as *fallen flesh*. The disease has so vitiated humankind that it is powerless in itself to heal the distorted relationship with God or to act righteously. Without intervention, the disease is always fatal.

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 7:24-25a; 8:2-4)