

**THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN JUSTIFICATION
ACCORDING TO ROMANS**

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Submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

NEW TESTAMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF J N VORSTER

FEBRUARY 2005

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INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of justification lies at the heart of great debates in Christian theology, and the Letter to the Romans lies at the heart of the discussion of justification. To a great extent, the classic confrontation between Protestants and Roman Catholics centers on justification, with Protestants defining justification as being counted righteous by faith alone and Catholics defining justification as being made righteous by faith and works (Dunn 1988a, 41, 187). The doctrine of justification is also a potential source of tension between Christians and Jews (Stendahl 1993, 41-44). In the past thirty years or so, there has been a reappraisal of this doctrine as expressed in the writings of Paul, with scholars seeking to give full credit to the original first-century context and the diversity of thought in that time (Sanders 1977; Dunn 1988a,b, 1998; Stendahl 1993; Wright 1991).

To this point, however, less attention has been given to the role of the Holy Spirit in justification. Since, as we shall see, Paul himself closely associated justification with the work of the Spirit, particularly in his foremost writing, the Letter to the Romans, an examination of this subject has the potential for bringing about greater understanding and agreement.

More than anything else, the Letter to the Romans is known for its teaching of justification by faith, and from a historic Protestant perspective it is particularly known for the proposition that justification is by faith rather than works. For many conservative Protestants, this doctrine means that salvation comes through accepting certain beliefs rather than by acts of obedience such as repentance or water baptism. For example, based on their interpretation of justification by faith, two professors at Dallas Theological Seminary denied that repentance is an integral part of Christian conversion (Hodges 1989, 145-46; Ryrie 1997, 96). Yet there is much more to the discussion of justification than the contrast between faith and works, and the letter to

the Romans presents a much richer understanding of faith than mental assent to doctrine.

The contrast in Romans is not between mental acceptance of teaching and faithful obedience to teaching. Rather, it is between the works of sinful humans and the work of God's Spirit in human hearts, in response to their faith. For Paul, only the latter is sufficient to bring about the life transformation that was central to his teaching. From his perspective, justification is not primarily a legal transaction based on propositional truth but a work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who yield to God's grace.

To understand the role of the Holy Spirit in justification according to Romans, we will first consider the construction of a contemporary theology and the value of rhetorical criticism in addressing our subject. Next, we will discuss the rhetorical situation of Romans and its socio-cultural background, including the significance of "spirit" in that context. From there, we will proceed to a more detailed analysis of the text, examining personification as an important rhetorical device in the letter and examining passages of the letter that speak particularly about the role of the Holy Spirit in justification. We will also look at other letters of Paul to find similar expressions. Finally, we will seek to integrate our findings, compare them with various theological positions on justification, and offer proposals for rethinking the doctrine within a pneumatological context.

METHODOLOGY

Before embarking upon a detailed analysis of the scriptural text, we will first discuss some problems and possibilities that face contemporary theology and briefly offer some desirable characteristics of a contemporary theology. Then we will discuss some methods by which we can investigate the letter to the Romans and related biblical texts. In particular, we will employ tools and insights of rhetorical criticism.

Constructing a Contemporary Theology

Christian theology arose in the first-century Mediterranean world in a social milieu that was dominated by the Roman Empire. To a great extent, the ancient Mediterraneans held a common worldview and value system, with significant continuity of thought from Greece to Rome (Malina and Neyrey 1996). At the same time it is possible to overstate this point, for there was considerable diversity in the ancient world and in ancient Christianity, as shown by the multiplicity of cultures, religions, philosophies, and schools of theology.

Eventually, two great strands of theology emerged in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. While there are important differences between these two traditions, to a great extent their systems are similar in their foundation and outlook. For instance, both assign equal value to Scripture and tradition, are hierarchical in church government, are based on a sacramental system administered by priests, and espouse a systematic theology that is heavily indebted to Greek philosophy in such areas as the doctrine of the trinity.

In the ancient world Christianity was situated in the Mediterranean, and in the medieval world Christianity was situated primarily in Europe. In both cases, despite diversity of language and culture there were certain unifying philosophical assumptions and worldviews. Greek and then Latin were unifying languages, and

there emerged a canon of accepted philosophical and theological writings as well as official theological pronouncements.

In contrast to the ancient and medieval worlds, we live in a society that experiences rapid change and that is increasingly diverse. Moreover, technology has enabled rapid communication and intermingling of ideas as well as economic globalization. Politically, the nations of the world can no longer operate in isolation, but they are greatly affected by the policies of other nations and of the world community.

Christianity is no longer based in the Mediterranean world or even the Western world. It must interact with and take into account the views, cultures, economics, and politics of Asia, the Islamic world, Africa, and Latin America. Pennsylvania State University professor Philip Jenkins (2002a,b) noted that the era of Western Christianity has passed, and the day of Southern Christianity—its ascendancy in Africa and Latin America—is beginning.

From biblical and medieval times, there has been an enormous paradigm shift in science and philosophy to modernism and then in the late twentieth century to postmodernism. Modernism sought to understand everything in terms of rationalism and the scientific method. As applied to religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it employed critical methods for the study of the Bible, investigated the development of dogma, and emphasized the humanistic aspects of religion. As applied to science and philosophy, it encouraged materialism, the view that matter and physical phenomena are the only reality, and naturalism, a commitment to science as the only acceptable explanation for the origin of the universe and human existence.

As philosophers began to see that rationalism could not adequately account for the full range of human experience, in the late twentieth century modernism started giving way to postmodernism, which is characterized by relativism and epistemological pessimism. As Wolfart (2000, 386) described it, postmodernism is characterized by a questioning of objective truth, empiricism, and reason.

The result of this type of thinking is a changed view of religion. Instead of analyzing religion as divinely inspired or even divinely guided, religion is typically viewed as a product of human cognition and culture. Moreover, religions are often seen as human attempts to set priorities and consolidate power within a culture. For instance, Lease (2000, 443-45) described religion as a form of ideology that advances secular purposes.

Clearly, Christian theology faces many new challenges in this era of diversity, change, globalization, and postmodern thought. At the same time, these circumstances open the door for new options in contemporary theology.

First, globalization offers the possibility of a truly global theology, one that incorporates insights from many sources. For instance, questions, concerns, and contributions from the rapidly growing churches of Africa and Latin America can enrich traditional theology.

Second, this diversity makes it possible to envision a theology that is relevant and adaptable to diverse cultures and worldviews in a way that many previous theologies have been unable to do. For instance, the traditional formulation of the doctrine of the trinity may have resonated with minds steeped in Greek philosophy, but it seems increasingly abstract and irrelevant to people today, and it inhibits interaction with and understanding by Jews and Muslims.

Third, postmodernism forces theologians to examine what underlying beliefs and motives they bring to the discussion of theology. While Christian theology cannot abandon the quest for truth, goodness, morals, and ethics, it can benefit from a more careful examination of unstated and even unconscious assumptions that theologians often bring to the table.

The shift that Jenkins (2002b, B7) has noted from Northern and Western Christianity to Southern Christianity is significant in light of the above discussion, indicating that the face of a contemporary theology may be substantially different from what many Western theologians today would expect. Southern Christians are “far more conservative” in beliefs and moral teaching, have a strong supernatural

orientation, are more interested in personal salvation than political action, and emphasize scriptural authority.

As partial substantiation of his thesis, Jenkins cited Harvard theologian Harvey Cox's book *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*. In sharp contrast to Cox's 1966 book, *The Secular City*, which discussed the rise of secularism and offered liberal theology as the most appropriate response, Cox's 1995 book documents the rapid rise of more theologically conservative, spiritually oriented, and culturally diverse forms of Christianity around the globe, especially in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and urban North America. He particularly noted that Pentecostalism, an experiential branch of Christianity, was growing by 20 million members per year, had become the fastest-growing form of worship worldwide, and had become the dominant expression of Christian worship in megacities everywhere. He concluded, "A religious renaissance of sorts is under way all over the globe.... We are definitely in a period of renewed religious vitality, another 'great awakening'" (Cox 1995, xv, xvi).

According to statistics compiled by David Barrett, editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, Pentecostals are now larger than any other Protestant group and have become the second-largest group of Christians after the Roman Catholic Church. By 2000, total Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Neo-Charismatics numbered about 524 million, which means they accounted for over one-fourth of all Christians and over 8 percent of world population, with a projected growth to over 800 million by 2025 (Barrett and Johnson 2002, 287). In addition to classical Pentecostals, these numbers include Quasi-Pentecostals, Charismatics, Post-Charismatics, and Neo-Charismatics from every denomination as well as various indigenous and independent groups, especially in Africa and China. Many of these would not identify themselves as Pentecostal or Charismatic, but they exhibit similar forms of spirituality. The point is that despite an incredible diversity of theology and ecclesiology, these rapidly growing movements are marked by the characteristics that Jenkins has identified.

With the foregoing problems and possibilities in mind, we can identify some characteristics that would be necessary or at least desirable for a theology that is truly Christian yet also truly contemporary. To do so, we must consider both the sources of Christian theology, including the Bible, and the contemporary situation of humanity, for whom theology is constructed.

Our analysis of justification will be *biblical*, as it draws from the NT, particularly the canonical writings of Paul. Since these writings are both *monotheistic and christocentric*, our theology will share these characteristics; and since they represent the apostolic tradition in early Christianity, our theology can be characterized as *apostolic*.

Our construction of theology will be *integrative*, seeking to pull together various statements of Paul in order to discern the central core of his thought, including unstated assumptions or allusions that the original writer and readers took for granted (Dunn 1998b, 17-18; Dunn 1999, 106). This does not mean that we can develop a comprehensive, systematic theology from the writings of Paul, for we must recognize the occasional nature of his letters, the diversity of his thought, and our limitations in understanding the original rhetorical situations. We can explain much of the diversity in terms of various rhetorical strategies. Thus instead of viewing Paul as inconsistent and self-contradictory, we will seek for a coherent center in his writings that will both demonstrate the essential unity of his thought and account for the diversity. Thus our analysis will be *coherent*, striving for clarity and consistency as much as possible (Campbell 1998, 94; Beker 1991, 15-16; Achtemeier 1996, 145; Moxnes 1980, 5).

In recognition that the work of the Spirit is central to Paul's soteriology (Campbell 1998, 109), our theology will be *pneumatological* or spiritual. Since Paul wrote to address specific circumstances and exigencies, Paul's teaching was more *experiential* than theoretical, more *practical* than abstract. It is apparent that his primary purpose was not to construct timeless theology but to be *relevant* to his world and to be *flexible* enough to address the diverse cultures, philosophies, and

circumstances of his world (1 Cor 9:19-23). In view of the dual trends of diversity and globalization in our world, we will strive to develop a corresponding theology for the twenty-first century. By giving attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in justification, and therefore to the life transformation that Paul envisioned, we will ensure that our theology is both experiential and practical. Since this theme is of great significance to a rapidly growing yet increasingly diverse segment of world Christianity, our theology will also be both relevant and flexible.

When we apply the foregoing considerations to the doctrine of justification, we conclude that we need to move beyond the traditional Protestant-Catholic debate, because it primarily relates to the philosophical and theological concerns of the Western medieval and early modern world. To capture the richness of the biblical treatment of justification and to be relevant to humankind in the twenty-first century, including an increasingly non-Western Christianity, we should integrate Paul's views on the effective work of the Holy Spirit into our theology.

Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical criticism seeks to understand the purpose of an utterance or writing within the overall situation in which it was created. This approach recognizes that meaning rests as much in the situation that generated the language as in the language itself.

Traditional hermeneutics focuses on the intention of the author, and while rhetorical criticism can aid in this process, it opens additional avenues of fruitful investigation. A traditional analysis would recognize that a larger context is helpful in ascertaining meaning more precisely. But the larger context does not actually change the meaning of a sentence itself; it retains essentially the same meaning in every literary analysis no matter how much we expand the linguistic context.

Rhetorical criticism reveals, however, that the meaning can change radically, depending on the rhetorical situation—not just the verbal context of the words but the

situation that evoked the words, the purpose for which the words were uttered, the effect that the words were intended or expected to have.

For example, a simple statement such as “The door is open” can have radically different meanings depending on the rhetorical situation. Under a traditional analysis, it might seem to have one “objective” meaning: A specific entrance or exit is presently in a state of being apart, not closed, so as to allow unobstructed entrance or exit. Nevertheless, it is possible to imagine circumstances in which this simple statement can have various—even opposite—meanings.

If a professor makes this statement to a timid student who is standing outside her office seeking an audience, the meaning would be, “Please come in.” If the professor makes the statement to a brash student who has intruded into the office and rudely challenged her, it would mean, “Leave at once.” If the professor and student are working together in the office and a gust of wind blows some of their papers, the statement would mean, “Please shut the door.” And these examples do not even consider possible metaphorical uses of the phrase such as we find in Col 4:3 and Rev 3:8.

Turning to biblical hermeneutics, we see the importance of examining the rhetorical situation in order to understand texts, especially occasional writings such as the letters of Paul. Vorster (1990, 109) has explained that we need to adopt an interactional model in order to analyze these letters:

Meaning does not reside ... only in the relationship of linguistic elements to one another, but also and foremostly in the interaction of speech situation and linguistic elements. The question is no longer “what does this sentence mean or say,” but rather “why is this utterance appropriate to the context and not any other,” or “what does this utterance do within this context.”

In order to construct the rhetorical situation, it is necessary to construe the audience. Once we identify the author and the implied reader, then we are in a position to reconstruct the rhetorical situation. Bitzer (1968, 6) explained that rhetorical discourse is created in response to a specific situation. He then gave what has become a much-quoted definition of the rhetorical situation:

Rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.

Postmodern thinkers have critiqued and modified Bitzer's formulation, pointing out that it presumes meaning to reside in events. Instead, Vatz (1973, 157, 161) argued, "Meaning is not discovered in situations, but *created* by rhetors.... It is only when the meaning is seen as the result of a creative act and not a discovery, that rhetoric will be perceived as the supreme discipline it deserves to be."

Vorster (1990, 126) explained that in using his interactional model, the interpreter should focus on the persuasive force of a writing. He or she should take into consideration the "need" of the rhetorical situation, the *status* of the situation, the roles of persons within the situation, and the identification of *topoi* and their relationship to the status.

In this model, the *status* refers to the subject of the deed (person involved), the definition or naming of that deed, the quality of the deed, and the questioning of the whole process (Vorster 1990, 119). The *topoi* are "abstract and general categories which function during the creation of arguments"; "tactical aids or moves used in the rhetorical situation"; "fundamental categories underlying the arguments" (124).

We can identify several reasons why rhetorical criticism can be helpful.

1. It provides a greater awareness of the difficulties associated with defining and ascertaining “objective meaning.” The significance of a text can vary with the questions that are brought to the text—and therefore with the readers who bring questions to the text. Thus, we must be humble in our claims to understand the “true meaning” and also to appreciate the multiple layers of meaning that can be present.

2. It helps us recognize that every interpreter comes with his or her own theological, cultural, and personal presuppositions, biases, and agendas. Instead of naively or disingenuously claiming to be objective interpreters, we should identify and acknowledge the distinctives of our own perspective and attempt to take them into account when interpreting the text. In so doing, we will also become adept at identifying the perspectives of others and how those perspectives affect their own analysis of the text. As Grondin (1994, 97) observed, “In order to interpret a text ... it is necessary to make our *own* situation transparent *so that* we can appreciate precisely the otherness and alterity of the text—that is, without allowing our unelucidated prejudices to dominate the text unwittingly and so conceal what is proper to it.”

3. It gives us a greater appreciation of the total situational context. Some factors are not adequately identified under traditional approaches, yet are crucial to understanding. In particular, the more recent perspectives and methods underscore the occasional nature of the letters of Paul and draw our attention to the rhetorical strategies that he employed. Without denying that Paul had a coherent theological center, we shift the focus of interpretation away from developing a systematic theology of Paul to an analysis of what particular situations he addressed in his letters, how he sought to meet particular needs, and therefore his purpose and plan in constructing his arguments.

4. We have a greater realization that a text develops a life of its own and is appropriated for different purposes.

5. We develop a greater awareness of the richness of meaning and the multiplicity of application that a text can have. We can come to have a fuller appreciation of the underlying principle of a text and how it applies.

In sum, rhetorical criticism leads us to examine a text within its social context and its rhetorical situation, rather than attempting to understand a text in the abstract. We gain a greater awareness of the perspective and motives of the author, the perspective and motives of the interpreter, and the gap between the two. We focus on what the text *does* rather than merely what it *is*. We understand what the text “means” in terms not only of the author’s originally intended meaning but also the calculated impact upon the intended audience and the practical effect upon all audiences.

Traditional approaches to biblical criticism retain great validity in their careful historical-grammatical analysis with the intent of elucidating the biblical text. At the same time, newer approaches provide for us a greater appreciation of the dynamic experience of the text. In this way, we can see that inspiration not only encompasses the original composition but also the present apprehension of the text. Through a diligent, humble, multifaceted, and holistic approach, we can apply the biblical text to the twenty-first century.

Rhetorical Devices and Figures of Speech

One way to interpret a written text is to examine the literary and rhetorical devices that it employs. This method is helpful whether we use a traditional hermeneutic or a newer hermeneutic.

Traditional hermeneutical approaches, whether of rhetorical criticism in general or biblical criticism in particular, focus on the intent of the speaker or author (Brock, Scott, and Chesebro 1990, 28):

The traditional critic is likely to see the historical approach as posing such questions as, “What strategies or rhetorical principles or ideas does the speaker employ in making messages?” “How did the speaker adapt to the audience?”... The interaction is consistently viewed through the speaker’s eyes.

In a traditional critical investigation of Romans, the reader will ask why the author, Paul, chose certain words and phrases and what he intended to communicate by them. Since rhetorical devices and figures of speech represent a somewhat exceptional or unusual use of words, they indicate that the author had some special purpose that deserves further investigation.

Newer hermeneutical approaches emphasize the relationship between text and reader. Meaning does not simply reside in the author's original intent but in the interaction of writer, reader, context, and society. Reader response is a vital component of meaning (Moore 1995, 143-44):

The New Hermeneutic views God's word as being the poetic word par excellence. As a result the word of God is held to reside not in the biblical text as such so much as in what the meaning of the text shows itself to be in the impact it makes.... The task of biblical scholarship must be to deal with the obstacles which in different ways impede or distort impact. The aim of enquiry must be to make of the text "what really lets it count."... If meaning is impact, ... then meaning is epitomised in reader response.

Here also, rhetorical devices and figures of speech are important, because to a disproportionate extent they carry the "poetic" meaning or impact of a text. The reader responds not just to the sum of meanings of a collection of words but to the manner in which the words combine and interact to create a unique, immediate impression—and rhetorical devices typically make an impact in an effective and concise way.

Regardless of the hermeneutical approach that we employ, a study of figures of speech is helpful, for they use words in a special, nonliteral way to "achieve an effect beyond the range of ordinary language" (Pickett 1992). As such, they can reveal the author's intention to emphasize a certain point, and they can have a significant impact upon the reader's perception and understanding.

Personification

One noteworthy figure of speech is personification. Since it appears prominently in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, it is a helpful tool for analyzing and understanding the letter.

Personification is "a figure of speech in which inanimate objects or abstractions are endowed with human qualities or are represented as possessing human form" (Pickett 1992). Ancient theorists of rhetoric, including Aristotle, Demetrius, and Quintilian, pointed out that "portraying inanimate things/concepts as animate makes the matter quite vivid" (Anderson 1999, 155-56, citing Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.11.3-4; Demetrius *Eloc.* 81; Quintilian *Inst.* 8.6.11-12.). Accordingly, Anderson (1999, 156) has urged us not "to miss the striking vividness of Paul's personification of abstract concepts."

In particular, since personification projects human activity onto something inanimate, it leads people to think of the thing personified as having consciousness, intention, will, and agency. Consequently, the personified object loses its neutrality, enters the realm of human interaction, and obtains power to evoke human emotions.

Because personification can attach strong emotions to abstract ideas, it can promote clear identifications, distinctions, and choices in areas that people might otherwise regard as somewhat metaphysical or speculative. By "humanizing" intangible concepts, personification conduces to focusing on ultimate realities and uniting in a common cause. For instance, a highly successful poster for recruiting volunteers for the United States military in World War II showed a man personifying the country. He pointed a finger at the observer and said, "Uncle Sam Wants You," thereby evoking feelings of loyalty and patriotism.

In this regard, it is important to understand personification in the ancient context. In the first-century Mediterranean world of Paul's letter to the Romans, people were "strongly group-embedded, collectivist persons.... They were used to asserting themselves and others in terms of stereotypes often explained as deriving

from family ‘history’ and the geographical location of their group” (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 16-17). Since they were prone to think in collectivist terms, any use of personification to emphasize group identity and solidarity was undoubtedly quite effective. As we will see, Romans indeed uses personification to unite believers in firm resolve against the personified enemies of the human race and particularly of the church.

Moreover, Paul’s world placed great value on external behavioral controls and expected people to conform to group norms. Indeed, one of the four classical virtues was σωφροσύνη (*sōphrosynē*)—temperance, self-control, or sense of shame (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 30, 186, 199). Much of Romans deals with the struggle to follow God’s righteousness and holiness instead of individual sin and lust. Again, we will see that by personification, Romans is able to discuss in a “personal” way how believers can interact with powerful forces in their lives so as to achieve godly control and balance.

RHETORICAL SITUATION OF ROMANS

To analyze the rhetorical situation of Romans it is helpful to use Kenneth Burke's pentad of Act, Agent, Agency, Scene, and Purpose (Brock, Scott, and Chesebro 1990, 187).

Act

Act refers to the letter and its effect. It is important to understand that Romans is a letter. Although it is often approached as a doctrinal treatise, it was written to a specific local audience for a particular purpose. While it undoubtedly has many theological implications, we must not forget its occasional nature in our attempt to understand its message.

Agent

Agent refers to the author and audiences (both explicit and implied). The undisputed author of Romans is Paul, the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles. To understand his concerns, it is essential to realize that he was a man of the first-century Mediterranean world, and as such he was a member of a collectivist culture. Therefore, an individualistic reading, focusing on personal guilt and angst, would be foreign to the rhetorical situation.

As explained by Malina and Neyrey (1996, 199, 203), the defining attributes of collectivist cultures are family integrity, solidarity, and keeping the primary in-group in "good health." Thus Paul was "totally group oriented, faithful and obedient, seeking God's honor and group benefits." They have offered an explanation of his motivation and his conversion that would be consistent with his cultural identity (205-6):

Paul's life is characterized, then, by a formation in and dedication to a disciplined way of living as a follower of God's will. He boasts only of his excellence in assimilating the education and discipline into which he was socialized. For he is at core a group-oriented person, not an individualist....

What is the origin of the obvious change in Paul's behavior from persecutor to preacher? ... The change in his life was mandated to him from the outside, by God who revealed new information to him.... He was transformed from being a figure who defended God's honor by applying sanctions to those deviants whom he believed challenged God's honor, to one who defended that same honor by proclaiming a gospel given to him directly by God.

Stendahl (1993, 4) similarly noted the importance of understanding Paul as a collectivist. He has argued that instead of seeing Paul's doctrine of justification as trying to answer the question, "How can I find a gracious God?" we should see it as a defense of "the right of the Gentiles to be included in the consummation and redemption now underway—by faith."

Paul wrote to the Christian community in Rome (Rom 1:7), which was primarily Gentile although there were some Jews also. It is clear that he had the Gentile Christians primarily in mind. For example, in Rom 11:13, he explicitly addressed Gentiles. The encoded explicit readers, then, are the Gentile Christians in Rome.

As will become apparent in our examination of the letter to the Romans, one important aspect of the Greco-Roman culture for these Gentile Christians was Stoicism. It was a prominent philosophy that provided some answers to the types of concerns that Christians had. Consciously or unconsciously, Paul interacted with Stoic thought in formulating his own answers to these questions. Kolenda (1974, 59-61) has stated the basic ideas of Stoic philosophy as follows:

Everything that occurs happens necessarily and is governed by reason.... The objective of thought is to discover our role in the scheme of things. That role has to fit in with the rest of our surroundings. Reason, then, is seen as the fate, or providence, which assigns to us the particular role we are to play. A wise man will recognize this role and accept it.... The highest moral asset for a Stoic is self-control. He will not be aroused; neither the images of bliss nor the spectacles of suffering move him.... [The Stoic says,] I cannot control my fate, but I can control my *attitude* to that fate; let me be, therefore, courageous and self-possessed.... The Stoic's mind is controlled by reason alone.

Stowers (1994, 42-43) explained that the theme of self-mastery must have been highly significant for the ancient readers of Romans. "Only the Spirit of Christ, not the law, can liberate those enslaved to these passions and desires.... Self-mastery as a personal, social, and theological problem is the most palpable issue of chapters 1-8."

He further explained, "The dominant view in Greco-Roman culture held that desires in themselves were not bad but dangerous, powerful, and prone to act independently of rational control." Accordingly, moderation and restraint were important values. Most thinkers did not believe that it was possible to eradicate immoral passions and desires. "Rather, one had to subdue them, as a ruler would subjugate a rebellious province or a master a belligerent slave" (Stowers 1994, 47-48).

From this perspective, it appears that Paul's Judaizing opponents saw the law as a means to self-mastery. In this context, Paul's purpose in writing Romans was not to address Augustine's concern about "human agency versus divine grace" or Luther's concern about "individual dependence on God's grace versus dependence on the human institutions of the church." Instead, he presented God's answer to the question of self-mastery (Stowers 1994, 66, 82).

The encoded implicit readers of Romans are the ideal or competent readers. We can ascertain from the letter itself what the reader is assumed to understand or be like. For instance, the letter assumes Greco-Roman culture, some knowledge of Jewish Scripture, and some knowledge of Paul and his ministry. While the readers were members of Roman society and culture, they were also members of a relatively small sect that saw itself as distinct from the surrounding society.

As such, a social dynamic was at work, as described by Elliot (1993, 80). Sectarian communities emerge as “a protest group within a larger corporate entity” and gradually become marginalized and dissociated from the original group. At this point, they experience “social disapproval, harassment, and pressures urging conformity.” Consequently, they develop strategies for “asserting their collective identity, assuring internal social cohesion, and maintaining ideological commitment.” They conceive of themselves as a specially chosen group with a superior understanding of truth, a superior moral code, and a unique identity. They are conscious of a clear separation from the outside world and expect strong commitment from those within the group.

Agency

Agency includes social mechanisms, letter writing, and special literary forms. While Romans is a literary composition, its primary effect was in its oral reading. Paul did not write it as a treatise to be handed from individual to individual and read silently. Instead, it was “written to be read orally to the congregation.... The letter was created orally, transcribed by a literate member of Paul’s local group, delivered by a handpicked Pauline emissary, and performed orally by the deliverer of the letter, using all the tools of the Hellenistic orator’s trade” (Yaghjian 1996, 217).

Scene

Scene is the setting, the socio-historical situation. The Roman church apparently began among Jews, probably from Jews who had received the Holy Spirit

on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). In AD 49, Emperor Claudius had ordered the Jews to be expelled from Rome, and so the Roman church presumably lost most of its Jewish constituency, including, for example, Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2). Under Emperor Nero, Jews were allowed to return to Rome, and by the time of Paul's letter, apparently there were a number of Jewish Christians in Rome again (Stendahl 1993, 13). For instance, by the time of the letter Priscilla and Aquila had returned to Rome and were church leaders there (Rom 16:3-5).

In identifying the scene, we should note the ancient Greco-Roman concept of "spirit" and the connection between blood and spirit, which forms a backdrop to the letter. We will develop this thought in the next chapter.

Purpose

The immediate purpose of the letter was to inform and assure the Roman believers of Paul's intention and plan to visit them soon (Rom 1:11-13). Aside from this immediate occasion for writing, Paul evidently had a larger purpose in mind. As the recognized apostle to the Gentiles, he desired to give an orderly, comprehensive statement of the gospel to the church in the foremost Gentile city. Through this doctrinal presentation he sought to gain the support of their prayers and other assistance for his missionary endeavors (Rom 15:24, 30). More importantly, he wanted to safeguard them against false doctrines and to enlist them in the defense of the truth.

In this connection, the recent return of Jewish Christians to Rome may have figured prominently. Apparently, there was some tension in the Roman church over their reintegration. The Gentile believers were no longer disposed to make special accommodations for Jewish Christians but apparently expected them to join in the practices of the larger group and abandon practices that, in their view, unnecessarily set them apart from the Gentiles all around them. In this setting, it seems that Paul wrote to help unite Jew and Gentile into one body and ward off future inroads by Judaizers. Morgan (1995, 64) noted, "It seems likely that the recently returned Jewish

Christians and the Gentile Christians belonged in different house-churches with little contact, and it is not hard to believe that one of Paul's purposes in writing was to bring about some rapprochement between them."

For example, Rom 14 deals with ceremonial practices under the Jewish law, such as observance of holy days and dietary regulations. Paul admonished those who kept such observances not to condemn those who did not, and he admonished those who did not keep them not to ridicule those who did.

Den Heyer (2000, 248-49) has elaborated on this point, concluding that Paul's main purpose in Romans was to bring Jews and Gentiles together. Specifically, the purpose was to encourage the integration of Jews, rather than Gentiles, into the one body. In Rome, Gentile Christians were in leadership, and they possibly viewed the returning Jewish Christians with some suspicion. Paul had received information that the Roman church was somewhat divided, and as a Jew he was naturally concerned to make room for the Jews. The result was the Roman letter, "a marvelous combination of theoretical views, personal reflections and contextual theology."

Relationships in the Pentad

In examining the rhetorical situation, we should consider the relationships between the elements of Burke's pentad, such as between act and agent, act and agency, and so on. Indeed, to some extent we have already done so. For instance, we have examined the relationship between the act (letter) and the agents (Paul and the readers) as collectivists and as influenced by Stoic thought. We have also looked at how the scene (return of Jews to Rome) affected the purpose.

In discussing the relationships among the elements of Burke's pentad, it is helpful to compare and contrast the rhetorical situation of Romans to that of Galatians. As Morgan (1995, 148) noted, "Despite their considerable differences the best key to reading Romans is Galatians." Both books teach the same essential message: Both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith; therefore, Gentiles do not have to keep the law of Moses.

In Galatians, Paul counteracted Judaizers from Jerusalem who were infiltrating churches he had established in Galatia and who taught that all Gentiles had to conform to the Jewish law. Exercising his apostolic authority as founder of the churches in this region, Paul argued that the universal church, which had begun within Judaism, needed to accept the Gentiles as members without requiring them to keep the Mosaic law.

In Romans, he did not have the same authority over his audience, and thus the letter is not polemical. Morgan (1995, 72) explained, “He could make this argument direct when writing to churches he had founded, and reasserting his apostolic authority. Rome was different. He had no standing beyond his apostolic commission and can only proclaim his message in positive terms. The negative implication is subdued.” Moreover, as we have already seen from the discussions of Morgan and Den Heyer, the immediate situation in Romans apparently involved the reintegration of Jews into what had become an essentially Gentile church.

Integrating the various aspects of the rhetorical situation that we have discussed, Stowers (1994, 36) concluded that Paul’s primary purpose in Romans was to explain to Gentile Christians how they should relate to the Jewish law. While they should accept Jewish Christians into their fellowship, they should not follow the Jewish law in seeking acceptance from God and unity in the church. In their cultural understanding, self-mastery was a primary goal for their spiritual life, and the Jewish law could have been seen as an attractive means to this goal, but Paul proclaimed that, instead, they could only attain the desired self-mastery by faith in Christ and the work of his Spirit in their lives.

Stowers further maintained from Rom 16 that Paul primarily greeted slaves and freed persons. Most of the readers were foreigners in Roman society, as shown by their names, which are mostly Greek, and they had associated themselves with Judaism. Moreover, there were a disproportionate number of prominent women. In short, most of the readers were outsiders or people of lower status in their society, and consequently they felt a greater than average need to succeed socially and to

demonstrate that success. Stowers (1994, 79) concluded, “Romans ... seeks to convince such people that the Jewish law holds neither hope of self-mastery nor righteousness before God.”

Overview of Romans

Finally, when considering a particular passage in Romans, we must understand how it fits into the overall literary context of the letter. Paul’s Letter to the Romans begins with a prologue (1:1-17), which consists of a greeting, an expression of his personal interest, and a statement of the theme. We find the theme of the letter in Rom 1:16-17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’”¹ At its most basic, we may identify the theme of the letter as “the gospel” rather than justification, for “it is only in 1:18-4:25 that justification is highlighted in Romans” (Moo 1996, 29).

In the body of Romans, Paul first discussed the sinfulness of both Jews and Gentiles and their corresponding need for God’s righteousness (1:18-3:20). In the second major segment of the body, he presented the means of participation in the righteousness of God, namely, justification by faith (3:21-5:21). Third, Paul described the believer’s life—the life of holiness that results from receiving God’s righteousness (6:1-8:39). In the process he elaborated on the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life. The fourth topic is the condition of Israel (9:1-11:36)—specifically, Israel’s rejection of God’s righteousness in relation to past, present, and future. The didactic portion of the letter concludes with practical exhortations for Christian living (12:1-15:13). The letter ends with Paul’s reason for writing, his personal plans, greetings from Paul and his companions, admonitions, and praise to God (15:14-16:27).

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise identified.

“SPIRIT” IN THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL SITUATION

Since, as we will argue, the reception of the Holy Spirit is central to Paul’s concept of justification, it is important to explore the meaning of “spirit” in the ancient world. In the OT, the Hebrew word *ruach* meant “wind, breath, mind, spirit.” The basic idea was “air in motion,” and the connotations included power and courage. It came to denote “the entire immaterial consciousness of man” as well as a supernatural being (Harris 1980, 2:836). With respect to God, the Spirit of Yahweh was not a distinct entity from Yahweh but was Yahweh’s active presence and power.² The term refers to “God’s power—the personal activity in God’s will achieving a moral and religious object, ... the active principle that proceeds from God and gives life to the physical world” (Ladd 1993, 323).

In ancient Greco-Roman culture, the basic meaning of “spirit” (Greek πνεῦμα, *pneuma*) was “blowing, breathing, wind, breath, life-spirit.” It was also used for “what gives life to the body” or to “the source and seat of insight, feeling, and will, gener. as the representative part of the inner life of man” (Bauer et al. 1979, 674-75).

The Greeks could speak of *pneuma* as divine—“not in the sense of a personal holy spirit but as immanent.” The Stoics thought of *pneuma* as “a cosmic power or substance, and as such it may be seen as the being or manifestation of deity itself” (Kittel and Friedrich 1985, 877). They believed that it was universal; it “interpenetrated all the visible world.” More generally, in Hellenistic scientific and philosophical thought “*pneuma* as a physical or physiological term remain[ed] essentially materialistic and vitalistic” (Ladd 1993, 323).

There are some parallels in Greco-Roman thought for the NT use of *pneuma* to refer to God’s Spirit (Keener 1997, 7-8). Plato (c. 428 – c. 347 B.C.) spoke of *pneuma* as the inspiration for poetry and prophecy. Quintilian (c. A.D. 35 – c. 95)

² See, for example, Gen 1:2; Ps 104:30; Isa 59:19-21; 61:1.

noted that some thought God was a spirit (*spiritum*), and similar to Plato, Plutarch (c. A.D. 46 – 120) used *pneuma* for the divine spirit that inspires prophecy.

In the NT, “God is spirit” (John 4:24). Holiness forms the basic of God’s moral nature while spirituality forms the basis of God’s nonmoral nature, so the title “Holy Spirit” designates the invisible God, the Holy One. It particularly describes the one God in spiritual essence and action—performing miracles, guiding people, speaking to them, giving them words to say, dwelling in them, and empowering them for service.³ In the Gospel of John, the Spirit gives believers a spiritual birth (3:5), comes to dwell in them in a new way under the new covenant (7:38-39), and is the presence of the ascended Christ in the lives of believers (14:16-18).

For Paul, the Spirit of God pours love into the hearts of believers, dwells in them, imparts life, leads, adopts, bears witness, makes intercession, sanctifies, empowers, teaches, bestows spiritual gifts, and produces spiritual fruit.⁴ The risen Christ “is identified with the life-giving Spirit of God. . . . Christ is experienced in and through, even *as* the life-giving Spirit” (Dunn 1998b, 262-64).⁵

In discussing the role of the Spirit in Paul’s writings, we should note the ancient Hellenistic connection between blood and spirit. To do so, let us briefly trace these concepts in ancient biology and medicine.

Hippocrates of Kos (c. 460 – c. 370 B.C.), the father of Greek medicine, taught that the body contains four basic fluids or humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. His approach to health was to keep these four humors in proper balance. From this notion comes the practice of bloodletting in an attempt to regulate health. Of the four humors, the ancient Greeks considered blood to be by far the most important—indeed, essential to life (Meletis 2002, 19-23).

In addition to these four humors, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) spoke of a fifth vital essence, *pneuma*, which comes from the atmosphere into the lungs and from there to the heart. He regarded *pneuma* as “the breath of life that gives soul to varying

³ See, for example, Matt 1:18, 20; 3:11; 10:20; Luke 1:35, 67; 2:25-27; 4:1, 18; John 14:17, 26; Acts 1:4-8; 2:4, 38.

⁴ Rom 5:5, 8:9-11, 14-16, 26; 15:16, 19; 1 Cor 2:13; 12:3-11; Gal 5:22-23.

⁵ See 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 3:17.

degrees. In higher creatures outward *pneuma* is added to inner *pneuma*. Both moving and moved, it brings warmth and directs and sustains the body in its movements and experiences” (Kittel and Friedrich 1985, 878). In its highest form, *pneuma* distinguishes humans from other living things, for it make intelligent thought possible. In addition, *pneuma* mediates between the soul and body to cause motion. The heart distributes *pneuma* to the rest of the body; thus, the heart is the seat of the rational soul (Aristotle *Gen. an.*, *Mot. an.* 2.3-4). The *pneuma*-driven motion of blood in the body causes emotions; for instance, anger is caused by the boiling of blood around the heart (*Mot. an.* 1.1).

Aristotle (*De an.* 1.19, 22, 2.2) further taught that human children are conceived by the union of semen from the father and menstrual blood from the mother. Semen is formed from *pneuma* (air/spirit), and it contributes the principle of motion to the child.

Erasistratus of Chios (c. 304 – c. 250 B.C.) held that *pneuma* from the atmosphere enters the lungs and is converted into “vital spirit.” This *pneuma* is distributed throughout the body by the arteries.

In the Hellenistic Judaism of Philo (c. 20 B.C. – c. A.D. 50), “blood and *pneuma* are the soul’s essence. The nonrational soul has blood as its essence; the rational soul, which is distinctively human, has *pneuma*. *Pneuma* is the impress of divine power that begets thought” (Kittel and Friedrich 1985, 882; see Philo *Alleg. Interp.* 12-13, *Creation* 1.46).

Galen of Pergamum (A.D. c. 131 – c. 201) was considered the ancient authority on human physiology. Drawing from the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Erasistratus, he described the body as consisting of three connected systems—the brain and nerves, the heart and arteries, and the liver and veins. He maintained that the fundamental principle of life is *pneuma*, which comes into the body through breathing and takes on three distinct forms in the body.

First, blood originates in the liver, where it mixes with *pneuma* to form the “natural spirit.” This first form of pneuma-charged blood has the power of nutrition,

and it flows to the body through the veins. Next, some of this blood enters the heart, where it mixes with more *pneuma*, drawn from the outside by inhalation, to form the “vital spirit.” This second form of *pneuma*-charged blood flows through the arteries to give activity to the body. Finally, some of this blood is further refined at the base of the brain and charged with the third and highest form of *pneuma*, resulting in the “animal spirit.” This *pneuma*-charged blood flows through the nerves to give sensation and thought. In short, blood carries *pneuma*, the life spirit, which gives blood its red color (Mayeaux 2004; see Galen *Nat. Fac.* 3.14-15).

While it is not necessary to suppose that either Paul or his readers embraced any of the foregoing physiological schemes, we see that in the ancient Greco-Roman world there was a close association of blood and spirit. Both were deemed essential to physical life, and for some purposes the terms were almost interchangeable. Accordingly, this terminology was available for Paul to employ in presenting his theological message.

In a way, then, we could speak of the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of Jesus Christ,⁶ as “personifying” the blood of Jesus. As we shall discuss, in Romans the blood of Jesus is necessary for justification, or Christian initiation.⁷ Here we see parallels to the role of blood in birth, the role of bloodletting in purification rituals, and the role of blood in initiation rites of the mystery religions. At the same time, this concept is quite compatible with the Spirit’s playing a prominent role in justification and Christian initiation.

The Spirit continues to be important in the life of Christians, so that we can regard justification by the Spirit as a kind of blood transfusion that enables new life. Moreover, in Greco-Roman thought, a healthy person would have a balance of the four humors and would especially have pure blood. A perfect person would have a proper balance of spirit and would live a self-controlled life. Thus, an infusion of pure blood and pure spirit could serve as a metaphor for initiation into a new spiritual life characterized by self-control, balance, and virtue.

⁶ Acts 16:7; Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19.

⁷ Rom 3:25; 4:25; 5:9. See also Eph 1:7; Col 1:14.

PERSONIFICATION IN ROMANS

With the rhetorical situation of Romans in mind, let us turn to a more detailed analysis of the letter itself. We will first look at its use of personification, which provides important insights for the purpose and meaning of the letter. We will find that personification presents the problems and solutions of Christian life in “personal” rather than abstract, philosophical, or forensic terms. It emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit to give believers victory over sin and death, lead them into new life, and transform them from sinners into saints.

Personification is significant only in chs. 5-8. There appears to be very little personification in chs. 1-4 or 9-16.⁸ It occurs several times in ch. 5, a transitional chapter, but it is prominent in chs. 6-8.

Why this striking pattern of usage? The answer seems to be related to the subject matter of the respective chapters. In chs. 1-5, Paul dealt primarily with justification and used logically formulated arguments to establish that both Jews and Gentiles are justified on the same basis, namely, by faith. In chs. 9-16, we find a discussion of the condition of Israel (9-11) as related to the argument of chs. 1-8, practical guidelines for Christian living and relationships in the church (12-15), and closing remarks (15-16).

Chapter 5 is transitional. Some commentators, such as Dunn (1988a, viii), view it as concluding the previous section. Others, including Moo (1996, v), view it as introducing the next section. Either way, the minor use of personification in this chapter demonstrates its transitional nature from chs. 1-4 (little or no personification) to chs. 6-8 (heavy personification).

In contrast to chs. 1-5, chs. 6-8 discuss basic principles for the present life of believers. This section is “more in the nature of exhortation and teaching” and deals

⁸ Possible examples are “Scripture says” (Rom 9:17; 10:11; 11:2) and personification of the nation of Israel (Rom 9:6, 31; 10:19; 11:2, 7, 11, 26). However, these personifications seem to be conventional and therefore do not convey unique imagery, vividness, or emphasis.

with its subject “pastorally rather than argumentatively” (Anderson 1999, 241) This section of the letter is most directly relevant to the daily life of Christians, and it uses personification to portray vividly the central features of that life and to assist the reader in applying them personally.

Moreover, chs. 6-8, and particularly ch. 8, contain the most rhetorical devices and the greatest rhetorical intensity of the entire letter. In this regard, it is important to remember that “the NT documents . . . are oral to the core, both in their creation and in their performance” (Achtmeier 1990, 3-27). Thus, “‘reading’ implies hearing, and the authors of the NT writings wrote for ‘reader’s ears’ (Polybius 6.38.4.4), not merely for their eyes” (Yaghjian 1996, 211). Specifically, Paul dictated Romans to a scribe named Tertius (Rom 16:22), so the composition of the letter was primarily oral. As we have already discussed, it was intended to be read aloud to the original audience.

In Rom 6-8, Paul used an abundance of rhetorical devices, including personification, simile, metonymy, rhetorical question, anaphora (repetition of beginning words) polysyndeton (multiple use of connectives), prosopopeia (speech-in-character), *aitiologia* (short inquiring question answered by the speaker), *paradeigma* (example), *klimax* (chain), and *metabolē* (self-correction).⁹

Romans 8:31-39 is particularly noteworthy for its rhetorical devices, which draw attention to the entire passage. The following examples illustrate this point:

- Rhetorical question: “What then ...?” etc. (vv. 31-34).
- Anaphora: repetition of τίς (*tis*, “who”) (vv. 33-35).
- *Metabolē*: “It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised” (v. 34). The Greek says μᾶλλον δε (*mallon de*), literally, “but rather.”
- Metonymy: “the sword,” for capital punishment or the power of the state (v. 35).

⁹ Examples: *aitiologia* (6:1), *paradeigma* (7:2-3), prosopopeia (7:7-25), *klimax* (8:29-30); other examples follow.

- *Aitiologia*: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (vv. 35, 37).
- Personification: “Who will separate us ...? Will hardship, or distress ...?” (v. 35).
- Polysyndeton: repetition of ἢ (ē, “or”) (v. 35), repetition of οὐτε (*oute*, “nor”) (vv. 38-39).
- Simile: “as sheep to be slaughtered” (v. 36).

L. T. Johnson (1997, 133) stated, “Romans 8:31-39 is rightly regarded as one of the most stunning pieces of rhetorical art in the New Testament.” Dunn (1988a, 497-99) spoke of Rom 8:31-39 as the conclusion of Rom 1-8 and indeed the center of the entire letter: “8:31-39 serves to sum up the whole argument to this point.... ‘In this victory song of salvation assurance the whole letter has its center’ (Schmidt).” Concerning the opening question of v. 31, τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν πρὸς ταῦτα (*ti oun eroumen pros tauta*, “What then are we to say about these things?”), Dunn (1988a, 499) commented:

The question obviously introduces a conclusion, certainly to the final section 8:18-30, but since 8:18-30 is itself the climatic conclusion of the whole sequence of chaps. 6-8 ... the ταῦτα [*tauta*, these things] can be taken to refer to the whole developed line of argument in chaps. 6-8; and since 8:18-30 effectively rounds off the whole argument so far (1:18-8:30) ... it is not going too far ... to refer the ταῦτα [*tauta*] to the whole.

In short, personification serves as one of several rhetorical devices that highlight Rom 6-8. It draws attention to this section and particularly to the concluding portion of this section, which caps the discussion of the letter (at least to this point, if

not overall). While several rhetorical devices help draw attention to 8:31-39, personification stands out as the premier figure of speech in chs. 6-8 and arguably in the letter as a whole. As such, it focuses the reader's attention on this section.

If we investigate authorial intent, we can conclude that Paul used personification extensively in Rom 6-8 to focus attention on this part of his argument and to make it as vivid as possible. Even if he did not consciously construct the letter with such a preconceived method, as he dictated the letter to Tertius we can imagine him spontaneously employing effective rhetorical methods to impress the message upon his hearers, much like a preacher reaching the climax or the application of his or her message. In some sense, then, Paul must have regarded this portion of the letter as most directly relevant to the life of his readers and most needful for them to apply personally and act upon directly.

If we focus on reader impact, we again note that personification draws the reader's attention to this part of Romans. Without discounting other sections of the letter, we can nevertheless recognize that chs. 6-8 make a unique impact upon the reader, largely because of the distinctive use of personification in this section. By analyzing the use of personification we can better appreciate the significance of this passage and its contribution to the letter as a whole.

Studying Oppositions to the Things Personified

In almost every instance of personification in Romans, we find that the thing personified is set in opposition to something else. These oppositions serve to further emphasize and clarify the concept being discussed. In his text on structural exegesis, Patte (1990, 25) explains why a study of oppositions can help elucidate meaning:

What do we do when we want to avoid being misunderstood? Quite often we are not content to state what we want to communicate; we also stipulate *what we do not mean to say*, so as to remove any ambiguity. In other words, we more or less spontaneously set an *opposition* between what we

actually want to say and what we do not want to say.... The *explicit opposition of actions* ... most directly reflect and express the author's convictions. By studying these opposed actions, we can therefore identify characteristics of the system of convictions that, in a religious discourse, the author aims at communicating to the readers, and that the theme of the discourse unit also expresses.

While we are concerned primarily with rhetorical analysis, we will employ the above insight from the theory of structural exegesis. Consequently we will look at both the things personified and the things set in opposition to them. When we do, we find that the use of personification coupled with the oppositions highlights the spiritual warfare that is at the heart of Paul's discussion in Rom 6-8.

Instances of Personification in Romans

In order to analyze the use of personification in Romans, we list each instance. The thing being personified is placed in italics. When there is a significant opposition, it is identified. There are arguably a few additional instances of personification not listed here, but we have chosen to discuss only unambiguous examples, and they adequately represent any other possibilities not identified here.

Chapter 5

Verse 14. "*Death* exercised dominion [reigned] from Adam to Moses."

Opposition: grace (v. 15).

Verse 17: "*Death* exercised dominion through that one [man]." Opposition: "Those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."

Verse 21a: "*Sin* exercised dominion in death." The opposition is with the following personification.

Verse 21b: “So *grace* might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Chapter 6

Verse 6a: “*Our old self* was crucified with him.” Opposition: new life in Christ (vv. 8-11).

Verse 6b: “So that ... we might no longer be enslaved to *sin*.” Opposition: God (v. 13).

Verse 9: “*Death* no longer has dominion over him.” Opposition: life (v. 10).

Verse 12: “Do not let *sin* exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.” Opposition: God (v. 13).

Verse 13: “No longer present your members to *sin* as instruments of wickedness.” Opposition: God.

Verse 14: “*Sin* will have no dominion over you.” Opposition: grace.

Verse 16a: “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of *sin*, which leads to death ...?” The opposition follows.

Verse 16b: “... or of *obedience*, which leads to righteousness?”

Verse 17a: “You, having once been slaves of *sin* ...” The opposition follows.

Verse 17b: “... have become obedient from the heart to *the form of teaching* to which you were entrusted.”

Verse 18: “You ... have become slaves of *righteousness*.” Opposition: *sin*.

Verse 19a: “For just as you once presented your members as slaves to *impurity and to greater and greater iniquity* ...” The opposition follows.

Verse 19b: “... so now present your members as slaves to *righteousness* for sanctification.”

Verse 20: “You were slaves of *sin*.” Opposition: God (v. 22).

Verse 22: “You have been freed from *sin* and enslaved to God.” Opposition: God.

Chapter 7

Verse 4: “You have died to *the law* through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.” Opposition: “to him who has been raised from the dead,” i.e., Christ.

Verse 5a: “While we were living in the flesh, our *sinful passions*, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.” Opposition: “the new life of the Spirit” (v. 6).

Verse 5b: “Our sinful passions, aroused by *the law*, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.” Opposition: “the new life of the Spirit” (v. 6).

Verse 6: “But now we are discharged from *the law*, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.” Opposition: “the new life of the Spirit.”

Verse 7: “I would not have known what it is to covet if *the law* had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’” Opposition: “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” which “has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (8:2). This opposition is implied throughout ch. 7, including the following personifications.

Verse 8a: “But *sin*, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.”

Verse 8b: “Apart from the law *sin* lies dead.”

Verse 9a: “When the *commandment* came ...”

Verse 9b: “... *sin* revived [sprang to life].”

Verse 10: “The very *commandment* that promised life proved to be death to me.”

Verse 11: “*Sin*, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.”

Verse 13a: “Did *what is good* [i.e., *the law*, v. 12], then, bring death to me?” The opposition follows.

Verse 13b: It was *sin*, working death in me through what is good, [that brought death to me].”

Verse 17: “It is no longer I that do it, but *sin* that dwells in me.” Opposition: I.

Verse 20: “Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but *sin* that dwells within me.” Opposition: I.

Verse 21: “When I want to do what is good, *evil* lies close at hand.”

Opposition: good.

Verse 23a: “I see in my members *another law* at war ...” The opposition follows.

Verse 23b: “... at war [waging war] with *the law of my mind* ...”

Verse 23c: “... making me captive to *the law of sin* that dwells in my members.” Opposition: “the law of my mind.”

Verse 25a: “So then, with my mind I am a slave to *the law of God* ...” The opposition follows.

Verse 25b: “... but with my flesh I am a slave to *the law of sin*.”

Chapter 8

Verse 2a: “The *law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* has set you free ...” The opposition follows.

Verse 2b: “... from the *law of sin and of death*.”

Verse 3: “For God has done what *the law*, weakened by the flesh, could not do.” Opposition: God.

Verse 7: “For this reason *the mind that is set on the flesh* is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot.” Opposition: the mind that is set on the Spirit.

Verse 19: “The *creation* waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.”

Verse 20: “For the *creation* was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope.”

Verse 21: “The *creation* itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Verse 22: “The whole *creation* has been groaning in labor pains until now.”

Verse 35: “*Who* will separate us from the love of Christ? Will *hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*” Opposition: Nothing can separate us from “the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 39).

General Analysis of Personification in Romans 5-8

What concepts are personified in Rom 5-8? Based on the forty-nine instances we have identified, we find the following occurrences of personification: death (three), sin or the law of sin or another synonym for sin (twenty-three), grace, the old self, obedience, righteousness (two), teaching, the law of God or a synonym (nine), the law of the mind, the law of the Spirit, the fleshly mind, creation (four), and hardship of various kinds. We note that the personification is something bad or evil twenty-nine times (sin, death, the old self, the fleshly mind, hardships), something weak or inadequate in the face of evil fourteen times (the law of God, the law of the mind, and creation), and something both good and powerful six times (grace, obedience, righteousness, teaching, the law of the Spirit).

The oppositions of the negative personifications are the Spirit, the law of the Spirit, God, Christ, grace, those who receive grace and righteousness through Jesus Christ, life, obedience, teaching, righteousness, the law of God, the spiritual mind, and the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. For all six positive personifications, the oppositions are sin or the law of sin.

As we have seen, personification starts becoming significant in ch. 5. It seems best to treat ch. 5 as part of the discussion of justification by faith (3:21-5:21). It presents some preliminary conclusions based on the doctrine, namely, the permanent benefits of justification (5:1-11) and the universal application of the principle (5:12-21). Foreshadowing the major themes of chs. 6-7, it personifies death (vv. 14, 17) and

sin (v. 21a) as the dominating enemies of the human race. In opposition, it personifies grace as the liberating ruler (v. 22), anticipating a fuller explanation in ch. 8.

Almost all the personification in Romans occurs in chs. 6-8. These chapters form a distinct unit in the letter, which could be called “The Believer’s Life.” Chapter 6 teaches that believers should be dead to sin but alive to God (6:1-11) and free from sin but slaves to righteousness (6:12-23). Chapter 7 teaches that believers are set free from the law in their new life (7:1-13) and that the flesh is incapable of producing the new life (7:14-25). In other words, believers cannot live the new life by the power of the law or the power of the flesh. Chapter 8 describes life in the Spirit. Through the power of the Spirit, believers are able to live the new life of righteousness that ch. 6 describes. Life in the Spirit is characterized by the power of the Spirit (8:1-4), choosing to follow after the Spirit instead of the flesh (8:5-11), responsibilities and privileges (8:12-17a), suffering and glory (8:17b-30), and assurance of salvation (8:35-39).

Chapter 6: The Human Struggle against Sin and Death

Chapter 6 first personifies “our old self,” *ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος* (*ho palaios hēmōn anthrōpos*), saying that he/she was crucified with Christ (6:6). The reference is not to the nature of sin as such, for chs. 7-8 indicate that believers continue to struggle with the sinful nature, or the flesh (*σαρξ*, *sarx*). Rather, “our old self” refers to the old life that was dominated by sin: “We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin” (6:6). It is the dominion of sin that is broken at conversion—not the ability to be tempted, the ability to sin, or even the desire to sin.

The chapter then proceeds to personify sin no less than nine times, describing sin as a reigning monarch (6:12, 14) and as a slave owner (6:6, 13, 16a, 17a, 19a, 20, 22). The point is that if believers allow it, sin can still rule over them again, even though sin’s power has been broken in their lives. Verse 20 puts sin’s ownership in

the past tense—“you were slaves of sin”—showing that believers are no longer slaves of sin.

In these instances, the personification of sin emphasizes sin as a formidable foe and at the same time distances sin from the ideal life of the believer. In other words, instead of sin being a mundane, unremarkable, expected component of everyday human existence, it is a foreign element that believers should fight, resist, and defeat.

Chapter 6 also personifies death as a ruler, stating that death no longer reigns over the believer (6:9). Again, personification emphasizes the power of death and yet removes death from the realm of normal human existence. In other words, believers are not to be content to view death as the natural end of life. Instead, it is a usurper, a hostile force, that believers should seek to overcome. In sum, the use of personification in ch. 6 underscores the reality of the believer’s victory over the old life, over the dominion of sin, and over the ultimate consequence of sin, which is death.

The four other instances of personification in ch. 6 are positive, presenting a benevolent slave owner as the desirable alternative to sin. In v. 16b, the new master is “obedience, which leads to righteousness,” while vv. 18 and 19 directly identify the new master as “righteousness.”

According to v. 17, the believer has been transferred from sin to “the form of teaching,” or “doctrine” (NKJV). “But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.” The verb “entrust” here, *παράδιδωμι* (*paradidōmi*), means to “hand over,” and it may “connote the transfer of a slave from one master to another—an image appropriate to this paragraph” (Moo 1996, 401).

We might expect that Paul would directly identify the new master as God, and certainly God is the true master behind the words “obedience,” “righteousness,” and “form of teaching,” for ultimately these things are derived from God. However, these words emphasize the importance of obeying God’s Word. Slavery means obedience,

and the discussion of slavery serves a double purpose here. In connection with sin, the slave analogy underscores the power of sin in human lives without eliminating personal responsibility. In connection with righteousness, the slave analogy underscores human responsibility to obey righteousness in daily life while also assuring believers that the power to do so comes from God, who liberates them from sin. In this context, Dunn (1988a, 342) commented:

Paul hints at the double causation involved in both: “sin” as a power dominating man, but as also an action for which he is responsible (see on 3:9); “obedience” as man’s responsibility, but for which he depends on the enabling or motivating power of whatever or whoever he gives himself to.... It should not escape notice that Paul here has no misgivings about representing “righteousness” as an “end product.”... The flexibility of Paul’s concept of “righteousness” should be observed and not squeezed to fit a particular dogmatic scheme.... Nor does he seem to have any misgivings about representing righteousness as in some sense the product or result of obedience, even if qualified as obedience enabled by God and righteousness as always God’s gift.

It may seem strange to personify righteousness as a desirable slave owner. Realizing the inadequacy of this analogy, Paul stated, “I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations” (v. 19). It may be difficult for modern Westerners to appreciate the positive nature of this description, but it was quite understandable in ancient Mediterranean culture. While slavery was an evil institution, there were relatively decent slave owners who loved their slaves and took good care of them. In some cases they would grant freedom to their slaves, in which case they still assumed responsibility for their well-being in a system of patronage and clientage. According to Elliot (1993, 144, 146), this system was “fundamental and pervasive,” shaping “both the public and private sectors of ancient life,” and it specifically included “the

enduring bonds and obligations between slave owners and their former freedmen and freedwomen.” Elliot (148-49) further described this social institution as follows:

In general, the relation is one of personal loyalty and commitment (*fides*) of some duration entered into voluntarily by two or more individuals of unequal states.... A “patron” (*patronus, patrona*) is one who uses his or her influence to protect and assist some other person who becomes the patron’s “client” (*cliens*).... The client in this relationship remains under the power (*potestas*) and within the *familia* of the patron for life (as in the case of manumitted slaves).

Chapter 7: Sin As a Hostile, Controlling, Superhuman Power

Chapter 7 continues to personify sin, but it also introduces a new personification: the law, or the commandment. It first personifies the law as the former husband of believers (v. 4). Their marriage to the law has been dissolved by their identification with the death of Christ. Trying to apply the details of this analogy can be confusing, because Christ is the one who dies but also the new husband, and believers die with Christ yet come alive to marry Christ. For this reason, Moores (1995, 93) stated, “It is essentially a parable the point of which lies in a single correspondence.... This being so, to pursue its appropriateness outside the area of that single correspondence is to miss the point.”

Cranfield (1975, 1:335) gave probably the best explanation (Anderson 1999, 231). That is, v. 1 enunciates the general principle that the law is binding upon people as long as they live. Verses 2-3 cite marriage as an illustration of the principle (or, more precisely, of a corollary to the principle). Then vv. 4-6 apply the principle of v. 1 to the symbolic death of believers as they identify with Christ.

In a further personification, the chapter shows why it is good to be free from the law. The law, while good in itself, actually arouses or provokes sinful passions (v. 5). Due to the operation of sin, the law is actually like a slave owner that holds people

captive (v. 6). Through Christ, believers are set free from this captivity so they can have new life in the Spirit.

Chapter 7 also personifies the law as a teacher of morality (v. 7), which is good in itself yet ultimately inadequate to provide power over sin. Sin actually takes advantage of the law to condemn humans to death; thus the law, or the commandment, that promised life actually results in death (vv. 9-10). The reason is that humans have universally violated the law, and the penalty of sin is death. Thus, given human sinfulness, the law can offer no blessing but only condemnation. It is powerless either to overcome the power of sin or to provide mercy to the sinner. The law is good, and what is good does not bring death, but sin is able to bring death through what is good (vv. 12-13).

In sum, even though God's law is good, by itself it does not grant power over sin. It is a slave owner that can control the human mind but not the sinful actions of the flesh (v. 25).

Like ch. 6, ch. 7 frequently personifies sin and its synonyms, using some vivid images. Much like ch. 6, which describes sin as a slave master, 7:5 describes believers as having been controlled by sinful passions before they came to Christ. As a deceitful foe, sin took advantage of the law to produce all kinds of evil desires (v. 8a). Apart from the law it lies dead (v. 8b), but once the law came, sin sprang into life and action (v. 9). It actually used the law as a weapon to kill people (v. 11).

To depict the human struggle with sin, Paul spoke in the first person singular (beginning in v. 7) and in the present tense (beginning in v. 14). It would be a mistake to read this passage as primarily autobiographical, however. Instead Paul used *prosopopeia*, or speech-in-character (Stowers 1994, 264). In this way, he dramatized the position of someone who tries to fulfill the law of God and overcome sin in her or his life merely by the power of the human will.

We see this point clearly in v. 25: "So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin." The "I" in v. 25 is *αὐτός ἐγώ* (*autos egō*) in Greek, literally "I myself," as the NIV translates. This

phrase underscores that the speaker is contemplating his human life without the Spirit of God. Thus the lexicon of Bauer et al. (1979, 123) suggests, “[I am] thrown on my own resources.” Bruce (1963, 156) explained:

“I myself” (*autos ego*) is emphatic: it is “I by myself” who experience this defeat and frustration, but “I,” as a Christian, am not left to “myself”: “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” has come to dwell within me, and His presence and power make an almighty difference.

The personification of sin in ch. 7 emphasizes that sin is more powerful than the speaker. Sin is like the owner of a house; sin lives in the speaker (v. 17). Evil lies close at hand, like a predator (v. 21). As God told Cain, “Sin is lurking at the door” (Gen 4:13).

“The law of sin” works in the members of the speaker’s body and wages war against the law of his mind (v. 23). Some commentators think that the law of sin refers to the destructive use of the law of Moses. More likely, the key word that determines meaning here is “sin,” for the end of the verse says that the law of sin “dwells in my members.” This description corresponds to “our sinful passions ... at work in our members” (v. 5) and “sin that dwells within me” (vv. 17, 19). Indeed, v. 25 sharply contrasts the law of God and the law of sin. Thus, it seems clear that here Paul used the word “law” (*νόμος, nomos*) to mean “principle” or “authority.” Moo (1996, 464) concluded, “As in 3:27, Paul plays on the word *nomos* to create a rhetorically effective antithesis: ‘I, in my inner being, delight in and accept the authority of the Mosaic law; but I see a competing “authority,” operating in my members.’”

Similarly, v. 23 personifies “the law of my mind,” in opposition to the law of sin. Like the “law of sin,” it is a principle or authority at work in human lives—essentially human thoughts and intentions apart from the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Even without the indwelling Spirit, the human mind can agree with the law of God. Morgan (1995, 46) explained:

[Paul] was surely contrasting life lived under the law with the new life in the Spirit (7.6). He wants to be negative about the former without being negative about God's law as such. Having come perilously close to calling the law itself sin by associating them so closely as powers from which we have to be liberated, he now takes a different tack. He takes advantage of the double meaning of *nomos* (law) which can also mean "principle."... "The law of my mind" in v. 23 presumably refers to or includes the law of God (v. 22) that I consent to.

Verse 22 enunciates the "principle" of "the law of the mind": "I delight in the law of God in my inmost self." In other words, in their minds humans can acknowledge and assent to the law of God, even though sin continues to dominate their lives and actions.

In short, v. 23 personifies two warriors in the human heart—sinful passions (the law of sin) and good intentions (the law of the mind). We cannot identify the law of the mind directly with either the law of God or the law of the Spirit, because in the conflict of v. 23, the law of sin is clearly the victor of the battle, and it captures humans as the spoils of war.

Chapter 7 concludes, then, by depicting the law of sin as a slave master who rules the speaker. Specifically, the law of sin dominates the mind of the speaker with its good intentions, effectively preventing the speaker from obeying the law of God. In his mind, the speaker can serve God's law, but in his flesh he continues to serve the law of sin. In this way, the chapter uses personification to present sin as a hostile, controlling, superhuman power that no human can overthrow by her or his own ability.

Chapter 8: Liberation from the Power of Sin through the Spirit of Christ

Chapter 8 continues to personify sin by using synonyms for sin. “The law of sin and of death” is an oppressive master (v. 2). The “mind that is set on the flesh” (σὰρξ, *sarx*)—the fleshly or carnal mind—is the enemy of God and thus the enemy of God’s people (v. 7). The chapter also continues to personify the law—it is an ally of righteousness and of God’s people, but because it depends on sinful flesh for fulfillment, it is powerless to set people free from sin (v. 3).

In addition to the law of God, the law of the mind, and the law of sin, ch. 8 introduces and personifies a fourth law—the law of the Spirit of life that comes through Jesus Christ. It is the only principle or authority that is more powerful than the law of sin. (The law of the mind is good, and the law of the mind can potentially be good, but neither can impart power over sin.) The law of the Spirit is the liberator that sets believers free from the oppressive law of sin and death (v. 1).

In the middle of the chapter, the creation is personified as eagerly awaiting the revelation of God’s heirs, the church (v. 19). It is under a bondage that it did not choose, but God decided to keep it under the curse of sin until God’s children receive their eternal glory (vv. 20-21). Till then, the whole creation groans under the yoke of sin, as if in the pains of childbirth, waiting for the new age of glory to be born (v. 22).

Finally, v. 35 personifies various forms of trouble and hardship as the potential enemies of believers. The passage concludes that none of them can separate believers from the love of God that is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusions concerning Personification in Romans

We have seen that personification is a significant feature of Paul’s Letter to the Romans. It is a powerful rhetorical device that truly “enlivens” and “personalizes” the text. We can identify a fivefold impact that personification makes upon the reader.

Personification is not evenly distributed throughout Romans. It appears primarily in chs. 5-8 and particularly in chs. 6-8. *(1) Personification thereby draws attention to this section of Romans, highlights its unique contribution to the letter as a*

whole, and hints that the teaching in this section will be particularly relevant to the life of believers.

When we examine the content of these chapters, we find that they deal with the fundamental problems of Christian living: (a) How does the Christian life relate to sin and its ultimate consequence, death? Can, must, or should Christians continue to sin? Is it possible for Christians to live righteously? Does their new life in Christ change their previous relationship to sin? (b) How does the Christian life relate to the law of Moses? Should Christians follow the law of Moses, and if not, should they reject it completely? What role, if any, does the law have in the Christian life? Does their new life in Christ change their previous relationship to the law?

Earlier in Romans, Paul had already raised these questions briefly. With regard to sin, he stated, “All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 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.... But if through my falsehood God’s truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), ‘Let us do evil so that good may come’? Their condemnation is deserved!” (Rom 2:12-13; 3:7-8).

With regard to the law Paul stated, “For ‘no human being will be justified in his sight’ by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets.... For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.... Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (Rom 3:20-21, 28, 31).

These preliminary statements are somewhat cryptic by themselves; to some they even appear incongruous (Boers 1994, 31, 219). Certainly they call for further clarification. Paul could have continued to discuss these issues in a purely didactic and polemical way in order to elucidate their meaning, but instead he employed a significantly different approach. While continuing to use logical discourse, he added

rhetorical intensity with the vivid impact of personification in order to pull together the strands of his reasoning.

Paul began to speak of these issues in terms of kings, slave owners, and warriors. Sin, death, and the law are not merely abstract principles, but they are spiritual powers that dominate human life, and they are formidable foes of the new life in Christ. (The law is not evil in itself, but it is inadequate to defeat sin, and it is subject to being misused as a weapon by sin.) Sin and the law are not merely subjects for contemplation and theologizing, but the believers' response to these matters will determine who rules over them, what dominates their lives, and whether or not they will live in victory and freedom. *(2) Personification proclaims the magnitude of these problems for Christians and transforms them from merely philosophical, logical, forensic, or theological questions to central issues in the struggle for spiritual survival and freedom.* (See especially Rom 6.)

In like manner, personification emphasizes that believers will not find the answers to these issues merely in philosophy, logic, law, or theology. If sin, death, and the law are so formidable that they can be identified as spiritual powers, then it is obvious that the only way to overcome them is by a superior spiritual power. Only by superior authority or power can one ruler exercise dominion over another. Only by the exercise of force or the payment of a suitable price can one slave owner gain possession of another's slaves. Only by greater might can someone defeat an enemy.

(3) In short, the personification of the enemies of humankind as superhuman powers (see especially Rom 7) points the readers of Romans to a solution that is both supernatural and personal. No impersonal, earthly entity could bring victory, nor could anything that is an intrinsic part of humanity. How can humans overcome sin, death, the old self, the fleshly mind, and the various hardships of life? How can they transcend the weakness of the law, the mind, and the creation? The answer cannot be merely an abstract principle, force, law, argument, theory, belief, or element of human nature, for these are obviously less powerful than the personified foes. *(4) Ultimately, the use of personification indicates that spiritual victory comes by faith in*

a divine-human person—Jesus Christ the Lord—and by the power of his Holy Spirit.
(See Rom 8.)

(5) Finally, when we consider the implications of “spirit” in Greco-Roman thought, we can regard Paul’s references to God’s Spirit as a kind of personification that makes the Spirit directly relevant to the lives of believers. Paul did not speak of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force or as a separate divine personality. Instead, the Holy Spirit is the active presence and power of God and Christ. The transcendent God is “personified,” or made immanent, as the Spirit. Likewise the risen Christ is “personified,” or actualized, by the Spirit.¹⁰

This “personification” was quite relevant to the concerns of people in antiquity. For example, Rom 7 addresses the ancient desire to be in control of the self. Then Rom 8 contrasts the Spirit-filled life with life in the flesh (uncontrolled life). In v. 1, the Spirit is identified with life in Christ Jesus. In v. 6, the Spirit imparts life instead of death, and it also brings peace (harmony). In v. 10, the Spirit brings life and righteousness. In vv. 14-16, the Spirit makes believers children and heirs of God, imparting new identity and new genealogy.

In the ancient world, with its short life span, violent culture, and marginal existence for the masses, the ideal human life was one characterized by control, peace, harmony, and balance. Paul offered this ideal through the impartation of the Spirit, which does not stand in opposition to redemption by the blood of Jesus but in a sense personifies Christ, actualizes the work of Christ, and applies the blood of Christ to the believer.

To summarize, by faith in Christ, believers receive freedom from the penalty of sin (fulfilling Rom 3:20-31), and by the work of Christ’s Spirit in them they receive power to overcome sin in daily life (fulfilling Rom 2:12-13; 3:7-8). These two strands of seemingly incongruous thought are woven together not merely by correct belief but by an encounter with the person of Christ—both in his historical death, burial, and resurrection and in the present reality of his Spirit.

¹⁰ See Matt 18:20; 28:20; John 14:18, in which the promises of Christ’s abiding presence are fulfilled by his coming in Spirit.

“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” brings deliverance from “the law of sin and of death” (Rom 8:2). Moreover, through Jesus Christ, God “condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4). Finally, believers become more than conquerors over all hardships, death, life, rulers, powers, time, space, and everything else in creation through “the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:35-39).

JUSTIFICATION IN ROMANS

With our understanding of Romans more clearly focused by our analysis of Paul's use of personification, we now look closely at Paul's discussion of justification in the letter.

Chapters 1-3

In Rom 1-3, Paul argued that the whole world is guilty before God and cannot be made righteous by the works of the law. Instead, the only way to become righteous is by faith. Chapter 3 states and explains the concept of justification, or right standing with God. The source of justification is the grace of God; the basis of justification is the redemptive, atoning work of Jesus Christ; and the means of justification is faith in Jesus Christ. "They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith" (vv. 24-25). The chapter emphasizes that justification does not come by the works of the law of Moses: "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law" (v. 28).

In the preceding chapter, however, we find a startling statement: "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" (Rom 2:13). As we noted in the previous chapter, the statements in 2:13 and 3:28 may at first seem to be contradictory, and indeed some commentators such as Sanders have concluded that Paul was hopelessly inconsistent (Boers 1994, 31, 219; Thurén 2000, 55). Conservative Protestant exegetes typically emphasize the statement in Rom 3:28 while minimizing Rom 2:13. Instead of quickly assuming that there is a contradiction or else trying to explain away a statement that is awkward for our theology, instead we should proceed on the assumption that Paul had a coherent scheme in mind and see if can achieve fruitful results. Difficulties such as these can

alert us to the possibility that our theological synthesis is missing a connection that was obvious in the mind of Paul. Indeed, the contrast between Rom 2 and 3 is one of the factors that caused theologians such as Sanders and Dunn to reconsider the traditional Protestant explanation. But let us see if there is something more to be gained in light of the connection that we have discerned in Paul between faith and the Spirit.

Rom 3 clearly states that justification is by faith and not works of the law. In the context, however, faith is more than mental assent. It involves trust, reliance, and commitment, which in turn means acting upon what we believe and obeying what we are convinced is true. For Paul, faith and obedience are two sides of the same coin. Indeed, throughout the letter he described his ministry and the experience of the Roman believers in precisely these terms:

- “Through [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name” (Rom 1:5).
- “But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted” (Rom 6:17). Here, conversion is the result of obeying the teaching, whereas in Rom 1:16-17 it is the result of believing the teaching. Unless we are to accuse Paul of a fundamental contradiction that renders his entire message incoherent, we must assume that for Paul true belief in the message can be equated with acting in accordance with the message. In Rom 1, Paul had in mind an effective faith, a faith that motivates conduct, so that it is proper to attribute conversion to faith but also to the response of faith. There cannot be one without the other. This response of faith is not equivalent to works of the law, or meritorious works in general, but it is the essence of saving faith.
- “But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’” Here, a lack of obedience is equated with a lack of faith.

- “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed” (Rom 15:18).
- “Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:25-26).

There is a modern scholarly consensus that in Paul’s writings the word for “faith” in the Greek text—πίστις (*pistis*)—does not mean mere assent or mental belief but trust and reliance upon God that motivates one’s actions. Stowers (1994, 199) noted that Paul associated *pistis* with obedience. He preferred the English word “faithfulness” as the best translation in many texts, sometimes recommending “trust” or “trusting obedience.”

For the related verb πιστεύω (*pisteuō*), L. T. Johnson (1997, 54) suggested “faithing” as a translation of the present participle. According to him, it means much more than cognitive assent; it carries connotations of “hearing and responding,” “trust,” and “hope.” In Romans it has the special connotation of “obedience.” “When Paul speaks in 3:22, then, of ‘all those who are faithing,’ he means those who respond to God’s gift with hearing, belief, trust, hope, and obedience.”

According to Bultmann (1951, 1:314), for Paul faith is, more than anything else, a form of obedience. Even conservative Protestant interpreters such as Moo (1996, 52-53) have acknowledged that obedience should be included in the full definition of faith: “We understand the words ‘obedience’ and ‘faith’ to be mutually interpreting: obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience.” It is important to note, however, that in the words of Dunn (1996, 68), obedience must spring from “complete trust in God, total reliance on God’s enabling,” or else it is “misdirected.” Only this is the “obedience of faith.”

With this contextual understanding of faith in mind, we can better understand Paul's statements in Rom 2 and 3. Rom 3 clearly establishes that justification comes only by faith, not by works of the law. Rom 2 looks forward to the day of judgment, when the response of faith will be obvious to all. Faith that failed to motivate response will not be considered as faith at all, but faith that motivated response will be vindicated. Thus, it is proper to say that those who obey the law will be justified.

In this context, "the law" must refer primarily to the ethical code, not to Jewish boundary markers such as circumcision, for 2:14-15 says that Gentiles who do not have the law of Moses can still have "what the law requires ... written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness." In 2:25-29, this thought is extended by a discussion of what it means to be truly circumcised. Those who are not physically circumcised may still "keep the requirements of the law" and will condemn circumcised persons who break the law.

Still we have a tension here. Does ch. 2 say that people can indeed fulfill the ethical requirements of the law by their own ability? If so, it would contradict ch. 3. This tension is not fully resolved until ch. 8, but we find a clue in 2:29: "A man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (NIV). The concept that brings coherence to chs. 2 and 3 is the work of the Holy Spirit in justification.

Cosgrove (1987, 660) argued that Paul used the language of justification to speak of both Christian initiation and vindication at the final judgment. Thus he explained that in ch. 2 "works of the law" are not a means by which sinners can become righteous, but when believers are "enlivened by the Spirit and liberated from sin's power," then they are able to do what is good and "will be justified in the final judgment on that basis." In ch. 3, "faith" is not mere belief but shorthand for "faith in Jesus Christ," which in turn is a "metonymy for the gospel" (665). Initial justification places believers into a relationship with God so that the resurrection life of Jesus can save them in the future. This life consists in "the Spirit's renewing power," and it becomes a reality for "those who walk according to the Spirit in obedience" (667-68).

We can integrate the teachings in chs. 2 and 3 according to the more clear statement in ch. 8 as follows. Jews have the law of Moses to teach them, and Gentiles who do not have the law of Moses still have the law of conscience, which can function in a similar manner to give them ethical and moral guidance. In both cases, however, the weakness of law is that it depends upon flesh for fulfillment, but human flesh is sinful and ultimately incapable of fulfilling God's righteousness. Therefore, there can be no justification by law—whether the law of Moses or the law of conscience. Instead, the only means of justification is by faith, based on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. When people trust fully in Christ, they turn from their old life of sin and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit with internal and external manifestations. They are transformed by the power of God so that they live a new life.

Justification by faith does not refer primarily to what people think or profess but to the commitment of their lives, that is, the obedience of faith. The benefit of the new covenant is that when people commit their lives to Jesus Christ, he fills them with his Spirit with accompanying power. Thus they can truly demonstrate the obedience of faith not by the works of the law but by the power of the Spirit. If ch. 2 referred to human efforts to fulfill the law, then it would indeed contradict ch. 3. But instead, it refers to the possibility of fulfilling the requirements of the law by the power of the Spirit. Chapter 2 says that when Jews or Gentiles are transformed by God's Spirit they are justified, and by the Spirit they are now able to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. Chapter 3 says that when Jews or Gentiles commit their lives to Jesus Christ, they are justified apart from the law, and as ch. 8 will explain, justification is the beginning of a new life in the Spirit that fulfills the righteous requirements of the law. In short, justification by faith involves the reception of the Holy Spirit.

Under this reading, when Paul stated that no one could be justified by the works of the law (Rom 3:20), he referred to the inability of the flesh, the inability of a person who has not received the power of the Spirit (Rom 8:3, 7). But when people

believe on Jesus and obey his gospel, then they receive the Holy Spirit, with accompanying power to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. Thus the possibility of righteousness expressed in Rom 2:13-14 and 2:25-29 is fulfilled by the Spirit (Rom 8:4) (Witherington and Hyatt 2004, 223).

Chapters 4-5

Chapters 4-5 continue the discussion of justification, with ch. 4 providing proof from the OT and ch. 5 describing the permanent blessings and universal application of justification. Chapter 4 introduces Abraham and David as examples of justification. Paul sought to prove that justification by faith was not his invention but was supported by examples from the Hebrew Scriptures. He gave particular attention to Abraham as the father of the Hebrews and established that he is also the father of all who live by faith. Verses 17-21 describe Abraham's kind of faith, and v. 22 states, quoting Gen 15:6, "Therefore, his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.'" In short, Abraham was justified by his faith in God.

Verses 23-25 identify Abraham's faith and relationship with God as an example for NT believers: "Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him,' were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification."

In other words, NT believers will be justified as Abraham was if they have the same kind of faith that Abraham had. The object of their faith is the one God of Abraham, but here God is specifically identified as the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Moreover, it is significant that Jesus "was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification."

Typically, in Christian theology, justification is associated with the death of Christ, but here we find it equally associated with the resurrection of Christ. This statement advances the discussion beyond that of ch. 3, for in ch. 3 justification is grounded on the death of Jesus: "whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement

by his blood” (v. 25). Rom 4:25 is thus a strong indication that Paul considered the work of justification to be more than a forensic transaction involving the death of Christ, but it specifically involves the resurrection of Christ also.

By introducing the resurrection of Christ to the discussion of justification, Paul prepared the way for a discussion of the life of Christ in believers. As we will see, Paul equated the resurrection life of Christ with the Holy Spirit. Thus Rom 4:25 indicates that the work of the Holy Spirit is an integral part of justification.

Cosgrove (1987, 668) made a similar connection in his discussion of Rom 8:33, which he says refers to justification in the court of final judgment. While noting that “most interpreters assume that Christ’s atoning death remains the basis of this justification,” he argued from Rom 5:9-10 and 8:31-39 that the basis of this justification is rather the life of Jesus, which in turn results in “walk[ing] according to the Spirit in obedience.”

L. T. Johnson (1997, 117) noted the connection in Romans between the resurrection of Jesus and the Holy Spirit:

To a remarkable extent ... statements about power are correlated to statements about the resurrection of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.... Throughout the New Testament, the term “Holy Spirit” functions more or less equivalently to “the presence and power of Jesus” in the community of his followers....The Holy Spirit is therefore not an impersonal force, but the life-giving presence and power of the risen Lord among his followers.

We should also note the connection between blood and Spirit in the work of justification. The blood of Jesus provides atonement for believers (3:25); they are “justified by his blood” (5:9).¹¹ As we mentioned earlier, Greco-Roman physiology associated blood and spirit in giving life to the body, including nutrition, activity, and

¹¹ Eph 1:7; 2:13-14 and Col 1:14, 20 also state that believers have redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace through the blood of Jesus.

sensation. Perhaps alluding to this terminology or drawing an analogy from this context, Paul attributed the new life of Christians both to the death (blood) of Christ and to the resurrection life (Spirit) of Christ.

One without the other is incomplete. In the plan of God, the death of Christ was necessary for atonement, and the resurrection of Christ was necessary to bring victory over sin, death, and the devil. Likewise, in the experience of the believer, the blood of Jesus must become effective through repentance (death to the old life, the old person) and faith, and the resurrection of Jesus must become effective through the reception and inward work of the Holy Spirit.

In Protestantism, and especially Evangelicalism, there is a notion that to emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in justification would be to detract from the blood of Jesus. Our study of ancient Greco-Roman physiology shows, however, that such a dichotomy would have been foreign to first-century writers and readers. In the cultural context, it was common to think of blood and Spirit as related. When Paul said that justification comes by the blood of Jesus, we cannot thereby conclude that justification does not come by the Spirit of Jesus, or vice versa. It is quite reasonable to think of “both/and” instead of “either/or.”

Chapters 6-8

Ch. 6 explicitly applies the death and resurrection of Christ to the personal experience of the believer, and it includes burial as the necessary link between death and resurrection. In 6:1-5, believers first die with Christ by turning away from the life and dominion of sin. Then to signify their death and make it a permanent reality, they are buried with Christ in baptism—an allusion to the apostolic practice of baptizing repentant believers by immersion in water with the invocation of the name of Jesus

Christ.¹² Then they rise to newness of life, which chs. 7 and 8 identify with the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Thus we have a clear identification between the gospel message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and the Christian initiatory experience of repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Cor 15:1-4, Paul identified the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as the basic gospel message that brings salvation to those who believe and follow it. In the first proclamation of the NT church, Peter, with the support of the rest of the apostles, preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:22-26). When the crowd asked what they should do about this message, the apostles answered that the proper response of faith is repentance, water baptism, and reception of the Spirit (Acts 2:37-38). Paul followed this pattern when he encountered some disciples of John at Ephesus, baptizing them in the name of the Lord Jesus and praying for them to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-6).

Turning back to Romans, ch. 7 and especially ch. 8 connect the resurrection of Christ with the Holy Spirit. In ch. 6 we find the admonition to live a new life of victory over sin. In ch. 7, however, we see the inability of either the law or the flesh to fulfill this goal. Neither can impart spiritual life to believers or give them power over sin. While Rom 3 contrasts works of the law with faith, Rom 7:6 contrasts the law with the new way of the Spirit, much as in Galatians, thereby showing the equivalence of the life of faith with life in the Spirit: “But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”

In ch. 8 we see the answer to the challenge of ch. 6 to overcome sin and to the dilemma of ch. 7 concerning the inability of the flesh and law. That is, the Spirit of the risen Lord imparts new spiritual life to believers so that they can live victoriously

¹² Immersion was the standard mode as signified by the Greek word βαπτίζω (*baptizō*), meaning to dip or plunge, and as indicated in Matt 3:16; John 3:23; Acts 8:38. Invoking the name of Jesus was a prominent feature of the baptismal formula according to Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16; 1 Cor 1:13. Probable allusions also occur in Acts 15:17; 1 Cor 6:11; Gal 3:27; Jam 2:7.

in the present age and have assurance of bodily resurrection in the age to come. The chapter begins with a sharp contrast between the old way of flesh/law and the new way of the Spirit: “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 God’s own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:2-4).

What the law could not do and what sinful human flesh could not do, God has done through the death of his Son. The first part of this statement—“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”—indicates that this victory comes not merely by the historic death of Christ, nor merely by a belief in the reality and efficacy of that death, but somehow the believer must participate in the life of the risen Christ.

A few verses later, this implication becomes explicit: “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. 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” (Rom 8:9-11).

Fee (1994, 552) paraphrased v. 10 as follows:

If Christ by his Spirit is dwelling in you, even though your bodies are destined for death because of sin, the presence of the Spirit (because he is the “Spirit of life”) means that you also have life both now and forever, because of the righteousness that Christ has effected for you.

Believers are to overcome the old life, which is characterized by the dominion of sinful desires and attitudes—that is, “the flesh.” To do so, they must begin to live

in “the Spirit.” This occurs by their receiving the Spirit of God to dwell in them. The passage identifies “the Spirit of God” with “the Spirit of Christ” and with “Christ,” and it asserts that Christ’s indwelling presence is essential. The focus is not on belief in the death of Christ, although that is necessary and is the basis of what follows. But to enjoy new life, the believer must have a present relationship with the resurrected Christ by being filled with his Spirit.

Indeed, “the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” If we understand “righteousness” in terms of Rom 1:17, then it refers to God’s saving action in human lives, or God’s fulfillment of a covenant relationship with humans. Receiving the Spirit of life “because of righteousness” means that God, as part of God’s saving action, bestows the Spirit of Christ so that believers might have life. Even though they still live in mortal bodies that are in the process of dying, and even though they still face the sentence of physical death, they have present spiritual life by the indwelling presence of Christ. They enjoy this presence “because of” the righteousness of God, which as Rom 1:17 states, they receive through faith. In other words, Christ comes to dwell in believers by his Spirit as an integral part of justification by faith.

Moreover, by the same indwelling Spirit, believers have the promise of resurrection in the life to come. Here v. 11 explicitly links the resurrection of Christ with the Spirit in believers. Because they have the same Spirit in them that raised Christ from the dead, they also have the promise of bodily resurrection. There are close parallels between the past, present, and future works of the Spirit. In the past, the Spirit gave life to the dead body of Christ. In the present, the Spirit gives spiritual life—victory over “the flesh” (vs. 4-9), victory over “the deeds of the body” (v. 13)—to believers. In the future, the Spirit will give life to the “mortal bodies” of believers (v. 11). Morgan (1995, 48) commented on the work of the Spirit in Rom 8:10-11:

The Spirit is life (cf. v. 2) on account of (God’s?) righteousness, probably God’s saving action, or a right relationship with God, rather than the human moral virtue which ensues. The close connection between God’s Spirit

and the resurrection of Jesus (cf. 1.4) means that God will by his indwelling Spirit give life to the mortal bodies that the Spirit indwells.

A few verses later, the letter further explains the role of the Spirit in the life of believers: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:14-16). Here, the Spirit is not merely a gift that accompanies the experience of becoming a child of God, but the Spirit is the very actor that makes the believer a child of God. The Spirit of God—or the Spirit of Christ (v. 9)—is the agent of adoption and the first witness of the believer’s new spiritual status. Morgan (1995, 122) has again pointed out that the resurrected Christ comes to believers and acts in their lives as the Spirit:

The God who creates and saves is known in his saving righteousness in the death and resurrection of Jesus who is present to believers as Spirit. The Lord who is Spirit and creates freedom (cf. 2 Cor. 3.14-18) works on earth through believers who are empowered by this Spirit.

To summarize, Rom 4:25 links justification by faith with participation in the resurrection of Christ. Then, Rom 8 explains that the way believers identify with and participate in the resurrection of Christ is by receiving his Spirit to dwell in their lives. The Spirit is essential to their change of status. Without the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ (v. 9). Moreover, the Spirit causes their adoption as God’s children (v. 15). If we think of justification as describing the believer’s change of status from being counted as sinful to being counted as righteous, then the work of the Spirit is essential to justification.

The Spirit not only effects a change of status, however, but also a change of identity, by actually beginning to transform the believer into a person who has power

over sin. By the Spirit, believers are delivered from walking “according to the flesh” (v. 4) and are able to “put to death the deeds of the body” (v. 13). If we recognize the active, transformative connotations of justification, then again we see that the work of the Spirit is essential to justification.

The Spirit bears witness to our spirit of this transformation (v. 16). Here is an indication that the role of the Spirit in justification and adoption is not invisible or silent, but it includes a tangible experience and is accompanied by miraculous power. Later in Romans, Paul described the action of the Spirit in the conversion process by using just such terms: “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ” (Rom 15:18-19).

In this regard we might well think of the powerful involvement of the Holy Spirit in Christian initiation as described in the Book of Acts. According to its accounts, believers were “baptized [immersed, overwhelmed] with the Holy Spirit” and “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5; 2:4). The Spirit “fell on” them, was “poured out” on them, and “came upon them” (Acts 10:44-45; 19:6). Immediately accompanying this work of the Spirit, the believers miraculously “began to speak in other languages” (Acts 2:4). In addition to “speaking in tongues” they also began “extolling God” (Acts 10:46), and they “prophesied” (Acts 19:6). Thus, Luke’s record of initiation experiences confirms the discussion of Paul, which is what we would expect if Luke was indeed a coworker and traveling companion of the apostle.

Hollingshead (1998, 233-34) described Paul’s worldview in a way that corresponds well with this analysis. He explained that for Paul the death and resurrection of Jesus created a new world order based on outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

For Paul the chief effect of the crucifixion and resurrection is not that they *reveal* the underlying structure of the universe, but that they *change* that structure. Paul thinks that the one unavoidable, observable fact that proves this change has occurred is presence of the spirit (recall Rom. 5:5). This observable presence of the spirit has significance for Paul that goes far beyond mere instruction....

The reason Paul can argue against the works of the law is that they have been replaced—by the spirit....

But in Paul's understanding, the spirit has now entered into the world. It is not "represented," but manifested. This is not so much allegory as the collapse of allegory. The signified ideal has literally entered into the realm of the signifier.... Paul can dismiss circumcision precisely because the signified has descended into the human realm, and no longer requires representation.

In summary, our study of Romans has revealed that in Paul's thinking justification under the new covenant was not primarily a doctrine but an experience in the Holy Spirit and a relationship with the living Lord through his Spirit. This conclusion corresponds closely to the results of our analysis of personification in Romans. For further evidence and perspective, we briefly turn to an examination of justification in other Pauline letters.

JUSTIFICATION IN OTHER PAULINE LETTERS

Galatians

The Letter to the Galatians provides us with Paul's early statement of the doctrine of justification. He wrote against Judaizers who taught that Gentile converts to Christianity needed to keep the Jewish law in order to be saved. Paul denounced this teaching as contrary to the life of faith that characterizes the Christian message.

To do so, he sharply contrasted the keeping of the law under the old covenant with the life of faith under the new covenant: "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.... I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing" (Gal 2:15-16, 21).

Consequently, Paul rebuked the Galatians for falling away from the doctrine of justification by faith and going back to dependence on the law. In the course of his rebuke, Paul equated the old way of reliance upon the law with walking in "the flesh," and he equated the new way of justification by faith with walking in "the Spirit." "The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?" (Gal 3:2-3). Fee (1994, 385) pointed out the significance of this dichotomy: "The ultimate contrast with which Paul deals in this letter is not between 'faith' and 'works of Law,' but between life in the Spirit—lived out always by faith—and Torah observance."

Paul next asked, "Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing. Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among

you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?” (Gal 3:4-5). The assumption here is that justifying faith involves the work of the Spirit, while the deeds of the law do not involve the Spirit. The problem with trusting in “the works of the law,” then, is that it is equivalent to trusting in the ability of the flesh. By contrast, when people have faith in God, the Spirit is activated in their lives.

Fee (1994, 419) noted that v. 5 deals with “the hope that our justification by faith in Christ and the Spirit has secured.” He again pointed out that for Paul justification involves not only the historical work of Christ but also the present work of the Spirit: “Our present justification/righteousness based on the work of Christ and the Spirit is what will be realized—provided we continue in faith and the Spirit and do not return to slavery.”

Paul appealed to the Galatians’ experience of receiving the Holy Spirit to prove that they had indeed entered into a new life that stood in contrast to the law and to establish that they had entered into this new life on the basis of faith. For him to use this argument means he considered it beyond all dispute that the Galatians knew they had received the Holy Spirit and furthermore knew they had received this experience by faith. Fee (1994, 388-39) observed, “Thus Paul is appealing once more to the visible and experiential nature of the Spirit *in their midst* as the ongoing evidence that life in the Spirit, predicated on faith in Christ Jesus, has no place at all for ‘works of Law.’”

In short, Paul appealed to their undeniable experience of a tangible reception of the Holy Spirit (as in Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-48). By internal and external evidence, the Galatians on both sides of the controversy knew that they had received the Holy Spirit in a miraculous, powerful, charismatic way (Moxnes 1980, 209-10; Dunn 1993, 59-60; Williams 1987, 98). Moreover, they knew that they had not earned this experience by their actions and abilities but had received it when they completely trusted in Jesus Christ.

Today it is common to start with justification by faith as a given and to argue from this premise that the believer must indeed have received the Holy Spirit. Paul

did just the opposite. He argued that since the Galatians had undeniably received the Spirit then it must be that they were justified by faith (Dunn 1993, 60). In his thinking, then, receiving the Spirit and justification are inseparably linked under the new covenant.

To make this link clear, Paul appealed to the example of Abraham: “Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.’ For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed” (Gal 3:6-9). This is a plain statement that Abraham was justified, or counted as righteous, by his faith. Moreover, it was God’s plan to extend this blessing of justification by faith to the Gentiles. The blessing that Abraham received was justification by faith, and this blessing is now promised to the Gentiles (Fee 1994, 393; Williams 1987, 92).

How can Gentiles receive this blessing? They cannot receive it by keeping the law, contrary to the teaching of the Judaizers. “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.’ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’ But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, ‘Whoever does the works of the law will live by them’” (Gal 3:10-12).

Instead of the law, the redemptive work of Christ is what makes the blessing of justification available to the Gentiles. Specifically, when Gentiles believe on Jesus, they receive the promise of the Spirit, and in this way they receive the blessing given to Abraham, namely, justification. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:13-14).

“The promise of the Spirit” is the promised Holy Spirit, the promised experience of being filled with the Spirit, as Jesus promised in Acts 1:4-5.¹³ It is not some other blessing promised by the Holy Spirit, for such a meaning would not fit the context. It is the reception of the Holy Spirit that is the subject of discussion, as we see in 3:2, 3:5, 4:6, 4:29 (by analogy), 5:5, and 5:16-25.

In these verses, Paul stated clearly that the way Gentiles under the new covenant are justified is by receiving the Holy Spirit (Fee 1994, 394; Moxnes 1980, 213-16; Williams 1987, 96). They receive the Spirit by faith, so he proclaimed justification by faith. To omit the Spirit from the discussion, however, is to omit the life-giving, righteousness-imparting, enabling element. To say merely that people are justified by faith is to state the *basis* of what happens, but it does not actually explain *what* happens. To say that people are justified by faith when they receive the Holy Spirit is to expect a life-transforming experience of justification by the power of God’s Spirit.

Dunn (1991, 133) pointed out that “Paul evidently felt no need to justify the assumption that the gift of the Spirit was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. This must be because the gift of the Spirit to Gentiles was both recognized among the first Christians and acknowledged as the sure indication of God’s acceptance/justifying act.”

One might ask why Paul did not make the link between Abraham as explicit as possible by saying: Abraham was justified by faith when he received the Holy Spirit; therefore, the Gentiles are justified by faith when they receive the Holy Spirit. The reason is that the Bible does not state that Abraham received the Holy Spirit. While the entire Bible describes God’s Spirit as active in the world and in people’s lives, the NT teaches that there is a unique reception and indwelling of the Holy Spirit under the new covenant (Gal 4:4-6).¹⁴ Abraham was justified by faith, but in God’s plan it was not yet time for the indwelling of the Spirit to be associated with justification. Under the new covenant, we find an expansion of justification to the

¹³ See also Acts 2:33, 39; Eph 1:13 for identification of the promise.

¹⁴ See Luke 7:28; 24:49; John 7:37-39; 16:7; 20:23; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4; Heb 11:39-40.

Gentiles, but we also find an expansion of the experience of justification to include the powerful reception of the Spirit. Thus, Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is good news for the Gentiles, because it brings the blessing of justification to them, but it is also good news for the Jews, because it brings them into a greater relationship with God also.

Later in ch. 3, Paul explained that since the law could not impart life it could not impart righteousness. "Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law.... The law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian [the law]" (Gal 3:21, 24-25). What *does* impart life, then? It is clearly the Holy Spirit. The reason the law was inadequate for justification is that it depended upon human flesh for fulfillment and did not impart the Spirit. The reason that faith is adequate for justification is that it connects humans to the life-giving, empowering Spirit of God.

Moxnes (1980, 264) concluded that the Judaizers must have cited Abraham as an example of righteousness and life coming through the law. Paul rejected this claim, instead maintaining in Gal 3:10-14 and 21-22 that life comes through the Spirit. In doing so, Paul drew upon the common Christian experience of initiation "through baptism and the manifestations of the Spirit," and in doing so, he drew on earlier interpretations of this experience as recorded in Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18 (Moxnes 1980, 91).

In ch. 5, Paul described justification as in some sense still future, and once again he linked it with both faith and the Spirit. "For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness" (Gal 5:5). In Gal 5:16-25 he contrasted life in the flesh with life in the Spirit. If we understand life in the Spirit to be something different from the life of faith, then the unity of the letter is destroyed. The way to make sense of the entire letter is to recognize that for Paul the contrast between law and faith translates into a contrast between flesh and Spirit. The law was

good in itself but inadequate to provide justification because it relied upon the flesh for fulfillment and imparted no power to the flesh. Faith is the answer to this dilemma because by faith we receive the Holy Spirit, which imparts God's righteousness to us and enables us to live a new life of righteousness. This point is underscored in Rom 8.

Dunn (1993, 53) observed that in Galatians Paul appealed to two primary aspects of the shared experience of Christians—"faith and Spirit." They are linked in the experience of justification.

1 and 2 Corinthians

Paul appealed to the experience of the Corinthians much as he did in Galatians. He stressed that their conversion was not based merely upon head knowledge or response to persuasive rhetoric, but they received a miraculous, powerful experience of the Holy Spirit. "My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4-5). In language reminiscent of Rom 15:18-19, this statement describes the role of the Spirit in the proclamation of the gospel. Moreover, it identifies the basis of faith as the power of God, specifically, the Spirit. Thus, Paul tied justifying faith to the Spirit.

We also find a parallel in 1 Thess 1:5: "Our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." Lull (1991, 258) noted, "The eschatological gift of the Spirit at the Thessalonians' reception of Paul's gospel provides evidence of their faith."

Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul linked this powerful reception of the Holy Spirit with the conversion and justification of believers:

- "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God" (1 Cor 2:12).

- “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Being baptized with, by, or in the Spirit¹⁵ is an integral part of Christian initiation, and as such it cannot be separated from justification.
- “Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45). It is the Spirit of Christ that imparts life. This identification of the Spirit with Christ himself is clear in 2 Cor 3:17-18.

The strongest statement in 1 Corinthians that links justification with the Holy Spirit is in 6:11: “And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

In the context, Paul described the former sinful life of the Corinthian believers by listing various habitual sins, and he contrasted it with their new life in Christ. In their conversion from the old to the new, they were washed, sanctified, and justified, and Paul linked these works to the name of Jesus and the Spirit of God. Elsewhere in the NT, washing is associated with baptism in the name of Jesus Christ,¹⁶ while sanctification is associated with the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ In traditional Protestant theology, justification is typically identified with faith, but here we see that in Paul’s theology it is also important to identify justification with the name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In other words, justification rests upon the saving action of the man Jesus Christ, in his historical death, burial, and resurrection, but it also rests upon the present work of the Spirit of Christ in the believer’s heart.

It appears that 1 Cor 6:11 describes Christian initiation, which involves repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ The Greek text uses the same preposition ἐν (*en*, “in, by, with”) in Acts 1:5 and 1 Cor 12:13.

¹⁶ Acts 2:38; 22:16. John 3:5 and Titus 3:5 are also likely references to water baptism at Christian initiation.

¹⁷ Rom 15:16; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2.

(Acts 2:38). In Acts 19:1-6, Paul found some disciples at Ephesus who had received the baptism of John the Baptist, and he acknowledged that they were believers in some sense. Yet he insisted upon baptizing them in the name of the Lord Jesus, and he prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit. He regarded both water baptism and Spirit baptism as part of Christian initiation, and in 1 Cor 6:11 we find a theological expression that corresponds to his action.

Commenting on 1 Cor 6:11, Fee (1994, 130-32) noted how important the work of the Spirit is to salvation in the thinking of Paul:

Christ's death was the place in history where such saving activity took place; they were saved in these various aspects "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." But because they were all experientially appropriated at conversion, which is essentially the work of the Spirit, they were also saved in these various aspects "by the Spirit of our God."... It needs only be noted once more how crucial the role of the Spirit is to Paul's view of salvation in Christ.... The Spirit appropriates God's salvation in the life of the believer in such a way that new life and behavior are the expected result; and without the latter, the effective work of the Spirit in the believer's life, there has been no true salvation—in any meaningful sense for Paul.

While the rhetorical situations of Galatians and 1 Corinthians are different, both letters contain a similar contrast. Against the Judaizers of Galatians, Paul contrasted the old life of law/flesh with the new life of faith/Spirit. In the corrupt, pagan context of Corinth, Paul contrasted the way of worldliness/habitual sin with new life and transforming power in the Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians the contrast is once again placed in the context of the old covenant versus the new. The old covenant was proclaimed on tablets of stone, but the new covenant is written in the human heart by the Spirit. "You show that you are

a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor 3:3).

The old covenant depended upon the letter, the law. Once someone breaks the law, it cannot administer life; it can only pronounce punishment, which in the case of sin is ultimately death. By contrast, the new covenant is characterized by “the ministry of the Spirit,” which brings life and righteousness. Christ “has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses’ face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory!” (2 Cor 3:6-9).

The contrast in this passage is between the old covenant (“the ministry of death”) and the new covenant (“the ministry of the Spirit”). The new covenant is also called “the ministry of justification.” Presumably, Paul did not deny the existence of either the work of the Spirit or justification under the old covenant, but in the first-century context he saw the Jewish tendency to trust in law observance as antithetical to the new way of the Spirit. Significantly, the work of the Spirit was so intimately involved with justification by faith under the new covenant that he could actually equate the two.

Rather than merely saying that faith brings justification, Paul said specifically that “the ministry of the Spirit” brings justification or righteousness. Instead of contrasting law and faith or law and Christ, he contrasted law and Spirit (Dunn 1998a, 124).

The reception of the Spirit is closely identified with faith in the Lord Jesus, because the Holy Spirit is actually the Spirit of the Lord. The Lord Jesus “continues to be present with his disciples as Spirit—the same Spirit” (Dunn 1998a, 151). The Spirit is Christ’s personal presence and power to transform human minds and lives.

“But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:14-18).

We should probably regard the last statement as dealing primarily with the ongoing work of sanctification in the life of the believer. Nevertheless, it is significant that v. 18 equates the Lord with the Spirit. Not only could Paul equate justification in the believer’s life with the work of the Spirit, but he could equate the presence of the Lord in the believer’s life with the Spirit. In the words of Smedes (1983, 41-54): “In the new age, the Lord is the Spirit.... The Spirit is the ascended Jesus in His earthly action.... This suggests that we do not serve a biblical purpose by insisting on the Spirit as a person who is separate from the person whose name is Jesus.”

Philippians

In Philippians, Paul once again stated that righteousness comes by faith rather than by the law. In this context, he linked the reception of the Spirit with faith. “For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ” (Phil 3:3, 9). The true circumcision, or new covenant people of God, are those who live in the Spirit rather than the flesh, those whose righteousness comes from God by faith instead of from self by the law. In this contrast we see an equation of justification by faith and life in the Spirit.

Commenting on Phil 3:3-9, Lull (1991, 259-60) explained Paul's view as follows: Before Christ, someone could be blameless according to the law, but that was not the same as God's righteousness. Only through Christ and through the Spirit of God received from the risen Christ can people receive new life and become righteous.

Titus

Most contemporary commentators do not attribute this letter directly to Paul, but they still consider it to be a product of the Pauline community and thus in the mainstream of Pauline theology. It contains a strong statement of salvation by grace through faith that is relevant to our discussion: "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is sure" (Titus 3:4-8).

Here we find the familiar Pauline theme of justification by the grace and mercy of God and not by our works of righteousness. Significantly, this passage associates justification with the reception and renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

SURVEY OF THEOLOGICAL POSITIONS ON JUSTIFICATION

Now that we have examined the concept of justification in Paul's letters, let us briefly look at various positions on this subject. We want to enter into the theological conversation with the goal of contributing toward a contemporary theology that will fulfill the criteria we have established and be relevant in twenty-first-century global Christianity.

Traditional Protestant View of Justification

The central message of the Protestant Reformation was Martin Luther's doctrine of justification by faith (Gonzales 1975, 3:25-62). In opposition to the merit system of medieval Roman Catholicism, with its sacrament of penance and sale of indulgences, Luther argued that people could not receive forgiveness of sins or remission of its penalties by the performance of good deeds. Instead, he proclaimed that sinners came into right standing with God by faith alone.

To establish his message he appealed primarily to the writings of Paul, particularly the letters to the Romans and Galatians. For example: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'" (Rom 1:16-17). "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:15-16). Luther even insisted on adding the word "alone" to his German translation of Rom 3:28 so that it said, "A person is justified by faith [alone]."

For Luther, justification was a forensic transaction that took place totally outside of humans. In order to establish that no human merit could enter into the process, he appealed to Augustine's doctrine of predestination. John Calvin and his

followers later gave fullest expression to this concept (Gonzales 1975, 3:120-161, 242-72). Thus, the salvation of an individual occurs by the decision and action of God completely apart from human involvement. God first determined who would be saved and paid the price for their salvation by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. On the basis of God's unconditional election and God's redemptive act in Christ, God imparts faith to the elect. Faith is not a decision on their part, nor is it a response to God's grace. Rather, it is a gift of God's grace apart from human intention or desire.

Because of this undeserved, unmerited gift of faith, God no longer imputes sin to the chosen ones but instead imputes the righteousness of Christ to them. They now have right standing with God on the basis of faith. God counts them as righteous; they are justified in God's sight. Subsequent to their justification, believers are supposed to grow in grace and be progressively transformed so that they become more and more righteous in their daily lives. In Protestant theology, however, this work is known as sanctification, and it is logically distinct from justification. Justified persons are counted as righteous by a legal reckoning even though they are not actually righteous in their heart or conduct. In Luther's words they are justified sinners, *simul iustus et peccator*—"simultaneously righteous and sinful."

Traditional Catholic View of Justification

In response to the Lutheran and Calvinist doctrine of justification, the Roman Catholic Church proclaimed at the Council of Trent in 1545-63 that justification comes by faith and works. Justification begins by faith, but it is maintained and increased by good works, with both faith and works being prompted by God's grace. Justification is a process of actually becoming righteous by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Trent affirmed that justification is a process initiated by God's prevenient grace, which humans can accept or reject. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ purchased our justification, and humans receive it by God's grace, not our works. "Justifying faith" is more than "confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake,"

however, and in addition, humans are not justified by “faith alone” (Schaff 1983, 2:112-13). Good works also play an important role:

If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof: let him be anathema.... If any one saith, ... that the said justified, by the good works which he performs through the grace of God and the merits of Jesus Christ ... does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of that eternal life ... let him be anathema (Schaff 1983, 2:115-18).

In the twentieth century, prominent Protestant and Catholic theologians such as Karl Barth and Hans Küng expressed considerable consensus on the subject of justification, agreeing that Luther rightly opposed medieval distortions of the doctrine, that justification is a work of God’s prevenient grace to be received by faith, and that humans are not God’s coworkers in producing justification (Küng 1964). In 1983, the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue Group in the United States announced that it had reached a “fundamental consensus” on the doctrine of justification by faith, stating, “Our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Christ Jesus and on the gospel whereby the good news of God’s merciful action in Christ is made known” (*Christianity Today* 1983, 11). Nevertheless, there is a significantly different outlook on the issue of whether justification is wholly extrinsic or includes an intrinsic work.

The New Perspective of Sanders and Dunn

In the latter half of the twentieth century, scholars began reexamining the exegetical basis of the traditional formulations of justification. Sanders (1977, 1-12, 419-26, 492) noted that Luther’s reading of Romans and Galatians depended on the view that the Jews of Paul’s day were legalists who believed in justification by works. Against this view, Sanders argued that first-century Jews based their salvation in the

grace of God, not human works. Thus, Luther's reading of Pauline theology had more to do with Luther's own struggle against medieval Catholicism than with first-century issues.

Sanders argued that Paul was actually concerned with the Jewish belief in "covenantal monism." That is, the Jews believed they had an exclusive covenant with God, and the early Jewish followers of Christ persisted in this view. By contrast, Paul argued that both Jews and Gentiles could enter into covenant relationship with God. Therefore, it was not necessary for Gentile believers in Christ to keep the Jewish law. In particular, Paul argued that Christians did not need to keep the boundary markers of the Jewish covenant with God, particularly, circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and the dietary laws.

To a great extent, Dunn has followed this analysis. He has concluded that in Paul's writings "works of the law" refers specifically to legal obedience as a means of distinguishing Jews from Gentiles so that Jews could maintain their "national righteousness" as God's unique covenant people (Dunn 1988a, lxv, lxix, lxxi, 158). Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith is a legitimate corollary of Paul's doctrine (Dunn 1998, 366).

Evangelical Responses to the New Perspective

Several Evangelical scholars have responded to this New Perspective by saying that we can only understand Romans and Galatians if we assume that some first-century Jews indeed based their justification or salvation more on their works than on God's grace. Moo (1996, 217) has argued that in Paul's writings "any system of works is revealed as unable to conquer the power of sin.... No person can gain a standing with God through works because no one is able to perform works to the degree needed to secure such a standing." Thus Paul's argument in Romans serves to invalidate any system of legalism or works-righteousness.

Gathercole (2002, 263-66) agrees in part with the New Perspective critique of traditional Lutheranism: "While God does initially 'justify the ungodly,' the

indwelling of Christ and the Spirit *enables* obedience that culminates in final justification.” Nevertheless, he argues that the New Perspective is not adequate either: “The meaning of justification by faith apart from works of Torah in Romans is not to be determined by the Antioch incident (Paul is *not* in debate with Jewish Christianity) but rather by the rhetorical context of Paul’s debate with his Jewish interlocutor.” He maintains that Jewish literature of the first century emphasizes both gracious election by God and obedience as a basis for vindication at the judgment, and the NT does likewise. He concludes, however, that Paul and his Jewish contemporaries had a significantly different understanding of obedience in this regard: “For Paul, divine action is both the source and the continuous cause of obedience for the Christian.”

Witherington and Hyatt (2004, 122) similarly acknowledge that the New Perspective correctly criticizes the traditional Protestant conception of justification:

It is a mistake to simply read Paul’s righteousness language through a forensic filter, not least because Paul believes that God requires of his people that once saved, they actually lead righteous lives. Paul would likely be appalled by the notion that he is talking about some sort of legal fiction, including the idea that Christ is righteous in the believer’s place in such a way that believers are not required to be righteous. Even worse would be the notion that when God looks at believers, he simply sees Christ’s righteousness and reckons it to their accounts, instead of believers having to live holy lives.

In the final analysis, they too see the New Perspective as inadequate. They argue that the central thrust of Rom 2-3 is not against Jewish ethnocentrism or boundary markers but against “arrogance, boasting, self-righteousness based on works and accomplishments, judgmentalism, and the like” (Witherington and Hyatt 2004, 124-25). As a further example, Rom 4:6 speaks of David as being credited with righteousness “apart from works.” Even though he abided by the Jewish boundary markers of circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary laws, he was without works

because of his disobedience, and therefore he needed the justifying grace of God (247).

Witherington and Hyatt (2004, 210-19) point out that in Romans justification involves both an “objective standing” in God’s sight and a “subjective transformation” based on what Spirit does in believers. For those who have faith in Christ, the Spirit becomes the means of incorporating them into the body of Christ’s people and makes personal righteousness possible. “The Spirit does not merely convey the Good News. The Spirit enacts that news in the believer.”

They conclude that the disagreement between Paul and his Jewish contemporaries was not over obedience, for Paul considered that members of the covenant needed to obey whatever God requires. Rather, the disagreement centered on whether obedience *without transformation by God’s power* could be the basis for justification (Witherington and Hyatt 2004, 249).

A Pentecostal Perspective

Recently, some Pentecostal theologians have begun to call for a reappraisal of justification in pneumatological terms. For example, in 2000 Frank Macchia, a professor at Vanguard University, gave a presidential address to the Society for Pentecostal Studies in which he proclaimed that the traditional doctrines of justification in Protestantism and Catholicism are inadequate. Neither gives full credit to the New Testament description of justification as a transformational event, and neither gives proper recognition to the role of the Holy Spirit. Macchia (2000, 11, emphasis in original) stated his thesis as follows:

Paul’s entire insistence is that justification does not come through the law but through God’s saving act in Christ and the Spirit, which is experienced now through the gift of the Spirit and is culminated in the resurrection of the body and the new creation.... *The importance of the Spirit as the means of bringing about final righteousness in new creation is the*

reason why faith and not the works of the law is the means by which this new creation lays claim to us in the here-and-now.

Macchia (2000, 12) argues that the righteousness reckoned to the believer is not the meritorious works of Christ but new life in the Spirit. He further states, “Justification is a gift given by grace alone, and received by faith, because it comes to us as a work of the Spirit through Christ.”

This entire discussion helps us to rethink the doctrine of justification in ways that are not circumscribed by the historical controversy between Protestantism and Catholicism. The New Perspective of Sanders and Dunn assists in this regard, although Moo, Gathercole, Witherington, and Hyatt point out inadequacies in this approach. Macchia’s ideas are particularly helpful in pointing us toward a fresh construction.

We can construct a synthesis as follows: While Paul’s argument in Romans serves to invalidate any system of legalism or works-righteousness, it is important to place it in its historical and social context. The Jews who rejected the Christian message were intent on maintaining their identity and their status by keeping the law. Their error was not merely covenantal monism or legal exclusivism, but it was supremely their rejection of the saving work of Christ—specifically, his death, burial, and resurrection. Their error was not in acting as opposed to believing; rather, it was in acting by the power of the flesh rather than by the power of the Spirit. They sought to obey God by the law, which was outmoded because it relied on the ability of the flesh. Instead, they needed to realize that the law was a temporary tutor to lead them to Christ so that in Christ they could be transformed and live a new life by his indwelling Spirit. Instead of the old way of the letter, they needed to follow the new way of the Spirit.

First-century Gentiles were attracted to this mistaken system of self-mastery through the law and the human mind, in part because of the prevalent teaching of Stoicism. The Stoics promoted two important goals that Paul himself embraced: self-

mastery and the brotherhood of humans. They taught that God is reason, that reason unites God and humans, that reason establishes a natural law for everyone to follow, and that on this basis all people are equal and are brothers. Thus, when the Romans heard Paul appealing for them to control the flesh and to accept Jews into their fellowship, it would have been easy for them to merge the Stoic thought of their culture with the Jewish thought of the Bible—thereby treating the law of Moses as the biblical manifestation of natural law, as the basis of unity in the church in contrast to the society at large, and as the means for self-mastery in both Stoic and Jewish senses.

Instead, Paul appealed for Gentiles and Jews to unite on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. In Rom 1-5 he argued that only faith in Jesus Christ could bring people into right standing with God, thereby uniting them into one universal body. In Rom 6-8 he argued that no one could attain self-mastery through the law (as the Jews thought) or the efforts of the human mind (as the Stoics thought), but only through the power of the Holy Spirit. In Rom 9-11, he explained that a careful study of the Jewish Scriptures shows this path to be the proper way to integrate Jews and Gentiles into one church. In Rom 12-15, he applied the theoretical discussion to practical conduct, including issues that could continue to separate Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome and that could hinder their ability to evangelize the Romans.

In summary, Paul sought to unite Jew and Gentile by appealing to a new common ground of faith in Jesus Christ. While building upon the best of both Jewish and Gentile thought, he demonstrated the inadequacy of Jewish law and Gentile philosophy. Moreover, in his understanding, faith is more than mental assent, because that would leave people still dependent on the power of the human mind. Instead, faith is effective because it activates the power of God's Spirit to transform the mind and empower a new life.

In Jewish thought, the Holy Spirit is the active presence and power of the one true God. Paul assumed this definition but further identified the Holy Spirit as the

Spirit of the risen Christ, who was the one true God manifested in flesh. In this way, Paul connected faith in Jesus Christ to the work of the Holy Spirit, showing that they are inseparable.

CONCLUSION

Traditional Protestant theology emphasizes the forensic model of justification. Under this view, justification is essentially something that takes place outside of humans. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for human sins on the cross, and God accepts this atoning act as the necessary and sufficient satisfaction for those sins. This remedy is applied to an individual's heart by grace through faith, which enables the person to be justified, or counted as righteous. In the theologies of both Martin Luther and John Calvin, even this faith is extrinsic to humans, for prior to their birth God has predestined those who will be saved, and based on this election God grants justifying faith to the chosen.

Traditional Catholic theology emphasizes that justification involves the active cooperation of humans. While justification begins with faith, it is maintained and increased by works, which are motivated by grace through faith. Justification involves both being counted as righteous and actually being made righteous by the work of the Holy Spirit.

A study of the Letter to the Romans and other Pauline writings indicates that neither position fully articulates the Pauline concept of justification. The forensic model accurately describes Christ's death as the necessary and sufficient atonement for all human sins, and Protestantism correctly insists that in Paul's theology no human works can earn salvation. Nevertheless, the traditional Protestant interpretation of justification does not give sufficient attention to the resurrection of Christ and to the corresponding role of the Holy Spirit. Here the Catholic explanation gives a useful hint by pointing to the work of the Spirit in the believer's life.

What is needed for a full theology of justification is something more than either of these two approaches. We find a fresh way to move forward by a careful examination of Paul's theology in Romans—supported by other Pauline writings as

well as other books of the NT (although we have excluded the latter from the present study). In Romans we see an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit for justification as well as for all aspects of salvation.

Romans teaches that justification rests upon both the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ's death provides the way of atonement and reconciliation, but by itself his death would have been a defeat instead of a victory. Christ's resurrection won actual victory over death, sin, and the devil, and to receive justification people must somehow participate in his resurrection as well as his death.

The way believers apply the resurrection of Christ to their lives is by receiving his Spirit to dwell in them. The Spirit is the agent of justification—not only transferring them from the category of unrighteous to righteous based on Christ's atoning death, but also transferring them from a dead spiritual state to a living relationship with the risen Lord. At justification, the Spirit of Christ gives believers power to overcome sin, death, and the devil just as Christ did in his earthly life. The work of transformation begins, as the Spirit progressively molds believers into the image of Christ. This is the process of sanctification, but it begins with justification by the Spirit. In the words of Morgan (1995, 122), "The God who creates and saves is known in his saving righteousness in the death and resurrection of Jesus who is present to believers as Spirit. The Lord who is Spirit and creates freedom (cf. 2 Cor. 3.14-18) works on earth through believers who are empowered by this Spirit."

Sanders (1977, 419-26) and Dunn (1988a, lxxv-lxxii, 158-59) remind us that in the first century, the doctrine of justification involved a battle over the boundary markers of a covenant relationship with God. Paul contended that Gentiles should be recognized as covenant members on the basis of faith in Christ without having to adhere to the Jewish distinctives of circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and dietary laws. Traditional Protestant theology correctly concludes that Paul's teaching would also oppose any other system that bases justification on group identity or human merit rather than faith in God's grace. But Catholic theology reminds us that Paul expected a genuine inward transformation to be part of justification. From our investigation of

Paul's writing, we see that this transformation occurs by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. In essence, Paul teaches that the new boundary marker for the covenant people of God is the charismatic reception of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

Dunn (1998, 332-33, 416, 425, 442, 455) describes the beginning of salvation as a crucial, many-sided transition and a complex whole with three significant aspects: justification by faith, participation in Christ, and the gift of the Spirit. Protestant theology has focused on the first, and Catholic theology has focused on the second. While it would be a mistake to elevate any one aspect to the exclusion of the others, it is the gift of the Spirit that is the most prominent of the three in Paul's thinking. Thus "Paul could think of the blessing of Abraham both as justification and as reception of the Spirit.... It is 'having the Spirit' which defines and determines someone as being 'of Christ.'... In Paul's understanding, it was by receiving the Spirit that one became a Christian" (414, 423).

Williams (1997, 86) concludes that Paul linked "the status of righteousness with the work of the Spirit in the closest possible way," and "the experience of the Spirit and the status of justification are, for the apostle, inconceivable apart from each other." Indeed, God justifies humans by overcoming the power of sin in their lives by God's Spirit. "Thus the new relationship with God, the status of being justified, is the work of a life-transforming power, the power of the Spirit" (Williams 1987, 97).

As Williams (1987, 98) points out, this understanding of Paul enables us to transcend earlier Protestant-Catholic debates over whether justification is extrinsic or intrinsic. "For Paul, a new status before God implies a life transformed by the working of God's Spirit and vice versa. It would not occur to him that a Christian would claim the status if the signs of the Spirit were lacking."

In sum, for Paul, justification involves not only a change of standing but also victory over sin and the beginning of a new life. Sinful humans can receive the divine work of justification in their lives by grace through faith. Justifying faith is not merely acceptance of Christ's atonement, but it consists of trust, reliance, and

¹⁸ Paul also included water baptism in Jesus' name as part of the boundary marker. See Acts 19:1-6; Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 6:11; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5; Col 2:11-12.

obedience. By obedient faith, the sinner turns to God in repentance, receives water baptism in Jesus' name, and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, "which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27). The Spirit comes with vibrant witness and transforming power.

While justification is by grace through faith and not of works, it is not merely an extrinsic, forensic transaction. Rather, it is a dynamic work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart that enables believers to enter the new covenant and participate in the resurrection life of Jesus Christ.

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