



REFORMATION
COMMENTARY
ON SCRIPTURE

NEW TESTAMENT
VII

ROMANS I-8

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COMMENTARY ON ROMANS 1–8

OVERVIEW: In their prefatory comments, the Reformation-era interpreters extol the importance of the letter to the Romans, noting its centrality to all of Christian doctrine. They celebrate the letter in verse, summarize its contents and argument, and observe that it especially focuses on one central doctrine: justification by faith alone. Key concepts such as the law, gospel, and grace are introduced, as is the author of the letter, the apostle Paul. The reformers dedicate their commentaries to individuals and situate their work in relation to previously written commentaries. Finally, they address the reader, requesting prayer and suggesting how to approach the text spiritually.

THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. MARTIN LUTHER: This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes. Therefore I want to carry out my service and, with this preface, provide an introduction to the letter, insofar as God gives me the ability, so that everyone can gain the fullest possible understanding of it. Up to now it has been darkened by glosses[†] . . . and by many a useless comment, but it is in itself a bright light, almost bright enough to illumine the entire Scripture. . . .

We find in this letter, then, the richest possible teaching about what a Christian should know: the

meaning of law, gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, justice, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross. We learn how we are to act toward everyone, toward the virtuous and sinful, toward the strong and the weak, friend and foe, and toward ourselves. Paul bases everything firmly on Scripture and proves his points with examples from his own experience and from the prophets, so that nothing more could be desired. Therefore it seems that St. Paul, in writing this letter, wanted to compose a summary of the whole of Christian and evangelical teaching that would also be an introduction to the whole Old Testament. Without doubt, whoever takes this letter to heart possesses the light and power of the Old Testament. Therefore each and every Christian should make this letter the habitual and constant object of their study. God grant us his grace to do so. Amen. PREFACE TO THE LETTER OF ST. PAUL TO THE ROMANS (1545).¹

ALL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE REVOLVES AROUND THIS BOOK. JOHANN WILD: Among the Pauline letters the one that he wrote to the Romans has been assigned the first place. That's not because he wrote it first, for at least two others, that to the Corinthians and that to the Thessalonians, had already preceded it. But this letter is deservedly given the first place, not only because it was written to the Romans among whom the most important affairs and the empire itself was then located, but also because it presents a particular

¹Luther, *Preface to the Letter**. [†]Glosses are brief, interpretive notations.

text of Christian doctrine containing, as it were, a method of teaching of the whole of Scripture. Those who are even moderately literate are aware how profitable it may be to possess a way of teaching in accordance with the whole of doctrine. The whole of Christian teaching revolves around this book. The explanation of how we are justified before God, or what Christian righteousness really is, is the head and chief point of the whole of Christian doctrine. Hence Paul undertakes to clarify and illustrate this point in this letter.

EXEGESIS OF ROMANS (1558).²

PURITY OF DOCTRINE, FOUND IN ROMANS, PROTECTS THE ROSE. NIELS HEMMINGSEN:

The church of God in this world is not improperly compared to a rose born among thorns. For as thorns encircling a rose press against it and puncture it, they thereby only render it more fragrant. Similarly, the church, when hard-pressed on all sides, breathes out her fragrance all the more widely. By this exhaling, she emits her fragrance more effectively, and as a result, she also grows larger by new additions. This is what the history of the church sets in front of those who read it, and that to which the experience of all the saints bears witness.

The thorns surrounding this rose that crowd it and puncture it are the thistles and tares of heresy, of tyranny, hypocrisy, shameful acts, and various scandals in doctrine and morals, and—to say no more—spurious, woody, and dry stalks that cause no small harm to the true and genuine rose. Satan, that *aspondos* [implacable] enemy of Christ, scatters and sows these thorns so that he might squeeze and suffocate the rose that Christ planted with his own hand, clearly wishing to reduce her to nonexistence. Or, if he is unable to do that, he aims to at least prevent her from spreading her flowers and branches more widely. . . .

What is truly necessary for preserving the church is purity of doctrine. This has been found to be one and the same thing in all the church

histories that have been written, and holy discipline in morals serves as its handmaid. For this purity of doctrine is that life-giving spring out of which the Lord's rose blooms, so that she will not be suffocated or wither away even among the many thorns of tyranny, hypocrisy, sophistry, and scandals. This purity of doctrine is not to be sought after from any other source than from that saving fountain, that is, the writings of the prophets and apostles, among which the letters of Paul hold no mean rank, and especially that which he wrote to the Romans.

For this letter in a particular way demonstrates and explains the chief points of true doctrine. For this reason I believe it should be read and known with singular diligence by all pious persons. But so that it might be more properly understood by simpler persons and by novices with less experience in sacred theology, I have resolved to publish a commentary of sorts on this book, hoping that good and pious men and women will not disapprove of my intention. But even though I am aware that the judgment of certain persons opposes us, still I did not wish to defraud the many good men and women who await my small work on account of a few who think ill of it. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1562).³

INTRODUCTION TO PAUL. JOHANNES BRENZ: In order to explain this letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, before anything else I will first say a few things about Paul, the author of this letter, and then I will set forth in a few words the essence of this letter, so that we will know what we should expect to find in it.

Now as to what pertains to Paul, Christ himself, the only-begotten Son of God, gave a testimony concerning him. For when he was divinely converted from the synagogue of the Jews to the church of the sons of God, and from being a persecutor became instead an apostle of Christ, he was called by a heavenly voice a *skeuos tēs eklogēs*, or a "chosen instrument,"⁴ to bear my name before Gentiles and

²Wild, *Exegesis in Epistolam*, 4r-4v.

³Hemmingen, *Commentarius in Epistolam*, A2r-A2v; B2v-B3r.

kings, and before the children of Israel." Even though at first he had cruelly persecuted the church and the gospel of Christ, his teaching has thereby more authority insofar as it was all the more amazing that he came to a knowledge of Christ. For he did not abandon the Pharisaism that he once professed by any kind of fickleness of mind, but he converted to Christianity only when moved by a miracle from heaven. And he learned his gospel not from men and women here on earth, but from Christ himself in heaven, now sitting and reigning at the right hand of God. For he was caught up to Paradise, and also to the third heaven, and apart from the many secrets that he heard and that cannot be revealed on this earth with human words, he received also the very gospel from Christ himself, which he would later publish through the whole world. Nor was this another gospel than the one that Christ had earlier taught in this world and that the other apostles had learned. Therefore, the greatest confirmation of the truth of his doctrine is that Paul had come to know the very same thing in heaven that the rest of the apostles had received on earth. "Paul an apostle," he says, "not from men and women, nor by men and women, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead"; and "the gospel that is preached by me is not according to men and women. For neither did I receive it from men and women, nor did I learn it, but through a revelation of Jesus Christ." So that Paul would not be lacking in any authority to preach the gospel, Christ did not send him in secret and without public commendation, but adorned and marked him with such a great gift of working miracles that he not only raised the dead with his presence, but even the handkerchiefs and aprons taken from his body (according to Luke) laid on the sick pulled them back from sickness and caused evil spirits to depart. These were his letters of commendation, which are commonly called "letters of credit," by which the heavenly Father wished to commend to the world the authority of Paul and the truthfulness of his gospel. One could rightly say many other things about Paul, but since a man's speech shows the true shape of his soul, I would rather that by

this commemoration of mine we come to know who Paul is from his own words, which he has given us in written letters. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1564).⁴

THE BACKGROUND TO ROMANS. HULDRYCH ZWINGLI: The apostle gives thanks to Christ for prospering the Romans, and rejoices greatly on account of their faith, which was reported throughout the whole world. Then he attempts to settle a disagreement and controversy that existed among them. For it so happened that there were Roman believers from both the Jews and the Gentiles, and each was haughty in thinking too highly of themselves. Each side was setting themselves above the other and esteeming themselves as more loved by God and pleasing to him than the other. The Gentiles (who opposed the Jews as being profane and unworthy of Christ) think that they have an excuse before God for their unbelief, since they possessed neither the law, nor the prophets, nor a covenant by which they could know and worship God. They therefore thought of themselves as being excused in the sight of God and the world, or at least as being far better than the Jews. For the Jews had the law and the prophets and the divine oracles, including prophecies of the coming Christ, and nevertheless they crucified Christ the Savior, and therefore were made unworthy of Christ. The Jews, on the other hand, were so envious of the gospel going to the Gentiles that they would not allow it to be preached to them in any way, claiming that the promise of a Savior was given to them alone, not to the Gentiles. Paul explodes this quarrel, placing himself as an intermediary between the Jews and Gentiles, and shows that both are sinners, and that through Christ those of both origins are now one and same people, one holy church. He then proves by the strongest witnesses drawn from the Old Testament that both were going to be saved through Christ, and that not because of any works but only by the grace of God through Christ. In the end he adds a moral section concerning the true worship of God

⁴Brenz, *In Epistolam*, 5-6; citing Acts 9:15; Gal 1:1, 11-12; Acts 19:12.

and works, and how they should act in external matters. *ANNOTATIONS ON ROMANS* (1539).⁵

THE TIMING OF THE LETTER IN PAUL'S LIFE.

GEORG MAJOR: In the twenty-second year of Paul's conversion, the fifty-fifth year after Christ's birth, and the thirteenth year of Claudius's reign—after the Ephesian tumult had been sedated—Paul traveled to Macedonia, visiting the cities and churches where he had taught before. In the city of Philippi, having written the second letter to the Corinthians, which he sent through Titus and Luke, whom he sent ahead to collect alms in Corinth and Achaia and coming soon after them, he remained in Greece and particularly in Corinth for three months. At that time the letter to the Romans, written in Corinth, was sent through Phoebe a minister of the church at Cenchreae. Now Paul had spent his time continually proclaiming the gospel to all from Jerusalem to Illyricum, as he reports in Romans 15, where he says, "Now I must travel to Jerusalem to minister to the saints." For it seems that to Macedonia and Achaia . . . he sent ahead Titus and Luke from Corinth to collect alms in order to share fellowship with the poor saints who were in Jerusalem. *LIFE OF PAUL*.⁶

PREPARATION FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL.

CHARLES FERME AND ANDREW MELVILLE: The apostle, being about to proceed to Rome, sends this letter on before him, in which it appears to be his aim and design to prepare the minds of the Romans by it—as by a sort of *Isagoge*[†]—for hearing and eagerly embracing the gospel when he himself should come and preach it. He seems, therefore, purposely to select for discussion in this letter the position "that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation," that is, that the gospel is the sole truth according to which God is rightly worshiped, and that brings righteousness, peace, and eternal life to men and women. Having discussed this, he, by way of an appendix or

inference, exhorts us to a life worthy of the gospel, which is the second part of the preparation.

LOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS (1651).⁷

THE SCOPE OF THE EPISTLE. THOMAS WILSON:

Timotheus:[†] What is the scope of this letter?

Silas: To teach the way of obtaining true righteousness, which is not by works but by a lively faith in Christ Jesus.

Timotheus: Are there any more matters handled in this letter?

Silas: Yes, sundry and most weighty, as namely: about original corruption; sanctification; spiritual combat; the use of the law; of the remnants of sin; the benefits of afflictions; the constancy of believers; election; reprobation; rejection; provocation of the Jews; moral, ecclesiastical, and political duties; Christian liberty; and familiar matters.

Timotheus: What reasons may move us to love and study this letter?

Silas: (1) The worthiness and variety of the matter. (2) The method and order of writing, which is very exact. (3) The dignity of the instrument or pen-man, who was an apostle that had seen visions and revelations. (4) The majesty and wisdom of the Author, who is the God of wisdom and majesty. . . .

Timotheus: Why was this letter set before the rest of Paul's letter?

Silas: It was not because it was written before all the others, nor because of the great dignity of the Roman nation—being then lords of almost the whole earth—nor for the excellency of the Roman church—which consisted of Gentiles and was inferior to the church of the Jews, who were the olive tree, others being wild olives—nor yet for the length of this letter, as some have imagined, but for the exceeding worth and use of the matter handled in it. For besides the main article of justification by faith, defined, debated, and determined, there are other

⁵Zwingli, *In Evangelicam Historiam*, 497.

⁶Major, *Vita S. Pauli Apostoli*, C7v-C8r; citing Rom 16:1-2; 15:25. Cf. RCS NT 6:274-75.

⁷Ferme and Melville, *Logical Analysis*, 1*. [†]Isagogue: an introduction, opening a case. Ferme may be referring specifically to Porphyry's *Isagogue*, an introduction to Aristotle's *Categories* and a well-known medieval university textbook.

questions and points of Christian faith of great moment and profit: the fall of humanity, the force of original corruption, the restoration of men and women by Christ; of the sweet and manifold fruits of justifying faith, also of sanctification; of the cross and comfort to those that bear it; of predestination; of the vocation of Gentiles; of the breaking off and grafting in again of the Jews; of good works; of magistracy, of charity, of the use of things indifferent,[†] of the diversity of gifts, and functions of the church. So this letter was, out of good respect, set before the rest as the key to open the way to understand the others, and as a catechism or introduction to our most holy religion. Also, the most exact and accurate method of this letter deserved that it have a preface; so, after the proem, Paul defines justification, declaring what it is. . . . Also, he expresses the various causes of it: (1) Efficient: God's grace (2) Material: Christ Jesus dead and raised to life. (3) The Formal: our belief of the gospel (4) The Final or remote end: the praise of God's righteousness; the nearest end, our salvation.[§]

A COMMENTARY UPON THE MOST DIVINE
EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE ROMANS (1614).⁸

Summaries of the Content of Romans 1–8

CONDENSED FORM OF ERASMUS'S ARGUMENT.

ANDREAS KNOPKEN: ERASMUS weaves together a rather complex argument, but it can be more concisely stated this way: that Paul teaches that both Jews and Gentiles who have come together within Christianity by virtue of faith in Christ are transgressors of the divine law. Neither did the written law profit the Jews, nor the law divinely inscribed on the minds of men and women—which they call the “law of nature”—profit the Gentiles, but both are guilty before God, as many scriptural testimonies prove. To both, he then

offers Christ, through justifying faith, who is the *end*, or the fulfillment, “of the law for righteousness to all who believe.” He both forgives sins and imparts the justifying Spirit, who transforms our affections so that we are made into a new creation and so that we might be righteous not only in the eyes of men and women by our works, which is what the law demands of us, but also inwardly in our mind and affections, which are known only to God. Only the Spirit of Christ can make this happen, who transforms whomever he moves upon into new men and women, just as Samuel said to Saul. Then he goes on to teach, last, that however it might be the case that we are righteous in the eyes of God only by faith in Christ, that works do not confer righteousness, and that by them “no flesh will be justified before God.” Yet because we are still burdened by impure flesh and justification is required until the day that “this mortal shall put on immortality,” we must keep the flesh in subjection to our mind by virtuous efforts.

And so that we might not think that the preaching of the grace of God means we no longer have to do good works—and so change that liberty into which Christ set us free into an occasion for the flesh so that we make it into a cloak for wickedness—he then launches into the moral section of the letter, along various topics. Just before the end he admonishes them to show tolerance toward the weak and superstitious until they also mature in Christ “into a perfect man or woman.”

This letter was written from Corinth, a city of Achaia, and carried by Phoebe, a Roman woman from Cenchreae who was sent by the apostle. It is in this letter especially, along with that written to the Galatians, that Paul pays special attention to and exalts the role of faith, against the Pharisaic “workers,” showing that trust in Christ alone justifies for obtaining salvation or glory. But the works belonging to those who are thus justified are the fruits of a good tree, and such works without faith are sins, however much they might be marvelous and magnificent in the eyes of men and women: “for whatever is not of faith is sin,” and

⁸Wilson, *Commentarie*, 3-4*. [†]Wilson uses a fictional dialogue format. [‡]Referring to the *adiaphora*, theological and spiritual matters that are debatable rather than essential to the faith.

[§]Aristotle's four causes.

“without faith no person can please God.” OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁹

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 1-4. JOHN OWEN: In the first chapters of this letter, the apostle, from Scripture and the constant practice of all sorts of men and women of all ages, Jews and Gentiles, wise and barbarians, proves all the world, and every individual in it, to “have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” And not only so, but that it was utterly impossible that by their own strength, or by virtue of any assistance communicated or privileges enjoyed, they would ever be able to attain to a righteousness of their own that might be acceptable to God.

So, he concludes that discourse with these two positive assertions:

First, that for what is past, “every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.”

Second, for the future, though they should labor to amend their ways, and improve their assistances and privileges to a better advantage than formerly, “yet by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in the sight of God.”

Now, since it is the main drift of the apostle in this letter, and in his whole employment, to manifest that God has not shut up all of humanity hopeless and remediless under this condition, he immediately discovers and opens the rich supply that God, in free grace, has made and provided for the deliverance of his own from this calamitous estate. That is, by the righteousness of faith in Christ, which he unfolds, asserts, proves, and vindicates from objections, to the end of the third chapter.

This is a matter of great weight, comprising in itself the sum of the gospel with which Paul was entrusted. It involves the honor and exaltation of Christ, which above all he desired; the great design of God to be glorious in his saints; and, in a word, is the chief subject of the message committed to him from Christ. This gospel is that those who neither have, nor by any means can attain, a

righteousness of their own by the best of their own working, may yet have that which is complete and *irrefusable* in Christ, by believing. Paul, therefore, strongly confirms this in the fourth chapter, by testimony and example from the Scripture, with the ancient saints. He thus also declares that though the manifestation of this mystery was not more fully opened by Christ from the bosom of the Father, yet, ever since sin entered the world, this has been the only way for anyone to appear in the presence of God.

To make his demonstrations even more evident, he singles out one person as an example: someone who was eminently known and confessed by all to have been the friend of God, to have been righteous and justified before him, and thereby to have held sweet communion with him all his days. To wit, Abraham. . . .

Now, concerning him, the apostle proves abundantly, in the beginning of the fourth chapter, that the justification that he found, and the righteousness he attained, was purely that—and no other—which he described before; to wit, a righteousness in the forgiveness of sins through faith in the blood of Christ. Yes, and that all the privileges and exaltations of this Abraham, which made him so signal and eminent among the saints of God as to be called “the father of the faithful,” were merely from this, that this righteousness of grace was freely discovered and fully established to him. An enjoyment was granted to him in a peculiar manner by faith whereby the Lord Christ—with the whole spring of the righteousness previously mentioned—was enwrapped. This the apostle pursues, with sundry and various inferences and conclusions, to the end of verse 17, chapter 14.

Having laid this down, in the next place Paul gives us a description of the faith by which Abraham became the inheritor of those excellent things. . . . So that, just as his justification was proposed as an example of God’s dealing with us by his grace, so his faith might be laid down as a pattern for us in receiving that grace. SERMON ON ROMANS 4:20.¹⁰

⁹Knopken, *In Epistolam ad Romanos* (1524), A4r-A4v; citing Rom 10:4; 1 Sam 10:6; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 15:54; Eph 4:13; Rom 14:23; Heb 11:6.

¹⁰Owen, *Works*, 8:211-12*; citing Rom 3:19-20.

THE ARGUMENT OF ROMANS I-8. GIOVANNI DIODATI: Now, although the New Testament letters were written for particular occasions, yet divine providence directed the apostles to include in them the necessary exposition of all the chief topics of Christian doctrine, and St. Paul, who spoke more than anyone else, also wrote more; and he more expansively and deeply unfolded all the mysteries of salvation, the duties of serving God, and the rules of lawful government and discipline in the church. He also mixed in excellent revelations of things to come, which God had manifested to him. Among all the letters of this great “vessel of election,” the one to the Romans holds the first degree in all categories, for in it, Paul lays open each part of Christ’s benefit in most exquisite order, as well as the duties of grateful response and service to which all believers are bound. The Romans to whom he writes were believers among the Gentiles that were assembled in Rome, where the gospel had been carried even before the apostles came there. And as the apostleship of the Gentiles had fallen to Paul’s lot, so he performed this great duty toward it—after he had for a long time caused it to shine with the incomparable gifts of God’s grace—to instruct and edify it with this divine letter, which may very well be called the great sea of Christian doctrine. And in it, after he had in the beginning set down his vocation and desire to contribute to the advancement of the faith of those who believed in Rome, he shows that the gospel received by faith is the only and most powerful means to obtain true righteousness before God, and by the means of it, life—seeing that all men and women, because of sin, are subject to God’s wrath and curse. The Gentiles are condemned by the law of nature imprinted in their hearts, and the Jews much more by Moses’ law, which yields no man or woman any prerogative to righteousness, but instead makes their coming judgment worse, since having the knowledge of the law, they do not live in correspondence with it by obeying it entirely. And therefore Paul concludes that all men and women, to avoid being condemned, must seek outside themselves the

righteousness that they lack, looking to Christ in whom this treasure is laid up, for the remission of sins, and full justification of sinners. And that as God presents this righteousness out of his mere grace, and to all nations, so the only means to receive it is by lively faith. It is without any necessity or use of circumcision or other ceremonies of the law. And men and women’s own works do not in any way contribute power to it. And Paul demonstrates it by the example of Abraham, the father of all believers, and the general pattern of faith. Then he goes on to declare the effects of faith, and of God’s fatherly love in Christ, which are peace and quiet of conscience toward God, security, joy, and spiritual rejoicing in tribulations, and assured hope of everlasting glory. And he concludes this part by showing the foundation and ground of all this communication of Christ to his believers, which is God’s order, who has established Christ to be the head and stock of his church. He did this so that from him might derive into her the virtue of his righteousness to justification, everlasting life and happiness—just as Adam was the natural head of all men and women, enclosing and enfolding them all in his sin, and consequently into his death and condemnation. Then Paul comes to the subsequent, and inseparable benefit of sanctification, which is brought forth in believers by the Holy Spirit, so that they may resemble Jesus Christ their head, by virtue of which the believer does not fight any more against the law of God. And again, the law is not an instigation for the believer to sin, to incense and harden him, but rather, a loving and friendly guide and rule of holiness. The believer willingly and peaceably frames and co-orders his will and actions to the law, though still with much weakness and repugnancy at the remainders of flesh within. God leaves those remainders in those that are his for a continual exercise and spur to their sides, to cause them to sigh after their perfect deliverance and freedom in the heavenly life to come. And therefore Paul comforts them by telling them that those firstfruits of the Holy Spirit—his motions and strivings—are to them a sure earnest of God’s love, of their conjunction with Christ, and

of their adoption, justification, and future inheritance and glory, which they at the present taste, but only in faith and hope, but which is nevertheless infallible, being grounded on God's everlasting decree. And therefore there also grows in them a firm confidence against all the assaults of the devil and the world, both internal or external. PIOUS AND LEARNED ANNOTATIONS.¹¹

ROMANS 1-8 IN VERSE. RUDOLF GWALTHER:

Chapter 1

I often wished to come and see my Roman
brothers,
But mighty God obstructed my prayer.
Then [Paul] teaches from where all vicious evils
come;
They come from disregarding the holy will of God.

Chapter 2

All those born in the human race have sinned
And all deserve God's anger.
And lest the Jewish peoples think they are exempt,
Paul teaches what it will mean to be truly a Jew.

Chapter 3

Glorious Israel, howevermuch the fame of the
nation rises,
Nevertheless, incurred penalties for sins.
And indeed, they do not benefit from the sacred
writings of the law;
The abounding grace of God alone helps sinful
people.

Chapter 4

The prophet Abraham believed in the truthfulness
of God
This faith gave pleasure to God, not being
doubted.
Thus all who believe are declared children of
Abraham.
Faith alone is able to reconcile [us] to the Lord.

Chapter 5

He describes the beginning of the holy gift of
faith,

Revealing how great the grace of the Lord will
be
He tells of the fount whence the error of sin
arose,
And that Fount from whence the grace of faith
now flows.

Chapter 6

To sin the doors must now be closed, he says.
It's faith's duty then to live in holy deeds.
Being recently made pure from the filth of sin,
Now with a holy mind go on to strive after God.

Chapter 7

He teaches with heavenly [wisdom] the
function of the law,
And how it lays its heavy yoke upon us.
It shows us hidden sin that escapes our notice.
But for us who are in Christ, our nurturing
faith has set us free.

Chapter 8

No condemnation is able to afflict the faithful.
Truly, God becomes our Father when the Spirit
makes it so.
And [Paul] writes that the summit of the
Father's love is so great
That neither cross nor violent death is able to
steal it.

SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE IN POETRY (1543).¹²

Key Concepts

THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTER OF THE LETTER.
JOHANNES BUGENHAGEN: The first thing to be
observed in this letter is that herein Paul charges
that all men and women are sinners and very
plainly shows that they are all sons and daughters
of wrath and of eternal damnation. After he
achieves this, he declares how we may be justified,
that is, through Christ by faith alone. This is the
essential character of this letter, and everything else
that he discusses throughout this whole letter is

¹¹Diodati, *Pious and Learned Annotations*, Cc3v*.

¹²Gwalther, *Argumenta Omnium*, 118r-118v. Adapted from original translation and versification by Paul Watkins.

referred back to this. Therefore, let those who seek true righteousness from some other source be ashamed. But all men and women do this. There is nobody who does not know that the Jews seek after righteousness in their ceremonies, by which they confess themselves to be, in fact, unrighteous. The Gentiles likewise seek the same thing by the worship of idols, thus accusing themselves of their own unrighteousness. But if they seek righteousness by means of their works, what else are such miserable people doing than trying to wash away excrement with excrement? For an evil tree cannot possibly bear good fruit, nor can Israel attain to righteousness by pursuing the righteousness of the law. INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS (1527).¹³

THE WHOLE CAUSE OF WRITING THE LETTER.

WILLIAM TYNDALE: The sum and whole cause of the writing of this letter is to prove that we are justified by faith alone. If you deny this proposition, not only will this letter and all that Paul writes, but also the whole of Scripture, be so locked up that you shall never understand it to your soul's health. And to bring us to the understanding and feeling that faith alone justifies, Paul proves that the whole nature of humanity is so poisoned, so corrupt, and so dead concerning godly living or godly thinking that it is impossible for anyone to keep the law in the sight of God. That is to say, it is impossible to love the law—and out of love and willingness, to do it as naturally as a person eats or drinks—unless we have been quickened again and healed through faith. And by “justifying” understand no other thing than to be reconciled to God, to be restored to his favor, and to have your sins forgiven. And when I say *God* justifies us, understand thereby that God, for Christ's sake, merits, and deserving alone, receives us unto his mercy, favor, and grace, and forgives us our sins. And when I say *Christ* justifies us, understand thereby that Christ alone has redeemed us, bought, and delivered us out of the wrath of God and damnation, and has

with his works alone purchased us the mercy, the favor, and grace of God, and the forgiveness of our sins. And when I say that *faith* justifies, understand thereby that faith and trust in the truth of God and in the mercy promised us for Christ's sake—and for his deserving and works alone—that quiets the conscience and certifies her that our sins are forgiven and that we are in the favor of God.

Furthermore, set before your eyes Christ's works and your own works. Christ's works alone justify you and make satisfaction for your sin; your own works do not. That is to say, only Christ's works can quiet your conscience and make sure that your sins are forgiven; your own works cannot. For the promise of mercy is made to you for Christ's work's sake, and not for your own work's sake.

Therefore, seeing that God has not promised that your own works will save you, therefore faith in your own works can never quiet your conscience nor certify you before God that your sins are forgiven when God comes to judge and to take a reckoning. Beyond all this, my own works can never satisfy the law or pay what I owe it. For I owe the law to love it with all my heart, soul, power, and might, which I will never be able to pay while I am enclosed with flesh. No, I cannot begin to love the law until I first am sure, by faith, that God loves me and forgives me.

Finally, it ought to offend no one that we say, “Faith alone justifies.” For if it is true that Christ alone redeemed us, that Christ alone bore our sins, made satisfaction for us, and purchased for us the favor of God, then it must be true that only trust in Christ's deserving and in the promises of God the Father—made to us for Christ's sake—can quiet the conscience and certify that our sins are forgiven. And when they say, “People must repent, forsake sin, and purpose to sin no more, as much as they can, and love the law of God. Therefore, faith alone does not justify,” I answer, “That and all similar arguments are nothing, such as: I must repent and be sorry; the gospel must be preached to me, and I must believe it, or else I cannot be a partaker of mercy, which Christ has deserved for

¹³Bugenhagen, *In Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 1v-2r; citing Rom 9:31.

me. Therefore Christ alone does not justify me; or Christ alone has not made satisfaction for my sins." Just as this is a naughty argument, so is the other.

Now, reader, go and act according to the order of Paul's writing. First, behold yourself diligently in the law of God, and there observe your just damnation. Second, turn your eyes to Christ, and see there the exceeding mercy of your most kind and loving Father. Third, remember that Christ did not make this atonement so that you would anger God again. Nor did he die for your sins so that you would return, as a swine, to your old puddle again; but rather so that you would be a new creature and live a new life according to the will of God, and not to the flesh. And be diligent, so that you do not lose this favor and mercy again through your own negligence and ingratitude. Farewell. PROLOGUE UPON THE EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE ROMANS (1526).¹⁴

WHAT IS THE MORAL LAW? CASPAR CRUCIGER: The moral law is the eternal and unchanging wisdom in the divine mind and the rule in God's will that he has made evident in creation inasmuch as glimmers of his wisdom have been instilled in creatures that possess reason, and which, therefore, gives knowledge about the nature of God, in his very own voice. It sanctifies us so that as rational creatures, we might agree with his mind and righteousness. And it condemns with horrible wrath those natures that are disagreeable, that is, who do not render full obedience. Those who stupidly imagine that these decrees are outside of God and changeable like Solon's tablets[†] or that of a Roman council[‡] posted on the city walls where they could later be removed, think of the law in a poor and paltry way. Men and women are greatly ensnared by this childish conception. And a blind sense of security, without feeling any great discomfort, is strengthened in men's and women's minds by such antinomian dreams. It behooves us instead to believe that God, the just judge, will destroy with horrible wrath those natures disagreeable to

his, as the conscience experiences this judgment with genuine discomfort when it begins to understand this saying: "the law brings about wrath," and also "by the law, sin becomes more abundantly chargeable," and in 1 Corinthians 15: "the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1567).¹⁵

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL? CASPAR CRUCIGER: The "gospel" is the preaching of repentance and the promise. Because reason does not naturally comprehend it, it must be divinely revealed, having been disclosed from the eternal Father's bosom through the Son as mediator, in which on whose account God (1) affirms that he remits sins, (2) regards men and women as righteous, and also (3) sanctifies them, the Holy Spirit being through that very Son placed in their hearts, and (4) gives them eternal life. And that he gives all these good things freely through faith, that is, to those believing the gospel, its peculiar promise being this: that these goods are given on account of the Son of God, not because of our worthiness. Here we must carefully consider a distinction between promises. There are promises in the law, as in Leviticus 18 and Ezekiel 20: "whoever shall do them shall live by them"; but the promises of the law are conditional; that is, they stipulate the condition of full obedience, requiring that the whole self be conformed to God. Accordingly, men and women *would* live by them if life (that is, God himself) were in them rather than sin being in them. But the promise of the gospel is offered freely; that is, it is granted on account of the Son of God, not because of our worthiness or any of our works.

Therefore, so that the distinction between the law and the gospel might be more evident, two terms must be kept in view: "on account of Christ" and "freely [*gratis*]." This is how we understand in

¹⁵Cruciger, *In Epistolam Pauli*, 6-7; citing Rom 4:15, 5:20, 1 Cor 15:56. [†]Solon was the sixth-century-BC Athenian who posted the laws on wooden tablets, but with only a one-hundred-year term of enactment, after which they would cease to be valid. [‡]Lit. *decemvir* (ten men), a fifth-century-BC council of ten magistrates who wrote up laws for Rome.

¹⁴Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises*, 508-10*.

the [Apostles'] Creed that article "I believe in the remission of sins": it is given to me freely on account of the Son of God as mediator. For the conscience does not suffer pangs in disputing whether God remits sin or whether he is merciful, but whether he *freely* remits the sins of the unworthy and also whether he remits them to *you*. This preaching of the gospel is to be believed, which so often repeats the exclusive particle "freely." It is also a universal promise, according to Matthew 11: "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And yet it is still necessary that the gospel be heard and accepted by faith, and indeed when we are strengthened by the preaching and contemplation of the gospel the Son of God works effectively within us at the same time, kindling faith and rejoicing the heart by the Holy Spirit which is given to us, according to Romans 1, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe," and Galatians 3, "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1567).¹⁶

WHAT IS GRACE? CASPAR CRUCIGER: It is to be lamented that the word "grace" (*gratia*) is so greatly obscured by the interpretations of the monks, the greater part of whom understand grace to be a new quality that is divinely infused. . . . For when speaking of this subject when we say that "sins are remitted for man and woman by grace," the term "grace" does not properly mean infused qualities but is understood in a relative sense to refer to God's promised mercy or freely given acceptance of us on account of the Son of God. For it is necessary when encountering the word "grace" to understand that both the terms "freely given" (*gratis*) and "mediator" are implied in it. And yet it is also true that when the remission of sins is received, the Holy Spirit is also always given, through whom the self is made into a temple of God when its heart is made alive and raised up out of the terrors of hell.

Let this then serve as a definition: Grace is the (1) freely granted remission of sins, and (2) reconciliation or acceptance of us bestowed *freely* by God's mercy on account of the Son of God. Although it is certain that it is always accompanied by the gift of the Holy Spirit, by whom the Father and the Son breathing on us sanctify our hearts and join us to themselves that we might become God's temple as is stated in 1 John 3, "by his Spirit which he gave to us" and in Galatians 4, "God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out 'Abba, Father.'" Now, the remission of sins is a liberation from real terrors and pains, a liberation in which the Son of God himself makes us alive and comforts us by his Holy Spirit, whom we truly receive when the preaching of the gospel is heard and laid hold of by faith. As a result of this comforting, our hearts experience a rejoicing and become acquainted with God's mercy and presence, and a true invocation is kindled within us, like what is said in that sweetest discourse in Zechariah 12: "I will pour out upon the house of David the spirit of grace and of prayer." That is, the Holy Spirit bears witness both in the ministration of the gospel and within our hearts that we are "in grace"—that is, that we are accepted freely by God on account of the Mediator. The Spirit is also he who in the ministration of the gospel shows us how to genuinely call on God, and also moves our hearts so that they grow in trust toward God through the Mediator. In this way a new beginning and eternal life are kindled within us. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1567).¹⁷

ON PREVIOUS COMMENTATORS. JOHN CALVIN: Of the ancients who have, by their piety, learning, holiness, and also by their age, gained so much authority that we ought to despise nothing of what they have adduced, I will say nothing; and with regard to those who live at this day, it is of no benefit to mention them all by name: Of those who have spent most labor in this work, I will express my opinion.

¹⁶Cruciger, *In Epistolam Pauli*, 10-11; citing Lev 18:5; Ezek 20:11; Mt 11:28; Rom 1:16; Gal 3:14.

¹⁷Cruciger, *In Epistolam Pauli*, 12-13; citing Zech 12:10; 1 Jn 3:24; Gal 4:6.

Philipp Melanchthon, who, by his singular learning and industry, and by that readiness in all kinds of knowledge in which he excels, has introduced more light than those who had preceded him. But as it seems to have been his object to examine only those things that are mainly worthy of attention, he dwelt at large on these, and designedly passed by many things that common minds find to be difficult. Then follows Bullinger, who has justly attained no small praise; for with learning he has connected plainness, for which he has been highly commended. In the last place comes Bucer, who, by publishing his works, has given as it were the finishing stroke. For in addition to his recondite learning and enlarged knowledge of things, and to the clearness of his mind, and much reading and many other excellencies, in which he is hardly surpassed by any at this day, equaled by few and excelled by still fewer—he possesses, as you know—this praise as his own—that no one in our age has been with so much labor engaged in the work of expounding Scripture. EPISTLE TO GRYNAEUS.¹⁸

A PRAYER, AN APPEAL, AND AN EXHORTATION.

DAVID RUNGE: We pray that the Son of God, that Fount of all wisdom and knowledge, by whose Spirit this letter was dictated and written, would mercifully see fit to bestow on us the firstfruits of his celestial heavens so that we might happily carry out to its end this holy endeavor of ours. We appeal to benevolent and honest readers that they might help our effort with their dedicated and pious prayers. We exhort studious youths to diligently read the apostle's text and thus equipped, also tie in the analyses of others. In this way we trust that our labor in the Lord will by no means be in vain. DISPUTATION ON ROMANS (1595).¹⁹

DEDICATION OF COMMENTARY.

ANDREW WILLET: To the most Christian, right noble, most excellent, and mighty prince, James, by the grace of

God, king of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, Defender of the True Christian Faith, and so on, and Gracious Sovereign.

As I have this far (by God's special grace assisting me) travailed in some books of the Old Testament, so now I have attempted to do the like in the New: "For as one cannot sail in the sea without fear who has not first tried the rivers," so the deep sea of mysteries in the new law cannot well be sounded, unless we have first coasted by the old. . . .

And thus having made an entrance into the apostolic writings, I have made the choice of St. Paul's letters, and among them of this to the Romans, which is as a key to the rest. . . . There are few old heretical positions or new [Roman Catholic] errors, which if they are propounded plainly, may not be confuted by this letter. . . .

We bless God, who has raised up Your Majesty as a notable instrument both of discovering and dissuading papal errors. . . . God has made Your Highness the pilot and steersman to guide this little ship of the English Church, so that it does not dash on the rocks of false religion. The ministers of God are the oarsmen: those who are lusty and strong to work should be set to their tackling.[†] . . . Thus, while both the sturdy mariners get to their business and the weak sailors are heartened to play their parts, with your sacred authority guiding the helm we may at length bring the ship, by God's grace, safely to the shore, fearing nothing while we follow our loadstar, Christ Jesus. And as Ambrose says, "Observe that star that brought the wise men unto Christ,"[‡] who in his good time, we trust, will conduct our ship, with our Sovereign Pilot, the noble officers, the painstaking mariners, and the patient passengers, into the haven of everlasting life. Amen.

Your Majesty's most humble subject, Andrew Willet. SIX-FOLD COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS (1620).²⁰

¹⁸CTS 38:xxiv-xxv (CO 10:403-4).

¹⁹Runge, *Disputatio Prima*, A2v.

²⁰Willet, *Hexapla*, 3r-v*. †I.e., handling the ship's equipment.

‡Possibly paraphrased from Ambrose, *Exposition on Luke* 2.46-48 (CSEL 32/4:67-68).

NOTE TO THE READER. CASPAR CRUCIGER:

Reader, if you wish to draw Paul's doctrine from
 the bubbling spring,
 This book shows you the path to the
 fountain.
 The Father sent the eternal Word,
 Willing that his utterances might not reach
 us with uncertain sound,
 Therefore, I wish to present heavenly things—as
 they are properly called;
 Nor would I want mud sprinkled in these
 springs.
 But darkness has stolen away the minds of men
 and women,
 So that in their fallen state they stray from
 the right path toward some other way.
 But the censure of the godly still calls the
 straying back,
 And the pious mind shows love by issuing
 these warnings.
 Thus I ask to be instructed by the judgments of
 the readers,
 As long as a kind appraisal is joined to them.
 May we always be one Church in Christ;
 May one faith and one love join our hearts
 together.
 God wishes us to be united and one with
 himself,
 And rage harms us both when it tears us
 apart.
 You, O Redeemer Christ, have joined us
 together, as your own, to be a single entity.
 So join us by the eternal covenant to yourself.
 COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1567).²¹

HOW TO READ THE LETTER. JOHN TRAPP: The whole letter is the confession of our churches, as Melancthon calls it, who therefore taught it ten times in his ordinary lectures, the letter being such

²¹Cruciger, *In Epistolam Pauli*, a viii v.

that no one will ever be able to think, speak, or write sufficiently of its words and excellency. Mr. Perkins advises that in reading the Scripture one first begin with the Gospel of John and this letter to the Romans, their being the keys of the New Testament. And, for the letter to the Romans, Cardinal Pole advises to begin at the twelfth chapter and read to the end and practice the precepts of repentance and mortification. And then to set on the former part of the letter, where justification and predestination are handled. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1656).²²

PRAY FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT TO BE YOUR GUIDE. JUAN DE VALDÉS: You will find in St. Paul some things that you will not find in yourself, and you will find others that you will not understand, and others that will appear strange to you. I suggest that you let all those things pass, so that you will not greatly fatigue yourself in attempting to understand them, since your purpose in reading St. Paul is not to understand all that St. Paul says, but to form your mind with what God will give you to understand, to feel, and to relish in St. Paul. I also counsel you, when you begin to read a letter, to read the argument that you find prefixed to it, because it throws great light on the whole letter. But all these counsels are nothing, and there is one that is worth much more than them all. It is this: that you always, when taking St. Paul into your hands, commend yourself to God, praying to him to send his Holy Spirit to be your guide in this reading, and that you seek to have him, through the mediation of the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory for ever. Amen. PREFATORY LETTER TO GIULIA GONZAGA IN COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1556).²³

²²Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition upon the Epistle of St. Paul*, 618*. Citing Puritan William Perkins, *Prophetica Sive de Sacra et Unica Ratione Concionandi, Tractatus* (Hanau, Germany: Guilielmuin Antonium, 1602), 22; *The Art of Prophecyng*, 26; and Reginald Pole, Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury.

²³Valdés, *Commentary upon St. Paul's Epistle*, xxix*.

1:1-7 GREETING TO THE CHRISTIANS IN ROME

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning his Son, who was descended from David^a according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received

a Or who came from the offspring of David

grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

OVERVIEW: The commentators note that Paul introduces himself in a way that intends to glorify God while also establishing his authority so that his readers will be able to trust his writing. He does this by mentioning his various titles and roles. First, he is a servant of Christ, and this servanthood should be a model for all those in episcopal leadership and should entail their serving the church in fear and love. All other Christians are called to be servants of Christ as well. Second, Paul is an apostle, and as such, his apostleship is a higher calling than a bishop's, thus giving him leadership over the other leaders of the church and undergirding the reformers' belief that the Scriptures have more authority than the bishops of the Catholic Church.

Paul, like the other apostles, is called to deliver the gospel, but as they are called to the Jews, he is called to the Gentiles. He is not creating a new gospel, but rather it is what the promise of the Old Testament prophets pointed to but has become buried under incorrect interpretations of the Pharisees. In a parallel way, the reformers explain that they are not proclaiming a new gospel, but rather one that has been buried under erroneous teachings. This gospel is bound up in Christ, and thus, if we move away from Christ, we move away from the gospel. In light of Paul's affirmation of the two natures of Christ, as both the Son of David

and the Son of God, the interpreters reflect on the necessity of the incarnation to salvation and how the human and divine natures relate.

Faith plays a key role in the gospel and the Reformation, and the reformers here start to explore the connection between obedience and faith, which will be an important theme throughout the first eight chapters. Faith should lead to obedience, but the obedience of faith differs from the obedience of law. It involves a shift from the wisdom of the flesh to the simplicity of faith, from the servitude of the law to the servitude of Christ.

Although Paul's salutation is to the Romans, it applies to all Christians, and it implies that all Christians should be allowed to read the Scriptures, a key desire of the reformers. It is the Christian's "peculiar glory" to be loved by God. God, in his beneficence, gives them both grace and peace. All Christians are called to be saints, being called to be holy, but first having sanctity bestowed on them through the forgiveness of their sins.

PAUL'S CALL TO PREACH THE GOSPEL. DESIDERIUS ERASMUS: I am Paul, who used to be Saul. I have come from creating turbulence to making peace. Freed from subjection to the law, I am now the servant of Jesus Christ. I am not, however, like a false soldier who has deserted his captain, or like a truant who has forgone his old profession.

Rather, I have been called forth to proclaim this message. I am much more content to be set apart now than at the time I was part of the “set apart” Pharisaical sect, who with ungodly zeal and light (i.e., not heavy) persuasion wandered out of the right way. Now—as one never before deserving to be referred to as “of unfeigned devotion”—I am one set apart and chosen by Christ himself to labor and travail in a much more weighty matter, namely, to preach, I say, the joyful tidings of God, which is no newfound fantasy. But rather, it was preached many years before, in his prophecies, which remain still in books of no small credence, ones about the holy and most undoubted truth of his Son. This truth relates to his frail manhood, born in time, of the seed of David. He was declared, by the Holy Spirit, to be the everlasting Son of the everlasting God. Various other professions appeared as well, most especially that he overcame death, rose again from the dead, and has now become to all who in him are born again, the Prince and Chief Author of resurrection. I mean Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom we have obtained not only such favor as the keeping of the law could not help us to, but also strength to be his messengers. As Christ’s gospel has been spread abroad among the Jews by other apostles, so may it be set forth among all heathens by me. And may it not trouble them with the burden of the law, but make them yield and submit themselves obediently to the doctrine of Christ’s faith, steadfastly clinging to it, rather than to the vain wisdom of philosophers. In relation to your nation, you Romans are also included in those heathens. But you are all called—by adoption and fathering—to the right title of inheritance and the surname “of Jesus Christ.” Incidentally, I also make this point to warn you, lest either sects or other countries cause you to square up against others who, through a favorable and gentle fathering, are now made one man’s children. **PARAPHRASE OF ROMANS (1549).**¹

1:1 *Paul, a Servant of Christ*

PAUL’S THREE-PART TITLE. JOHANNES OECOLAMPADIUS: “Paul.” Many have said many things about this name Paul, especially Chrysostom in his sermon on Paul’s conversion. In brief, it seems to us that Saul had been called by his ethnic name, since he was from the tribe and people of Benjamin among whom Saul was the first to reign. But he was also called Paul, since he was born a citizen of Rome. The name Paul was more pleasing to the Romans, among whom there were certain eminent Pauls. For he was said to have been born in the village of Gyscal in the region of Tarsus of Cilicia.

“Servant.” Paul is among those servants whom the man sent out—when the king was going to put on a wedding for his son—to invite many guests. His friends are called apostles with respect to their service, and servants with respect to the knowledge of the mysteries. But to be called a servant means more than to be called an attendant [minister]. For a servant is more subject. . . . Also, learn firmly from this passage that ecclesiastical rule is nothing other than service, as in Luke 22: “Whoever is greater among you, let him be a servant.”

“Of Jesus Christ.” He is contrasting Jesus with kings and emperors, to whom the rest of mortal men and women were subject. It is more praiseworthy to serve Christ than the emperor. Additionally, he sets Christ against Moses, since he proclaimed the gospel rather than the burden of the law.

Paul introduces himself well, as striving for nothing else than the glory of his Lord. **ANNOTATIONS ON ROMANS.**²

PAUL, A SERVANT OF CHRIST. THEODORE BEZA: The name “servant” might seem too unflattering and unfitting for such a great authority as Paul. But this title is more honorable than all the titles of bishops and kings and is most fitting for Paul’s purpose. For it is the same as if he had said that he who was a master over them was

¹Erasmus, *The Second Tome*, Air-v*.

²Oecolampadius, *Epistolam B. Pauli* (1525), bir; citing Lk 22:26.

himself a servant to his own master. Therefore they ought to listen attentively to the things that the master of the family commands: "By God's commandment, I bring a word from him who is both your and my Lord." On the other hand, the term "servant" is not taken here to refer to the condition of men and women as they are regarded by law. It is, therefore, not necessary to discourse here on the duty of a servant toward his master . . . for "servant" here refers to nothing other than the labors of someone who is employed by the Lord in announcing the gospel. And, however much the name "servant" might be appropriate for all who possess the name of Christ, it is nevertheless in this case particularly applied to ministers. LECTURES ON THE EPISTLES.³

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SERVANT OF CHRIST.

PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI: In the introduction, Paul gives three titles by which he graces his own name. The first is "a servant of Jesus Christ," which is common to all the faithful. For it is the property of a servant to not be in possession of his own rights, but rather to be about the business of his master. For this reason, if we are the servants of Christ, it is necessary that whatever we live, breathe and think, we direct it all to Christ. Also, false apostles appear to be censured by these words, for they seek after their own interests so that they may fill their bellies and advance their own designs. They do not claim men and women for Christ, but rather for Moses or for themselves. When it says that we are the servants of Christ, the metaphor should be carefully pondered so that it may be applied commonly to us all, by which it can be said of us all that we ought to be as subject to God as servants are to their masters. But we are so very far from rendering this kind of servitude, for servants care for their own affairs during only a small portion of the day, but for all the rest of the time they carry out the affairs of their master. But we do far otherwise. How little space or few hours of our life we give to pursuing divine things; rather,

whatever time we have, we turn ourselves to human and earthly matters. A servant possesses nothing of his own or that belongs to him; but we desire to privately possess many things that we will expend neither for God nor for Christ. When at times servants are killed or beaten, they seek refuge with pleading and supplicating voices; but when we are in adversities, we fight back against God, we murmur, and we blaspheme. Servants receive only food and clothing and are content with them; we place neither measure nor limit to wealth and luxury. Servants, upon hearing threats, tremble from head to toe; but we are not moved at all by the threats of prophets, apostles, or of learned churchmen. Servants do not mix the words of their master with those of their enemies, nor do they exhibit any civility or signs of friendship with them; but we perpetually join ourselves to the devil, the flesh, and the world. For which reason we are very far from that servitude that we owe to God, although we ought to obey and serve him far more than our servants ought to obey us. For God, beyond the fact that he feeds and nourishes us, also brought us forth and granted that we might exist. Whatever servants do for us is done entirely for our well-being, whereas it is no benefit to them. So also we, when we serve God, render none of our labors either for our own utility or benefit. Since even if we live righteously, he is made no better or more blessed than he was before. Also, we give our servants either nothing or only a little; but God sent forth his only Son for us, and at the same time, with him granted us all things. We promise our servants rather meager wages, while God has promised us that same happiness which Christ himself enjoys. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS.⁴

TWICE SEPARATED. THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: Paul was separated from his mother's womb by God's appointment; however, he was actually set apart by the command of the Holy Ghost to preach the gospel among the Gentiles. In the word "separate," he seems to allude to the name

³Beza, *Cours sur les Épitres*, 21.

⁴Vermigli, *In Epistolam S. Pauli Apostoli*, 2-3.

of “Pharisee,” which signifies a person who is separate, of which sect he was before his conversion. And by this he implies that he is still a separated person, but to a better purpose, namely, to the preaching of the gospel of Christ. ANNOTATIONS ON ROMANS 1:1.⁵

PASTORS SHOULD SERVE WITH LOVE AND FEAR. MARTIN LUTHER: Every pastor in the church, following the example of the apostle . . . considering himself always the lowliest of all servants, should administer his office with a mixture of fear and love. He should do only those things that are good and profitable for his charges, so that, knowing that the whole office exists for the benefit of his charges, he should rather resign from the office if his experience should show that the welfare and the good of his charges does not follow or that it is being hindered by him personally. LECTURES ON ROMANS.⁶

APOSTOLIC VERSUS EPISCOPAL APPOINTMENTS. PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: It is for a necessary reason that he makes mention of his office, that the church might know that the teaching of Paul is to be believed just as much as if it had boomed forth by the voice of God from heaven. Therefore, as Moses prefaced his comments: “The Lord God has spoken all these words,” and so on, that the people might know that he was putting forward not human teaching, but that which had been undeniably and expressly handed over to him by God, so also Paul starts out by asserting that he is an apostle, not chosen by any human judgment, but by the voice of Christ, and that he carries a gospel divinely handed to him, and that the position that he puts forward concerning the law, the promises, sin, grace, and faith was not a human invention but was divinely revealed and entrusted to him that he might pass it on to the churches. Therefore, he does not pointlessly insist on mere titles—either here or in other places—as

often as he repeats the mention of his office. These things are, therefore, to be remembered, so that we should read Paul as we read Ambrose or Augustine, not only as erudite interpreters of the prophetic Scriptures, but as firmly setting forth heavenly teaching to which it is necessary to assent.

Further, in this passage the apostolic calling is to be carefully distinguished from the episcopal calling. An apostle is called directly by Christ to teach the gospel, and he possesses a firm testimony that his teaching is divine. And it is certain that he possesses the Holy Spirit, does not err in doctrine, and is able to teach everywhere in all the churches. Whereas a bishop is called by human beings to teach the gospel in a certain region, can err, and may not necessarily possess the Holy Spirit.

Many things can be judged from these descriptions. For as the prophets among the people of Israel far surpassed the priests in excellence and did many heroic things the law did not permit the priests to do, so they hold that the calling of an apostle is far superior to that of bishops. They abrogate the law, call the Gentiles into community with the people of God, and narrate obscure points concerning the Messiah, such as that he is the Son of God, and that he would not take possession of a political kingdom. They also expressly impart the remission of sins, which the Levitical priests had never done. They explain in detail the doctrine of the justification by faith, which few among the people of the law had previously heard, whereas bishops are obliged to receive the things written by the apostles and not innovate some new or different kind of teaching. Therefore, Paul makes mention of his calling when he says, “a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle” so that he may admonish all to heed the authority of his teaching, COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1540).⁷

A SUPERIOR APOSTOLIC CALLING. CASPAR CRUCIGER: I previously stated that the apostolic calling was superior to the common, intermediate calling that bishops have. A prophet in the Old

⁵Downname, ed., *Annotations*, AAA11*; citing Gal 1:15; Acts 13:2.
⁶LW 25:140*.

⁷Melanchthon, *Commentarii in Epistolam Pauli*, 22v-23r.

Testament was a person called directly by God to shed light on the promise of a Messiah, as well as to give counsel on certain civil matters, having testimony from God that they would not go astray in their teaching. An apostle is a person called directly by the Son of God to teach the gospel that he entrusted to them, not for any administration of civil affairs, having testimony that their teaching would be divine and that it would not err in doctrine, and also having the authority to teach this wherever they pleased. A bishop is a person called by the church to teach the gospel, which he must preserve incorrupt as it was received from the apostles. But bishops err when they permit corruptions (which can and does happen), and they only have authority to teach in their own assigned place. These things are, therefore, to be kept in mind that their ravings might be censured when they pretend that the authority of bishops is equal to that of the apostles, and dream that Paul, who seems to wander about like the meandering Iris,[†] was far inferior to a bishop who has canonical authority in one place, as they say. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1567).⁸

SERVING IN THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. JUAN DE VALDÉS: Here I understand that in calling himself “the servant of Christ,” Paul does not deprive himself of the dignity of a child of God, it being a fact that he was a child of God by regeneration. For he had received the grace of the gospel, he was a member of Christ, he had the spirit of Christ, and he was the servant of Christ through the apostolate, because in preaching the gospel he served Christ, illustrating Christ’s name and his righteousness. The name of “servant of Christ” properly attaches itself to those who serve in the gospel of Christ, discharging the duty of apostles.

And I understand that those who proclaim to men and women the righteousness of God expected in Christ serve in the gospel. They affirm that through it God has already pardoned all men

and women solely upon their believing in the gospel, and upon their accepting this righteousness as their own, and upon their submitting themselves to it.

Where it is to be understood that because this is the best news that ever might, or ever could be brought to humanity, it is called the gospel, which means good tidings, something worthy of reward (*albricias*, paid to the one who first brings good news). At times St. Paul calls it the “gospel of God,” because he sent it; at other times, the “gospel of Christ,” because Christ was the bearer of it, and confirmed it by his death. And on some occasions, “my gospel,” because he published it among the Gentiles. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1556).⁹

A MOST PROFITABLE PREFACE. LAURENCE TOMSON (OR PIERRE L’OISELEUR): The first part of the letter through verse 16 contains a highly profitable preface. Paul moves the Romans to pay diligent care to him, showing that he does not come in his own name, but as God’s messenger to the Gentiles. He entreats them with the weightiest matter, which was promised long ago by God, proclaimed through many fit witnesses, and now at last, is performed in deed. THE GENEVA BIBLE (1595).¹⁰

1:2 *The Gospel’s Ancient Pedigree*

DO NOT CONFUSE THE PROMISE AND THE GOSPEL. JOHN CALVIN: “Which he had promised before,” and so on. Since many withdraw from a doctrine that is suspected of novelty, he establishes the gospel faith from antiquity. It is as if he had said that Christ had not descended unexpectedly to Earth, nor had he brought some new and previously unheard-of teaching. But rather, Christ along with his gospel was promised from the beginning of the world and had always been expected. Now, since the testimony of antiquity is frequently fictitious, he adds certain classical witnesses who were exempt from any suspicion,

⁸Cruciger, *In Epistolam Pauli*, 28. [†]In Greek mythology, the goddess of the rainbow, who wanders all over the earth.

⁹Valdés, *Commentary upon St. Paul’s Epistle*, 1-2*.

¹⁰Tomson, *The Bible*, 61v*.

namely, the prophets of God. Third, he adds that their testimony was solemnly sealed when they were recorded in the Scriptures. One can gather what the gospel is from this passage: the gospel teaches that which had not been promulgated by the prophets, but had only been promised. Therefore if the prophets were only promising the gospel, it follows that the gospel was at length openly exhibited when the Lord took on flesh. Therefore those who confuse the promises with the gospel are deceived, since properly speaking, the gospel is the solemn proclamation of the revealed Christ, in whom the promises themselves are exhibited. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1556).¹¹

PAUL'S MESSAGE IS NOT NEW. PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: He inserts this so that he might quietly meet an objection. Since a new kind of teaching was being proclaimed, without doubt the Pharisees declaimed against it. Since the church of God in some form had always existed since the beginning of the world, she necessarily had to always be in possession of that doctrine necessary for salvation. Therefore the Pharisees were grumbling over whether they also held to this teaching of the apostles. If they did not hold to it, the Pharisees clamored that it was a new and invented doctrine. Paul responds that there is one and the same gospel concerning the Messiah which was promised to the fathers and shown to the prophets and which had now been openly set forth: "We do not set forward a teaching unknown to the fathers and the prophets, but one buried under human opinions about the righteousness of the law, and about a political reign of the Messiah. You condemn this kind of teaching as new and invented because you do not understand the liberation that the fathers and prophets were expecting. You pretend that we are righteous by the law, that the Messiah was to come so that he might take up a worldly empire, that he might give you provinces to be ruled so that you might be affluent in wealth and pleasures. This is the liberation of which you

drunkards dream. But the fathers and prophets were waiting for the Messiah who would abolish sin and death by divine power, and who would destroy the kingdom of the devil. They looked forward to the promised Seed that would crush the head of the serpent."

In the same way the papal church now opposes us. They vociferously charge that we are bringing a kind of doctrine that is unknown to the church. We cry in reply and testify that our doctrine was supported in the church of the fathers, of the prophets, and of the apostles, and among the faithful in succession. We call forward the witness of [these] churches, namely, of the prophets, apostles, and the other saints. No doctrine ought to be received that has always been unknown to the churches of Christ. But the position of the true churches has been obscured for many centuries now. For popes, priests, and monarchs have scattered false and Pharisaic opinions in the church concerning the righteousness of works; they have thought up human forms of worship; they have gathered pagan superstitions, the invocation of the dead—a manifest *idolomania*—and have profaned the Lord's Supper with horrid impiety.

These things were thought up partly by superstition, partly by inquiry, and partly for the support of tyranny. This assembly of impious popes and kings is not the church of Christ, for which reason they unjustly arrogate this most noble title for themselves and oppose their invented authority—not the authority of the true churches—against us. Therefore, in this passage Paul warns his readers that they not receive dogmas without the testimonies of divine Scripture. He also warns that we must inquire into the opinions of the true churches and distinguish the true church from the false. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS (1540).¹²

THE GOSPEL IS THE ESSENTIAL POINT OF THE PROPHETS' TEACHINGS. JOHANNES BRENZ: Next, Paul explains in this introduction of what kind his doctrines are, whether he is setting forth

¹¹Calvin, *In Omnes Pauli*, 2.

¹²Melanchthon, *Commentarii in Epistolam Pauli*, 22v-23r.