



## Sacrifice in Romans 12-15

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Solving the riddle of Romans has proven more difficult than splitting the atom. The scholarly labor devoted to Romans in our time may be unprecedented in its quantity, scope, and intensity. So far that labor has produced no hypothesis that would explain the purpose of the letter. Literary critical studies have sought the key that would unlock Romans in the study of the letters as conversations. In reconstructing the dialogue between Paul and his conversation partners scholars have scoured the text looking for clues that might reveal the problem that evoked Romans.<sup>1</sup> Other scholars less impressed by that evidence have continued to read Romans as an apology for Paul's version of the gospel.<sup>2</sup> While this latter group is united in its treatment of Romans as a theological treatise, the positions taken on individual issues vary widely. At present the discussion is stalemated, but this stalemate has spawned creative efforts with experimental methodologies that may prove valuable. One of these studies, so it is hoped, may provide not just insight but a breakthrough that will advance the discussion.

Recently Wilhelm Wuellner and Robert Jewett have experimented with rhetorical criticism, a method that explores the use of rhetorical strategies of speaking and writing in the Hellenistic world. Jewett, for example, presents evidence that Paul appropriated some features of the ambassadorial letter. In "setting forth the equality of Jews and Gentiles under sin and grace and stressing the inclusive rule of faith" Paul, according to Jewett, was performing the role

<sup>1</sup>See especially Paul Minear, *The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans* (Studies in Biblical Theology 19; Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1971), who begins his discussion with a treatment of 14:1-16:27. Note also Jacob Jervell, "The Letter to Jerusalem," *The Romans Debate* ed. Karl P. Donfried (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 61-74, and Wolfgang Wiefel, "The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity," *The Romans Debate*, 100-119. The commentaries of F. J. Leenhardt and Ulrich Wilckens also incline in this direction.

<sup>2</sup>Those who share this view include T. W. Manson, "St. Paul's Letter to the Romans—and Others," *The Romans Debate*, 1-16, and G. Bornkamm, "The Letter to the Romans as Paul's Last Will and Testament," *The Romans Debate*, 17-31.

of a diplomat.<sup>3</sup> Jewett's study raises a number of intriguing questions. Was Paul more pragmatic and less ideological than we ordinarily think? Was he, for example, in using the term "slave" (*doulos*) in 1:1 putting forth his ambassadorial role as a slave of the emperor and, therefore, an "imperial bureaucrat"?<sup>4</sup> Time is needed to assess the value of this approach and evaluate each individual application, but this method in particular probably understates the impact of the Jewish forms, metaphors, and symbols on Paul's thought. Whether this approach allows us to see the real Paul or only a different Paul in an ill-fitting garment is still uncertain.

More recently Norman Peterson has deftly applied literary critical, sociological, and anthropological tools to a study of Philemon and parts of Romans.<sup>5</sup> In his search for the historical Paul, Peterson rightly questions the sketches of Paul as an itinerant or armchair intellectual and seeks instead to reclaim the social dimension of Paul's world and work. Peterson focuses on Paul's role as well as the hierarchical structures, domains, and modes of reference in the ancient world. Being acutely sensitive to the symbolic world in which Paul lived, Peterson seeks the key to that symbolic world in the kinship system assigning the master-slave metaphor an integral but subordinate role. Peterson's work does seem at times to make the method the end rather than the means, but he makes two valuable contributions: (1) By sharpening our awareness of the social dimension of Paul's mission he helps the reader understand the nature and function of roles in the letters, and (2) by encouraging an investigation of Paul's symbolic universe he provides additional insight into the relationship between Paul and his addressees. Peterson's work is provocative even if it does not provide a grand design for understanding all of the letters.<sup>6</sup> In using this method we run the risk of creating the image of Paul we seek. Nevertheless, these studies have brought gain. The ferment provided by these and similar studies makes the study of Romans exciting, and it frames this investigation of chapters 12-15. Our task is to explore one aspect of the relationship of chapters 12-15 to the rest of the letter. We shall examine the nature and function of "sacrifice," a key metaphor in 12:1 and 15:16-19. Before coming to that consideration, however, a brief sketch of some issues surrounding our reading of these chapters is necessary.

Earlier commentators, following Dibelius, viewed Romans 12-15 as the ethical imperative growing out of Paul's gospel of grace in chapters 1-8. Paying strict attention to the conjunctive adverb ("therefore," *oun*) in 12:1, scholars argued that Paul used the "therefore" to link the "mercies of God" in chapters 1-8 (to which 9-11 might be added) with the obedience prescribed in 12-15. Chapters 1-8 provide the indicative; 12-15 offer the imperative.<sup>7</sup> "Nowhere

<sup>3</sup>Wilhelm Wuellner, "Paul's Rhetoric of Argumentation in Romans: An Alternative to the Donfried-Karris Debate Over Romans," *The Romans Debate*, 152-174; and Robert Jewett, "Romans as an Ambassadorial Letter," *Interpretation* 36/1 (1982) 5-20.

<sup>4</sup>R. Jewett, "Romans as Ambassadorial Letter", 13.

<sup>5</sup>Norman Peterson, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

<sup>6</sup>See my review in *Theology Today*, 43(1986) 139-142.

<sup>7</sup>Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (2d ed.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935) 238-239.

else," according to John Knox, "...is the transition from doctrine to exhortation so definite and...so abrupt as here."<sup>8</sup> Most saw in these chapters a random collection of topics or miscellaneous arrangement of parenetic instruction held together by no internal logic or important link with the earlier chapters.<sup>9</sup> Such an assessment of the relationship between 12-15 and the rest of the letter tended to relegate 12-15 to the status of an appendix. Some located the climax of the letter in chapter 8, others in chapters 9-11, and most viewed chapters 12-15 as an appendage to Paul's argument. Victor Furnish's study exposed the weaknesses of that approach, and a 1971 work by Paul Minear sought in 14:1-16:27 the concrete situation that shaped the entire letter.<sup>10</sup> These studies joined by others show that in Paul's mind no wedge intruded between theology and ethics, and what Paul offers in 12-15 is not, as Nygren thought, an ethical

summary<sup>11</sup>—for the range of topics is too skimpy for that—but examples of conduct integral to Paul’s version of the gospel. What Paul offers here is not an appendage to his argument but an essential part of it.

Thus the tendency to read chapters 1-8 as the supreme statement of Paul’s theology and chapters 12-15 as an appended parenthesis overlooked the way the latter served Paul’s broader epistolary purposes. But what were those purposes? Did Paul intend to address a specific set of problems triggered by the return of Jewish-Christians to Rome after Nero lifted the expulsion edict of Claudius in 54 C.E. (Minear)? Did Paul write to correct his overreaction to the Galatian experiment with circumcision (Wilckens)? Did Paul address an exclusively gentile congregation to defend the Jewish option to live as Jews (Gaston)? Was the letter more about the crisis he was soon to face in Jerusalem than about the Roman church? These questions are difficult to answer, if answerable at all, but the questions themselves make a statement. What the queries show is that the letter to Rome was more than Christian apologetic and 12-15 more than abstract exhortation. These last chapters were bound not only to the gospel Paul interpreted but also to his experience in the east and his anticipated visit to the west.

## I. ROMANS AS LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Studies of the letter form have taught us to attend closely not only to the letter opening but also to the conclusion. Crucial to the interpretation of Romans are the announcements in the introduction and conclusion of the letter of Paul’s intended visit to Rome. Those announcements bestow a specificity on this letter that separates it from a general religious tract or theological treatise designed for general circulation. Those remarks make the letter instead an introduction and recommendation to a circle of strangers who know Paul only by reputation. For the apostle’s planned visit to Rome to be mutually encouraging (1:12) both Paul

<sup>8</sup>John Knox, *Romans, Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. G. Buttrick (12 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1952-57) 9:578-579.

<sup>9</sup>C. H. Dodd drew a similar distinction between “kerygma” and “didache” in *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1944) 7-35, 57-78.

<sup>10</sup>Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968). For Minear, see note one.

<sup>11</sup>Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1949) 415.

and his gospel require endorsement. If the Roman church is to assist with the mission to Spain, Paul’s version of the gospel of grace to the gentiles must find acceptance in what was probably a mixed congregation of Jews and gentiles.

But given Paul’s history in the east, he cannot be at all certain of a warm welcome in the west. As he heads for Jerusalem he speaks poignantly of danger from the “unbelievers in Judea.” He also worries lest the offering he brings from the gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia may be unacceptable to the “saints” in Jerusalem (15:31). A rejection of this symbol of God’s final ingathering of the gentiles and token of union of Jews and gentiles in the community of the redeemed would cripple Paul’s gospel. Furthermore, Paul’s ministry in the east had been a turbulent one. Undercut in Galatia by Judaizers, faced by Peter in a sharp public exchange at Antioch (Gal 2:14), and attacked by Jewish-Christian missionaries in Corinth (2 Cor 10-13), Paul was hardly recognized as the great patriarch of the church that we know him to be. As buffeted as

Paul was by these brutal exchanges, the most tortured experience Paul had was with his fellow Jews. In 2 Corinthians 11:24 Paul recalls a series of those painful episodes: “Five times I received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one.” In Galatians, recalling those episodes among others, Paul refers to the scars collected in the service of Christ: “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus (*stigmata tou Iesou*)” (6:17). The lashes were a form of synagogue discipline laid on Paul, according to Acts, because he sought to “profane the temple” (24:6) or offended “against the law of the Jews” (25:8). In this case Acts agrees with Paul’s own defense in Romans against the charge of antinomianism. Paul’s preaching of Messiah Jesus alone hardly triggered the violent reactions to his apostleship. More likely it was Paul’s version of the gospel of grace outside the law which was perceived by Jews as an attempt to woo Jews away from the ancestral traditions.

Common sense dictates that the angry and sometimes venomous charges against Paul for preaching a Jewish gospel that devalued the heart of the Hebrew religion—namely, the law—reinforced by brutal reprisals, raised questions Paul could not ignore. Those experiences had laid bare an apparent contradiction indigenous to Paul’s gospel. How can a gospel of salvation outside works of the law (Rom 4:6) to all those believing (3:22) not undermine or destroy the law (3:31)? “Do we overthrow the law by this faith?” “Absolutely not,” Paul replies in a huff, “we uphold the law” (3:31). Those charges and others dogged Paul’s steps and outran his mission. And they required a credible response.

## II. THE CHARGE OF ANTINOMIANISM

This letter reflects Paul’s fear that his notoriety will precede him to Rome, and baseless charges will prejudice his chance for a sympathetic hearing. At several points in Romans Paul shows he was stung by the charge that his gospel of grace undermined moral behavior. Enough evidence existed to give some substance to the charge. In Corinth and Philippi in particular, some understood salvation by grace outside the law to mean that all things were lawful (1 Cor 10:23). Certain libertines appeared to anticipate Herod’s caricature of grace by W. H. Auden: “I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really the world is admirably

arranged.”<sup>12</sup> “Is that where Paul’s gospel leads?,” the critic was bound to ask. Paul’s sarcasm is unmistakable in Romans 3:8: “And why not do evil that good may come?—as *some people* slanderously charge us with saying.” In 6:1-7:6 Paul again returns to this issue for a sustained rebuttal. Drawing on images familiar to his readers—baptism, slavery, and marriage—Paul answers the charge that his gospel actually encouraged immoral behavior. Often overlooked is the way this theme surfaces once again in 8:1-8. Note especially 8:4 where Christ’s redeeming work is done “in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Also important is the interesting juxtaposition of disobedience and grace in 11:30-32 which serves as the threshold over which the reader crosses into chapters 12-15. It is illuminating to read 12-15 against this background of baseless and sometimes malicious charges, of misunderstanding and distortion, of uncertainty about his welcome in Jerusalem, and of Paul’s high hopes for his visit to Rome and his mission to Spain.

### III. THE SACRIFICE METAPHOR

Verses 1 and 2 of chapter twelve are especially important because they serve as the heading for the entire parenetic section to 15:13.<sup>13</sup> In 12:1 a powerful, even violent, metaphor arrests the reader's attention. Paul urged his addressees to offer their bodies as a *living sacrifice* (*thusian zosan*), *holy* and acceptable to God as their divine (*logiken*) worship. Some argue that Paul's intention in removing the sacrifice from the holy place was to replace the cult with obedient service in the profane world.<sup>14</sup> Those holding this position appeal to Philo, a first century Alexandrian Jew, who tended to spiritualize the concept of the cult. Philo asks, for example, "The true oblation what else can it be but the devotion of a soul which is dear to God?" (*Life of Moses*, 2.108). So could it be that Paul's view of sacrifice in 12:1 reflects that of a Diaspora Judaism similar to that of Philo? Living in a setting in which Neopythagoreans actively repudiated sacrifice, and Stoics viewed bloody sacrifice with disgust, is Paul here simply viewing the sacrifice in individualistic and universalistic terms? Or is Paul drawing a distinction, as Cranfield believes, between inner disposition and outer act?<sup>15</sup>

To answer these questions it is important to recognize that Paul's view may not coincide with our own. Largely due to the influence of the epochal work of Sir James Frazer in the last century, *The Golden Bough*, we tend to view sacrifice as a primitive or even crude attempt to manipulate God. Animal sacrifice may strike the average Protestant as a crude waste, or as superstitious

<sup>12</sup>W. H. Auden, *For the Time Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958) 116.

<sup>13</sup>Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 325-331, made this point well, independently confirmed on form critical grounds by Carl J. Bjerkelund, *Parakalo* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967). Bjerkelund's analysis of the *parakalo* formula ("I appeal to you") found that *parakalo* with a reference to the "mercies of God" was a stylistic feature of Paul and not a summary of the theology of 1-8. According to Bjerkelund, the statement "I appeal to you by the mercies of God" has the character and seriousness of an oath.

<sup>14</sup>E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 327.

<sup>15</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (International Critical Commentary; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975-79) 2.604.

and selfish bartering. But our revulsion at the very idea of animal sacrifice may not have been shared by Paul. Whereas the meat we consume is slaughtered at the stockyards, in the Hellenistic world most animals were routinely offered to the gods when they were killed. Moreover, closer examination will show that Philo's view of the sacrifice was hardly as "spiritual" as sometimes reported. Philo did emphasize the importance of the purity of intention of the sacrificer, the value of the heartfelt thanksgiving, and did warn of special harm to any who approached the altar "puffed up by arrogance" (*The Special Laws*, 1.293). But although he spiritualized the sacrifice traditions he did not repudiate them. Instead he accepted the literal sacrifice as a valid part of the Jewish tradition from which one could extract its "inner meaning" through allegory (*The Special Laws*, 1.287). In his emphasis on the purity of the sacrificer Philo faithfully adhered to the ancestral religion of the Hebrews. Philo's emphasis on purity in the inward being agrees with the Levitical code that required a perfect victim *and* a ritually pure sacrificer. It is likely, therefore, that neither Philo nor Paul repudiated animal or cereal offerings, but extended the influence of the altar into everyday life.

This tendency to value sacrifice was probably reinforced by Paul's Pharisaism. Jacob

Neusner has taught us how the Pharisees without repudiating the cult universalized its rule by extending the Levitical code into everyday life. Thus for the Pharisees and for Paul as a Pharisee, the liturgy of sacrifice extended beyond the Temple to embrace work and leisure, eating and sex, and teaching and learning. The arena for sacrifice expanded beyond the sacrificial altar in the Temple to encircle street and home, kitchen and bed, shop and school, and field and sea. Thus in both Diaspora and Pharisaic Judaism the importance of the sacrifice was expanded, not diminished. More than a work used as barter to earn grace, as we Protestants are prone to think, the sacrifice was a vehicle of grace and power, an instrument for communion with the divine world and a consecration of a part of this world. We have reason to believe that Philo would have offered a sacrifice during a visit to Jerusalem. Would Paul have done the same? That possibility cannot be ruled out.

While Paul preached his gospel the daily sacrifices in the Temple continued without interruption. During Paul's lifetime no institution was more important than the Temple in Israel's experience, and no act more central to Temple worship than the sacrifice.<sup>16</sup> Leviticus is strangely silent about what the sacrifice meant, but some recent studies have helped us understand that omission. Through a history of religions study of sacrifice Marcel Mauss shows how the sacrifice functions to place the patron in contact with that world beyond.<sup>17</sup> The sacrifice is ruled by the awareness of a gulf between this world and God's world, or the world that we know and the world we know not. A victim without blemish is brought before the altar by a sacrificer who has purged himself in order to approach that holy space. In that awesome moment when the victim surrenders its life, when that life ascends to God, when its body lies on the altar

<sup>16</sup>Calvin J. Roetzel, *The World That Shaped the New Testament* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985) 55-64.

<sup>17</sup>I am indebted to my colleague James Laine for calling to my attention the study of Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964).

as consecrated gift, in that moment the sacrificer shares in the consecration of the animal and vicariously crosses the boundary into the very world of the holy. The sacrifice serves as the nexus of the two worlds. There the first born or the first fruits expresses thanksgiving. There atonement for sin is sought. There feasts of celebration and remembrance are wrapped in the aura of God's blessing. There in a state of ritual purity one presents that which is precious, hoping that it will be "holy and acceptable," to use Paul's term in 12:1.<sup>18</sup>

No one would deny that the integrating center of Paul's theology was his conviction that in Jesus' death and resurrection God had begun to reclaim the world. Paul's outlook is suffused with a vision of the revelation of God's righteousness. And yet Paul does not repudiate the forms of Jewish faith and expression but revalues them in the light of that incandescent reality. One of those revalued or even transvalued forms was sacrifice. Interestingly even Christ's death is viewed through the lens of sacrifice. In 3:23-25 Paul shares in the use of a tradition already appropriated by the Jewish Christian church before him. The sacrificial language Paul employed is powerfully evocative: "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God *put forward as an expiation by his blood*, to be received by faith." Rather than speaking of the sacrifice of Christ, in 12:1 Paul appropriates sacrificial imagery to initiate a discussion of believing obedience. Calling on and transposing the cultic language from his Pharisaism into a

new key Paul appeals to his readers to make a living sacrifice of their bodies and in the most radical sense to become both patron and victim. Within this violent metaphor is an implicit rebuke of those who accuse him of preaching “cheap grace” and of those who think Paul’s apocalyptic gospel promotes disassociation from this world.

Just as both the sacrificial victim and patron must be in a state of ritual purity for valid Temple worship Paul likewise urges on his readers a sacrifice “holy and acceptable to God.” It is at least plausible that Paul’s own “gift” of celibacy echos that sacrificial experience. No Hebrew thought of sex as unwholesome or unworthy of a full human being. The Jews took God’s command in Genesis to multiply and fill the earth with absolute seriousness. And yet sexual abstinence before making a sacrifice was understood as a form of consecration, as a means of temporarily setting oneself apart for the cult. Paul’s universalization of the cult in the face of the impending distress may have inspired his choice of celibacy but more study is required before we can say so with confidence (note 1 Cor 7:35, 40).

Paul calls this daily sacrifice one’s “*logiken latreian*,” infelicitously translated “spiritual worship” in the RSV. The term *logike* goes beyond the English cognate “logical” to encompass a godly form of worship. (Does Paul know the way the divine *logos* [from which *logike* is derived] stands for the divine essence or reason that suffuses all that is?) In any case, Paul’s intent is not to separate “spiritual” worship from “earthly” or inner experience from outer. He aims to sacralize everyday conduct and thus to remove the barrier between worldly and “spiritual” behavior for those in Christ.

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<sup>18</sup>See also Gerhard von Rad, “The Sacrifices,” *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1962-65) 1.250-261. See also pages 262-279 for a discussion of issues of purity.

That the sacrifice metaphor is a controlling one for Paul’s exhortation is supported by the reappearance of the sacrificial imagery at the conclusion of the parenesis. Paul claims to have spoken “very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the gentiles in *making a sacrifice* [or serving as a priest] for the gospel of God in order that the *sacrifice of the gentiles* may be *acceptable*, consecrated by the Holy Spirit” (15:15-16). Onto this sentence, loaded with sacrificial imagery, Paul couples a statement of purpose: by “word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit” Paul preached the gospel of Christ “to win *obedience* from the gentiles” (15: 18b-19, 18a). Sacrifice and obedience are synonymous, and both are the aim of the apostle who here takes on the role of the “priest” to bring the consecration of the gentiles to completion. Here we see the link Paul forges with 6:19 and 6:22. In defending himself against the charge of antinomianism, or more correctly, of encouraging *anomia* (lawlessness), Paul makes the same connection in 6:19 noted above between sacrifice and behavior: “for as you once presented your members slaves to impurity and to *anomia* upon *anomia* [lawlessness piled on top of lawlessness], so now present (*parastesate*; infinitive in 12:1) your members slaves to righteousness for holiness (*hagiasmon*; *hagian* in 12:1).” (Note that Paul uses the imperative form of *peristemi*, meaning “to present,” five times in 6:13-19, a word with unmistakable cultic associations.) In 6:19 Paul quite appropriately supplements the slave with the sacrifice metaphor. In 6:22 Paul extends, if he does not subordinate, the slave to the sacrifice imagery: “and now being liberated from the power of sin and being slave to God you have in return your fruit for holiness (*hagiasmon*) and its goal

(*telos*), eternal life.” Clearly the symbol of obedient slave and the symbol of sacrificial victim coalesce into one image. The slave metaphor does not so much eclipse as interpret the sacrificial metaphor. Paul here uses sacrificial terminology to refute the charge that his gospel of grace lacks moral character. For Paul obedience or literally slavery to God is a form of consecration that bridges the chasm encountered in the sacrifice between this life and that other life, between this fleeting scene and “eternal life.”

A final piece of evidence supports this reading of Romans 12-15. Paul emphasizes obedience in Romans as nowhere else. As we noted above, the letter opening and closing contain clues to the author’s purpose. Romans 1:5 telegraphs a concern of the apostle: “we have received grace and apostleship in order to bring about *obedience of faith* (*hupakoe pisteos*)...among all the gentiles.” Near the conclusion of the letter Paul speaks of “the obedience (*hupakoes*) of the gentiles” that he set out to win by “word and deed” (15:18). Two allusions follow in 16:19 and 16:26, and three references appear in Paul’s careful response to the charge of antinomianism in 5:19 and 6:16. Even allowing for the later addition of chapter 16, we have five occurrences in Romans alone to four others in the entire collection of Pauline and deutero-Pauline letters. Four occurrences of the verb form (*hupakouo*) appear in Romans (6:12, 16, 17 and 10:16) to only one in the entire Pauline corpus. While the sample itself is small, and taken alone could not establish a trend in the letter, when combined with the evidence in the discussion above the emphasis on obedience does support our view that Paul is building a case with the emphasis on sacrificial obedience

to refute the charge that his gospel is antinomian and his apostleship unworthy of support. Instead of an easy way, his gospel of grace summons men and women to a difficult way—to become a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God.

#### IV. A SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT OF 12:1-15:13

In 12:3-15:13 Paul views daily conduct through the cultic metaphor as “daily sacrifice.” In what follows Paul does not present an ethical system or even a summary of an ethical system. Instead he provides instances of sacrificial obedience consistent with his gospel of grace and the imminent parousia of Christ. Appealing to tradition, perhaps Palestinian tradition (e.g., 12:9-13),<sup>19</sup> and drawing on his own recent, painful experience (e.g., 12:3-8, and 14:1-15:13), Paul shaped instruction designed to dispel any doubt about the moral substance of his gospel. Some find evidence in Paul’s admonition to the “weak” and the “strong” (14:1-15:13) for a concrete struggle in Rome between Jewish and gentile Christians, but that view is disputed. Some believe that the plea for tolerance between the weak and the strong is only an echo of a similar situation noted in 1 Corinthians (see 8 and 10).<sup>20</sup> But in any case, Paul urges the liberated to surrender some freedom for the sake of the community. “For the Kingdom of God,” Paul says, “is not just eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For the one who is a slave of God in this way is acceptable to God” (14:18). Note especially the echo of 12:1 in the phrase “acceptable to God” which appears only in these two places in the entire Pauline corpus. Paul evidently intends to forge a link between the humble obedience of the slave and the sacrifice commended in 12:1. Instead of no law, *anomia*, Paul elevates the law of love and its demand to limit one’s own liberty for the vulnerable in the community. When viewed in this way, 12:1-

15:13 appears not as an abstract discussion or an assorted collection of miscellanea but a pointed statement with practical issue intended to scrub Paul's gospel clean of any suggestion of anomianism.

Throughout the section we see how Paul concentrates on gifts that promote the health and unity of the community instead of gifts that elevate individual inspiration and expression. Responses in 12:3-8 and 14:1-15:13 echo discussions Paul has held elsewhere. Although references to healers, helpers, miracle workers, administrators and speakers in tongues are lacking in 12:3-8, the passage nevertheless aptly summarizes 1 Corinthians 12:4-31. There Paul learned how Spirit possession can lead to arrogant expressions devoid of realism, compassion, or humility and may lead to indifference to or contempt for the neighbor. In 12:9-13 Paul dips into what may be a Palestinian parenetic tradition to emphasize further those sacrificial acts that nurture the church. The random nature of the instructions makes plain their traditional character. They are bound together only by their corporate emphasis.

<sup>19</sup>David Daube, "Participle and Imperative in I Peter," in E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan, 1955) 467-488.

<sup>20</sup>Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 6; Zurich: Benziger, 1978-82) 3.115, draws a detailed comparison of themes and language in 14:1-15:13 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10.

As important as that corporate emphasis is, it does not exhaust Paul's call to his readers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. In 12:14-21 Paul extends the circle of love to include the persecutor and in 13:1-7 to embrace the governing authorities. Paul's apocalyptic gospel differs in this regard from traditional apocalypticism that tends to erect hard and fast boundaries between the insider and the outsider.<sup>21</sup>

Whether Paul's parenthesis is drawn from experience in Corinth, tradition rooted in a Palestinian setting, or tailored to fit the requirements of just this letter (13:1-7), the entire section rebuts the charge that Paul's gospel reinforced old patterns of behavior rather than transforming them. Paul knows that the believer's cry of liberty and the Spirit's gift of freedom can encourage behavior that violates others and leads to disassociation from this world. Instead, Paul argues, life in Christ should lead to sacrifice for others expressed in service to the body of Christ (12:3-8), to genuine love for each community member (12:9-13), and to the renunciation of hatred for, and retaliation toward, the oppressor (12:14-21). The gospel of grace or participation in the rule of God exempts no one from civic duty (13:1-7), and love, the supreme charism of the New Age, does not abrogate the law but fulfills it, does not relax the moral demand but intensifies it (13:8-10). That love energized by an imminent expectation (12:12-14) should encourage tolerance rather than intolerance, and consideration rather than a callous disregard of the weak. Throughout chapters 12-15 Paul's examples reinforce the point made earlier. Paul's gospel of grace promotes a heightened level of commitment, solidarity, and love for the insider and the outsider, not the immoral behavior, heedless individualism, destructive and insensitive acts of freedom or arrogant and greedy acts that degrade both their victim and their doer.

It is, therefore, instructive to read 12-15 as a part of the argument of the entire letter. Opponents had brought charges of moral laxity and perhaps apostasy against Paul. The disassociation from the world by supporters also threatened to discredit Paul's gospel. Facing

accusers in Jerusalem and an uncertain reception in Rome, Paul presented a rationale for his version of the gospel he preached to the gentiles. He was eager to have support for that gospel and for the Spanish mission. Paul was acutely sensitive to the charge that his gospel of grace fostered antinomianism, led to arrogant behavior, and encouraged disengagement from the world. In chapters 12-15 Paul advanced the argument that he had begun as early as 3:1-8 and then took up again in 6:1-7:6. Here he included important instances of the devotion appropriate to the final eschatological breakthrough. For this extreme situation Paul appropriated a metaphor that complemented his gospel of grace outside the law and which he hoped would dispel any doubt about the substance of his gospel and its connection with this world. Paul's apocalyptic stringency, informed with powerful cultic imagery, avoided the radical separatism of the Essenes and instead claimed a total consecration that sustained one's being involved in the world without being conformed to the world.

<sup>21</sup>The discussion of this issue will require a separate treatment.