

ROMANS 1-6

Romans 1:5. Paul Opens with *Charis*

In his introductory greeting, Paul leads with the concept of *charis*. This important word, together with another word, *pistis*, dominate the entire letter to the Romans, appearing multiple times throughout this epistle. In Romans 1:5, Paul speaks of Christ, “through whom we received a gift [*charis*] and an apostleship by covenantal obedience among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name.” Although *charis* is usually translated as “grace,” it actually means “gift.” The gift of God is truly beautiful, infinitely inspiring, and ideally motivating. But unlike the modern notion of a gift, which is generally thought of as something given with no strings attached, the ancient understanding of *charis* comes from a more relational perspective, seeing it as something that powerfully binds both the giver and the receiver more closely to each other. According to anthropology and sociology, the giving and receiving of gifts is seen by people of all times and cultures in the world as a way to cultivate, strengthen, and enable reciprocal relationships between people. Such interrelationships are often a way to help the receiver to become more like the giver.

Likewise, Jesus’s atoning gift, which cannot be repaid, invites all people to cultivate a relationship with Him and our Heavenly Father. That relationship obligates individuals to serve Them and others. For Paul, that service included his sacred calling to serve as an Apostle, a title denoting someone sent out by Jesus Himself. Jesus invited Paul to become His servant as Paul was on the road to Damascus. Similarly, God’s various gifts or graces should oblige and thereby enable us, as they did for Paul, to be obedient in Jesus’s new covenant, which includes serving others. Paul was thus motivated by Jesus’s gift to accept the relational gift of Jesus’s Atonement and make covenants by means of baptism (Acts 9:18). Once he gained a trusting relationship with the Messiah and accepted the gift of His apostolic calling, Paul then accepted Jesus’s harrowing command to serve and teach the Gentiles, including kings and Roman emperors, in His name (Acts 9:15). Paul later experienced many hardships in his apostolic ministry as he faithfully served

the Gentiles for many years in a dedicated response to Christ’s atoning gift (*charis*) that later enabled him to receive other gifts from God such as protection, safety, and gifts of the Spirit—including the ability to heal others.

Romans 1:8. Paul Follows with *Pistis*

“First I reciprocate with my God the Father through Jesus Christ for all of you because your commitment [pistis] is proclaimed in all the world.”

This verse in the King James Version (published in 1611) reads, “That your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world,” subtly suggesting that *pistis*, “faith,” in the New Testament should be understood as a transmitted agreement, feeling, emotion, or mere belief, as most people for millennia have conventionally understood it. Recently, however, Bible scholars of the New Pauline Perspective have been demonstrating that the ancient Greek word *pistis* in Paul’s time meant “persuasion” and “comprehension” that would lead to obedience and covenantal commitment. Therefore, this verse has been traditionally mistranslated; Paul was originally referring here to faith not just as a belief but as a sacred, covenantal commitment. Teresa Morgan, an Oxford classicist, brilliantly explained that “there would have been definite advantages for early Christians, at least in some contexts, in adapting a common term like *pistis* to mean ‘new covenant’ and their commitment to it. It would have been easily understood by Jews and Gentiles alike, and among Gentiles it would have avoided the strongly Jewish associations of their typical Greek term for covenant in the Septuagint: *hē diathēkē*.”¹ This commitment to live according to the new covenant brought about by understanding Jesus’s atoning sacrifice implied the necessity of an active, faithful relationship with God the Father. Paul’s use of *pistis* “approximated the covenantal bond, both in the Septuagint and in other Hellenistic Jewish literature.” This Greek word overlapped with the concept of covenant that was inherently understood by the word *faithfulness*.² Jesus’s new covenant encouraged this loyal faithfulness of His disciples.

Romans 1:16–17. The Gospel Is the Power of Salvation

After his famous affirmation, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16), Paul continues, “For God’s righteousness is revealed by the Father himself from faithfulness [*pistis*] to faithfulness [*pistis*] just as it has been written, the righteous person will live by faithfulness [*pistis*]” (Romans 1:17). Clearly, Paul understands righteousness as a process, building faithfulness upon faithfulness so that the righteous person can become more like God as God’s righteousness is revealed.

But what Paul is saying here has been misunderstood and mistranslated for centuries. This is one of the losses that occurred in the Great Apostasy, when faith (*pistis*) came to be thought of as belief, a feeling, or emotion. In Christendom, the idea of obtaining salvation by a feeling or passive belief is termed “salvation by faith alone” (*sola fide*). The rapid transformation of the first century *pistis* from its original meanings of “obedience, loyalty, action, faithfulness, and power” into “something passive or received that somehow guaranteed sudden salvation” provides strong evidence that a major change had occurred by the fifth century. The plain and precious gospel truths regarding moral agency and obedience to the laws and ordinances of God became lost.

Fortunately, the scriptures of the Restoration reestablish the first-century meaning of *active faith* as “covenantal faithfulness,” which justifies (or “makes righteous”) humankind only through covenant relationships that are ratified by authorized, priesthood ordinances, all made possible by Jesus’s Atonement. N. T. Wright, an Anglican bishop and prominent New Testament scholar, has argued that this verse at the beginning of Romans should be rendered as “faithfulness” instead of an abstract, passive “faith.” Commenting on this verse, Wright added that “anyone who tries to echo *pistis* by speaking of ‘justification by belief’ had better have a good lawyer.”³ Here Wright was challenging the flawed theological posturing of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, who asserted that through passive faith (as they interpreted *pistis* as meaning only “belief”), those who believed automatically were seen as righteous and thus immediately saved. This righteousness or justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) was thought to occur because of alleged, imputed righteousness in which Christ’s righteousness supposedly became theirs. However, in the Roman world, faithfulness was not transferable to someone else. Furthermore, in apostolic Christianity, no one was saved until after the Final Judgment.

Thus, in this verse, much to the contrary, Paul was alluding to Abraham’s *faithfulness* and loyal service to God within a covenant relationship (Habbakuk 2:4). Furthermore, Jesus Christ often taught during His ministry that at the Final Judgment, He would advocate only for the obedient and faithful, not for those who had only believing or mystical feelings in mortality. The gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul thus declares, unleashes the power of God unto salvation to everyone—Jew, Gentile, or anyone else—who are just and righteous and live by faith, faithfulness, loyalty, and obedience.

Romans 1:27. Fallen Mortals Turn to Wickedness

In Romans 1:18–32, Paul sets out the human predicament. All of humanity is in a lost and fallen state. They claim to be wise and thereby have become foolish (1:22). They dishonor their bodies by giving into the lusts (or desires) of their own hearts (1:24). They change the truth of God into a lie (1:25). And because of this, God leaves them to their own vices and devices (1:26). In particular, Paul then highlights one of the main sins that separates us from God, which is more accurately translated as follows: “Likewise all the men abandoning the procreative ability of the female became inflamed with desire for

each other, men for men, acting indecently and receiving among themselves the deceit of their error as was necessary” (1:27).

An essential part of God the Father’s eternal plan of salvation is the special role the faithful have in providing bodies for God’s spirit children within the Abrahamic covenant. The Apostle Paul clearly viewed sexual relationships between two men in this fallen world “as a deviation from God’s intention for the sexual organs to unite a husband and wife for the procreation of children and to channel the sexual drive in a loving, unifying direction (1 Corinthians 7:1–7),” thus bringing about God’s continuing creation.⁴ In lamenting sexual deviations, Paul was not alone. Some authors in the Stoic philosophical school also claimed that homosexual behaviors were a departure from nature, as do the teachings of the Old Testament, New Testament, and early Christian writers.⁵ Genesis clearly reads, “And God made man—according to the image of God he made him—male and female he made them. And God blessed them, saying: ‘Grow and multiply and fill the earth.’ (Genesis 1:27–28a, LXX). Paul uses the same substantive adjectives.”⁶

Jude 1:4, 7, 16 similarly discourages all manners of sexual “lasciviousness,” “going after inappropriate flesh [*sarkos heteras*]” and “walking after their own lusts.” Similarly supporting and promoting marriage between a man and a woman, Prophets today have also taught these same foundational principles in the family proclamation: “The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God’s eternal plan.”⁷

Romans 2:1–16. God the Father’s Righteous Judgment

Having clearly stated that God will certainly judge all people in the world who do evil knowingly (1:32), Paul emphasizes that people should not judge others when they commit the same wrongs themselves (2:1–9; compare the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:1). But be assured that “God will render to every man according to his deeds” (Romans 7:6). Here we have important assurances that “there is no respect of persons with God,” or in other words, “God the Father is impartial” (2:11). Another way to render verse 11 is “God has no favorites.” In Roman law, judges were expected to be impartial, although they were proverbially corrupt. Many former Roman judges faced prosecution after their long years of judicial service, being immune from prosecution while in office but accountable when their terms expired.

In contrast to the often-unenforced Roman ideals of justice in the turbulent world of his day, Paul assures his readers that God the Father is the ultimate just judge. In contrast to partial and fallible earthly judges, Old Testament verses demonstrate that God shows no partiality.⁸ In the New Testament, many scriptures teach that God loves all people.⁹

Paul concretely applies the principle of the equality of people through the universality of Christianity in Romans 10:12–13, which reads, “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.” This principle is also taught in Restoration scripture. We read in the Book of Mormon that “the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God” (1 Nephi 17:35). In Helaman 3:27–28, we read that “the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name. Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.” Heavenly Father is the perfect, impartial judge and thus is trustworthy in granting blessings in covenant relationships and consistent in His judgment of the wicked. He loves all people and therefore grants and preserves humankind’s agency (Moses 4:3). Because He has granted moral agency to all, God the Father has not programmed some individuals to succeed and others to fail. He is our spiritual Father and we have always existed as intelligences. We have the ability to choose, with His help, to become as He is.

Romans 2:17–29. The Spirit, Not the Letter, of the Law

Wanting to be sure that people would not try to justify themselves by relying exclusively on the law, Paul teaches that even a Jew is really not a Jew by being only outwardly a Jew (Romans 2:28). All people must obey by the spirit and the heart, not just the letter, of the law to be praised by God and not by people (2:29).

Knowledge and ability to make convincing arguments using scripture brought scholars fame in Paul’s day as it still does today. However, the ideal ancient Jew who kept the covenant had an inner commitment to it. The major outward, physical commitment for males was known as circumcision, whereas the circumcision of the heart occurred in spirit. This spiritual circumcision was not in the letter or literal meaning of the law (2:25–29).

Ultimately the Son received the Father’s praise when He was obedient and suffered, died, was resurrected, and became like Him, all because of His covenantal faithfulness. Through faithfulness (or *pistis*) in keeping this covenant, which was symbolized anciently through circumcision, disciples would also realize the full benefits of maintaining a covenantal link to Christ’s Atonement that brings about a praiseworthy resurrection.¹⁰ If its covenantal members are true to their founding charter (that is, to faithfulness, or *pistis*), they will be blessed along with faithful Abraham.¹¹ The promised blessings associated with the covenant of *pistis* were many: among them, the Resurrection. Paul urged his Jewish listeners in Rome to the high bar of intended faithfulness to the covenant, which was traditionally encouraged by the Mosaic law. Paul stressed the positive use of God’s law, embodied by the Mosaic law, if it is understood and applied correctly as God originally intended. Paul’s emphasis on correct teaching cannot be understated when false teachers and judges were being judged by God.

Romans 3:1–8. The Faithfulness of God the Father

But we need not despair. Even if some teachers or people miss the mark, God will keep His promises. “Much more will be our advantage, through every type or experience of life, for first of all the revelations and words [*ta logia*] of God the Father were trustworthy” (Romans 3:2).

Joseph Smith insightfully taught, “What constitutes the kingdom of God? Where there is a prophet, a priest, or a righteous man unto whom God gives his oracles, there the kingdom of God; and where the oracles of God are not, there the kingdom of God is not.”¹² In other words, oracles or revelation given to humankind from God were essential to building God’s kingdom and should be trusted. In ancient pagan religion, the Greek term *ta logia* meant “oracles,” but in Christian parlance, they became revelations given by God the Father, usually by means of His faithful Son, Jesus Christ, through His faithful servants’ teachings. These oracles referred to special revelation that became a pledge or covenant granted by Christ to the faithful by His blood. This demonstrates that God the Father is faithful because He saves His children from the fallen world of sin and death by means of His Son’s Atonement.¹³ Therefore, humankind can trust and learn from God’s revelations that center on Jesus’s Atonement, thus establishing Christ’s new covenant. God the Father is faithful to this covenant made with humanity through Jesus Christ, and we are educated by the Holy Ghost throughout mortality.

Romans 3:9–18. All People Commit Sin

To reinforce his point that all accountable people have committed sin and have gone out of the way, Paul quotes a long collage of passages from the Old Testament. “As it has been written there is no righteous or just person, not one.”¹⁴ “Their throat is an open tomb . . . the poison of asps [snakes] is under their lips.”¹⁵ “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:18; compare Psalm 36:1).

All these verses drive home Paul’s point that “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). The Greek word *dikaïos* in an ancient Greek legal context meant “someone who is just and in tune with law, order, and justice.” Paul wants all to know that because we are all less than perfect, we all need God’s mercy, available through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Everyone will sin in a fallen world during mortality. Because of sin, all individuals become unjust, and thus justice has a claim over each person.

However, the discussion over the years about the idea of justice in Romans 3:10 has often been used as a proof text in support of a popular but false doctrine known as original sin that arose centuries after the Apostles’ missions during the Apostasy. The idea of original sin is based on the premise that the Fall was completely evil, destroyed our moral agency, and resulted in the traditional concept of the complete depravity of humanity, thereby necessitating, among other things, infant baptism.

During the Apostasy, the Catholic leaders normalized the doctrine of original sin to assert that only a select few known as saints could be good enough to grant the mystical grace of their refined nature to others. However, in reality, just because all people need Jesus’s mercy and obliging, atoning grace (or *charis*)

does not mean all people cannot make good choices. Jesus’s light provides inspiration to do good to every person in mortality (John 1:9). Furthermore, because of original sin, early Christian theologians asserted that one could not receive mystical grace or have an inner feeling of faith and therefore be suddenly saved unless God had specifically willed them to have these experiences, whereas others would not be saved at all. Yet Paul said, “God the Father is impartial” (Romans 2:11).

While Paul’s writing here is clearly influenced by Psalms 14:2–3 and 52:1–3, the quoted verses do not necessarily contain or imply the doctrine of original sin. Rather they point to the agency of humankind to choose right or wrong. The concept of original sin is not found in Judaism or in the earliest forms of Christianity or in most Eastern Orthodox traditions. When restoring the gospel, Joseph Smith wrote, “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (Articles of Faith 1:2). This second article of faith correctly describes the Fall as a transgression and says that everyone is responsible for their own sins—indicating moral agency and the ability to sin or not and to repent of sin through one’s own volition only made possible by God the Father’s gift of agency and Jesus’s Atonement (Moses 4:3).

Romans 3:21–31. Righteousness Comes through Faithfulness

The key verse here can be translated, “Becoming righteous as an obliging gift by his favor through the redemption in Jesus Christ” (Romans 3:24). While the King James Version reads, “Being justified *freely*,” the ancient Greek literally means, “Becoming righteous as an obliging gift [*chariti*].” As discussed above, gifts were anciently made available to all people, and the receipt of any gift always obligated their recipients, creating the desire and need to reciprocate with some favor given in return that would often take the form of some kind of pact, alliance, durable friendship, or covenant relationship.

Later Christian theologians, during the Apostasy, misinterpreted what *charis*, or “grace,” meant in earlier times because they lived in a time when the Roman Empire was collapsing. In the chaotic late-antique world of the Roman Catholic West, patrons were no longer faithful to their clients and vice-versa. Reciprocal gift-giving became rare. In addition, a popular pagan philosophy called Neo-Platonism stated that all gifts were completely free from a mystical Oneness, considered to be God by both pagans and Christian intellectuals like Augustine. In the year 400, Augustine was deeply influenced by Neo-Platonism and asserted that gifts of God were one-directional and mystical and required nothing in return. Augustine also admitted he did not know Greek very well, but still he managed to influence how everyone has interpreted the Greek texts in the Bible upon which the Christian doctrine regarding moral agency has been constructed. A little over a thousand years later, Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, famously added *alleyn*, “alone,” to his translation of verse 3:24 (“His grace *alone*”), which he admitted was not verbally present in the Greek, but he felt it should be added. Luther, however, was merely following Augustine and other Catholic church fathers who argued that grace was a one-way freebie with no strings attached.

Most Christians today sadly do not recognize the reciprocity of grace (*charis*) as understood in the first century, which obligates the recipient to act. Instead, many are blinded by popular interpretations of grace to embrace passivity. However, classicists, sociologists, anthropologists, and a group of knowledgeable Protestant scholars of the New Pauline Perspective have all concluded that every gift or grace (*charis*) has nuances of reciprocity that creates relationships. Precisely because Jesus's atoning gift cannot be earned, repaid, or merited, it creates a relationship when received that obliges the human response of reciprocity through keeping commandments, giving service, and entering and keeping covenants. In his translation of this verse, Joseph Smith insightfully and correctly changed the King James Version word "freely" to "only," so the verse reads, "Being justified only by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This reflects more clearly the ancient nuance that while gifts are available to all, receiving those gifts obligates recipients to become faithful within Christ's new covenant.

Romans 4:1–12. Abraham's Covenantal Faithfulness

"For why does the scripture say Abraham trusted God and even it was calculated as righteousness for him?" (Romans 4:3)

The King James translators tried to highlight the central Protestant teaching of immediate salvation by mere belief (*sola fide*) through their mistranslation of this verse. However, as we have mentioned, in Paul's time, the Greek word translated as "faith" (*pistis*) meant much more than a casual belief, a mental assent, or an inner feeling. In fact, it referred to knowledge and understanding that one must first cultivate in order to gain confidence or trust in someone or something. This trust in God the Father is developed by true knowledge about Him and the understanding of Jesus's gospel through covenants and ordinances. Ordinances are a key component of producing the faithfulness inherent in covenant relationships with Him through the enabling power of His Son Jesus Christ. In Doctrine and Covenants 84:20, Jesus taught that the power of godliness is manifest in the saving ordinances of the priesthood. In addition, the third article of faith states, "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."

Romans 4:13–25. Promises Realized through Faithfulness

"He did not faithlessly doubt the promise of God but was empowered by the covenant, giving God the Father honor." (Romans 4:20)

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." (Romans 4:20 King James Version)

The King James translators rendered Romans 4:20 as a reference to the aforementioned medieval or Reformation type of abstract feeling that was passive, inner, mystical, and unrelated to any other gospel principles. In fact, theological scholars often taught during the Apostasy that faith alone saved the passive believer (*sola fide*). The ancient Greek terminology suggests, however, that Abraham's faithfulness was enabled through a special new and everlasting covenant of marriage that included the blessings of priesthood, posterity, and the promised land.¹⁶ We read in the Book of Mormon in 1 Nephi 13:26 that unfortunately, many plain and precious truths and many covenants were taken away from the Bible during the Apostasy. This particular verse is a good example of how the plain and precious active principle of faithfulness (*pistis*) was twisted to become the basis of a passive mysticism or a mental assent devoid of any covenantal association.

Romans 5:1–11. The Faithful Enjoy Hope, Love, and Peace

In these verses, Paul expands the blessings that come to the “righteous through faithfulness,” for even though there be tribulation, “we enjoy peace with God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Paul is referring to a person's being considered just in the eyes of God, which is possible only because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. This obliging, atoning gift, or *charis*, cannot be repaid, earned, or merited, but if God's gift is fully received, it indeed creates in our souls a willingness to participate with God in a covenantal relationship. We can then cultivate this covenantal relationship by learning about Jesus's Atonement and demonstrating faith and by exercising it (*pistis*) through repentance and taking part in ordinances, from baptism to ultimately enduring to the end. That tribulation bring patience, experience, hope, and confidence (5:3–5). Paul (who himself as a horribly sinful man was stopped by the Savior on the road to Damascus) takes great joy in the fact that God loves us “while we were yet sinners,” even dying for us and joyously “reconciling” us and giving us peace through the Atonement (5:8–10). Notably, Romans 5:11 is the only verse in the King James Version that mentions the word *atonement*. In contrast, the words *atone*, *atonement*, and *atone* appear thirty-nine times in the Book of Mormon, the second witness to the Savior. The Atonement of Jesus Christ fulfills the Abrahamic covenant and renews it, creating a new covenantal relationship between Jesus and His covenant people.

Romans 5:12–21. Overcoming the Fall

In these verses, Paul dwells on the straightforward logic that because death entered the world because of the transgression of one man (Adam) and that “on account of this circumstance, since the predicament of sin came into the world through one person,” so likewise “by one man, Jesus Christ,” comes life and reconciliation (Romans 5:12, 15). In making this point, Paul is simply stating that sin and death came

about because of Adam and Eve’s decision to bring about the Fall. In retrospect, we can see that this was actually a fall forward, not backward.

However, during the centuries after Paul, Christian intellectuals misused this verse as a proof text to show that Adam and Eve’s transgression was a heinous sin, known theologically as original sin. Saint Augustine (ca. AD 400), for example, asserted that God’s command to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and to multiply referred only to the two of them having a spiritual union productive of good works to the praise of God.¹⁷ Augustine believed that God could have created a man incapable of sinning, but because Adam was created out of nothing, he therefore had radical weaknesses that came with having a physical body.¹⁸ Material bodies, as opposed to pure forms, were considered evil in the pagan philosophy of Neo-Platonism, and that idea is reflected in the writings of Augustine and other religious leaders during the historical period that Latter-day Saints refer to as the Great Apostasy.

For example, Jerome, a contemporary of Augustine, mistranslated Romans 5:12 to read, “In whom [Adam] all mankind sinned” (*in quo omnes peccaverunt*), which is not the meaning of the original Greek. Augustine, who did not know Greek well and used only Jerome’s Latin mistranslation as a proof text, wrote that all people had sinned because Adam “was corrupted by sin and *all whom he begot were born in sin.*”¹⁹ But the Greek verb *hemarton* cannot be understood that way. In Romans 5:12, “the verb *hemarton* should not be understood as ‘have sinned collectively’ or as ‘have sinned in Adam.’ They would be additions to Paul’s text. The verb only refers to personal, actual sins of individual human beings that would occur in a Fallen World.”²⁰ Instead, Augustine’s proof text states, “In Adam all have sinned, as all were that one man.”²¹ Augustine coined this condition “original sin” (*originalis reatus*).²² He also came to this conclusion about the complete depravity of humankind largely by reading Cicero’s philosophical work *Hortensius*.²³ Then Augustine asserted that all human sexuality was shameful, and so he encouraged virginity and celibacy for the Christian elite.²⁴ Augustine further asserted that Adam’s alleged sin was much greater than the sins of others since he was “more illustrious than others.”²⁵ He called Adam’s sin an “ineffable apostasy” and a “sin much greater than we can judge of.”²⁶

In contrast to the erroneous Christian doctrines influenced by Neo-Platonist pagan ideas, the scriptures plainly refute the concept of original sin. Jehovah claimed through Ezekiel that people are held accountable for their own sins, although the ripples of one’s forefathers’ sins can have consequences “to the fourth generation.”²⁷ During His ministry Jesus taught, “Allow the children to come to me! Do not prevent them! For the Kingdom of God is possessed by those like them. Amen, I say you: Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter into it.” And while hugging the children, He blessed them, placing his hands upon them, with no hint that these children were flawed because of some alleged original sin (Mark 10:13–16).

Scripture of the Restoration affirms the Fall was essential to God’s plan: “And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed, he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were

created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:22–25). Also, the prophet and military general Mormon condemned all the doctrines and practices of men related to original sin for two reasons: (1) Christ’s Atonement redeems little children, and (2) adults need to use agency to decide to repent (Moroni 8:8–11). Joseph Smith added, “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (Articles of Faith 1:2).

Romans 6:1–14. Alive through Christ

In these verses, Paul warns people not to go to another extreme. Because we have been given a gift, “what then will we say? Should we continue in our sinful state so that his gift [*charis*] may proliferate?” (6:1). What does Paul mean by “proliferate”? (The Greek word is *pleonasei*). In this sarcastic remark, Paul is saying that since God has extended to us *charis* for our regular sins, think how much more His gift would be worth if we were to commit great sins, which would make His *charis* even more expansive and all the greater. Receiving grace obligates us to honor the Giver, not to dishonorably take advantage of His gift.

But when *sola fide* and easy or cheap grace came to be articulated in the context of original sin, faith then became an inner, mystical, and passive revery, and that special state was thought of as becoming available only to the elect. Faith in the Protestant tradition of *sola fide* was no longer thought of as motivating humanity to faithfully repent, to obediently get baptized, or to receive gifts of the Spirit for use in loyal, righteous service. Protestant faith shifted even further away from ancient understandings of *pistis*.²⁸ Thus, Brigham Young commented on this verse, “No, there is plenty of sin without your sinning. We can have all the experience we need, without sinning ourselves, therefore we will not sin that good may come, we will not transgress the law of God that we may know the opposite. There is no necessity for such a course, for the world is full of transgression, and this people need not mingle up with it.”²⁹

More precisely, gifts in excess might be said to proliferate as they are reciprocated in the Roman patron-client system while “abound” (King James Version) is much more abstract and subtly contains, again, a Neo-Platonic bias that grace is a mystical, abstract concept. The void created by cheap grace and immediate salvation by faith alone in traditional Protestant theology that results in the absence of the didactic nature of ritual or covenants logically leads to what is called antinomianism, which is the view that under the gospel dispensation of grace, the moral law is of no use or obligation because faith alone is necessary to salvation. That leads to lawlessness, which ironically Paul is critiquing in this very verse.³⁰ Moreover, many traditional Protestants equate cheap grace with abstract *love* that is only allegedly available to the elect by an abstract yet all-powerful God.³¹ But for Paul, God’s loving grace (*charis*) is, of course, relational and therefore binds us together with God and not with our solitary selves. In modern revelation,

we learn “there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God,” emphasizing that if a person does not reciprocate God’s gifts or grace by living in a closer covenantal relationship with Him, that person may fall from this relationship, which is maintained by the strengthening bonds of reciprocal grace (Doctrine and Covenants 20:32).

Romans 6:15–23. Being Servants of Righteousness

“So what? Should we sin because we are no longer subject to Mosaic law because of *charis*? Let it not be so!” (Romans 6:15). The word *nomos* here refers not to law in general but to the Jewish law, the Torah of Moses, rather than a generic concept of “the law” (King James Version) or the necessity of keeping God’s commandments.³² Many Protestants, however, have interpreted the word “law” here to apply to moral standards, and thus they have interpreted not being “under the law” as not having to keep Jesus’s commandments. However, in ancient Greek, a *nomos* was a custom, a norm, which for Jews was the Mosaic law. Jesus fulfilled the outward symbols of the Mosaic law but did not do away with the moral, behavioral codes that were reciprocal responses. Indeed, He said that He came to fulfill the law by fulfilling its prophecies and messianic expectations, but anyone who “shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). Paul’s concern here was not academic. As early as the time when the Epistle of Jude was written, some members had changed the new covenant of reciprocal grace into “lasciviousness” (Jude 1:4) and into antinomianism, which unfortunately has also occurred throughout Christian history as people misunderstand the doctrine of grace and overlook Paul’s warning to not dishonorably use grace as a justification to sin.

Notes

1 Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 291.

2 Nijay K. Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 15–16.

3 N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009), 89.

4 John DelHousaye, *Romans: Translation with Study and Meditation* (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Seminary Press, 2017), 27, https://academia.edu/30984940/Pauls_Letter_to_the_Romans_Translation_with_Study_and_Meditation.

5 Paul may not be consciously appealing to the Stoics. Their philosophical vocabulary had been part of Jewish philosophy for over a century, as we find in the Wisdom of Solomon and the writings of Philo.

6 DelHousaye, *Romans*, 28.

7 “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

- 8 See Deuteronomy 10:17; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Job 34:19.
- 9 Acts 10:34; Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17; Matthew 5:45; F. F. Bruce, *Romans: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 85.
- 10 N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 4, bk. 2 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 984–985.
- 11 Romans 4:9; Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 861; Brent J. Schmidt, *Relational Faith: The Transformation and Restoration of Pistis as Knowledge, Trust, Confidence, and Covenantal Faithfulness* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2023), 301.
- 12 *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1976), 272.
- 13 Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 290.
- 14 Romans 3:10–12; compare Psalms 14:1–3; 53:1–3.
- 15 Romans 3:13; compare Psalms 5:9; 10:7; 140:3; Isaiah 59:7–8.
- 16 Abraham 1; Genesis 12, 17; Doctrine and Covenants 132.
- 17 Augustine, *Confessions* 8.7.17, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 28 vols. in 2 series (1886–1889; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 1/1:123–124; Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 1986), 366. Later in life, Augustine believed that Adam could have been turned back into a spiritual being even after he sinned. See Augustine, *Enchiridion* 28, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1/3:246.
- 18 Augustine, *On Contenance* 6, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1/3:381; Augustine, *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* 5.39; Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, 369.
- 19 Ambrosiaster, *Commentarius in Epist. ad Rom.* 5.12; J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 143; Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, 373. See also J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris, FR: Études Augustiniennes, 1980), 106–107; B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: Life and Letters* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell, 1998), 1:76.
- 20 Schmidt, *Relational Faith*, 5.
- 21 Augustine, *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins* 1.10, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1/5:18–19; G. F. Wiggers, *An Historical Presentation of Augustinism and Pelagianism from the Original Sources*, trans. Ralph Emerson (New York, NY: Gould, Newman, and Saxton, 1840), 278. Ambrosiaster (Pseudo-Ambrose), in commenting on *in quo omnes peccaverunt*, had asserted that the words *in quo* referred to Adam and had added: “It is clear that all have sinned in Adam as in a lump [*quasi in massa*]; for since he was corrupted by sin, all whom he begot have been born under sin.” Ambrosiaster, *Commentarius in Epist. ad Rom.* 12. Augustine used this interpretation later throughout his writings. Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, 373.
- 22 Augustine, *De diversis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* 1.2.20.

23 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.4.7, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1/1:61–62.

24 Augustine endeavored to prove that the allowed use of concupiscence by virtuous married persons is connected with shame. Augustine, *A Treatise against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1.16, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1/5:383. Compare Henrici Norisii, *Vindiciae Augustiniana*, 19–20. Julian, on the other hand, argued that concupiscence is nothing sinful, for it was conferred as a gift on Abraham and Sarah and what God confers as a gift cannot pertain to the work of the devil. Wiggers, *Historical Presentation of Augustinism and Pelagianism*, 120.

25 Augustine, *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* 6.22.

26 Augustine, *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* 3.56, 6.23; Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 2.34, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1/5:296–297; Wiggers, *Historical Presentation of Augustinism and Pelagianism*, 150.

27 Ezekiel 18:4; Exodus 20:5; see Jeremiah 31:29; DelHousaye, *Romans*, 63.

28 However, as already noted, Bullinger articulated faith within “the Covenant,” which allowed humankind to establish a relationship with God, paralleling in some respects the original, first-century nuances of *pistis*. Schmidt, *Relational Faith*, 208.

29 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London, UK: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–1886), 3:221.

30 See a good discussion on this topic in Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1981), 113.

31 Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 114.

32 James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 339.

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