

3:1 *The Value of Circumcision*

NOT FOR HUMAN PRAISE OF MAN.

CHRYSOSTOM: If Paul means that there is no use in being a Jew or in circumcision, why was that nation called, and why was circumcision given? How does Paul solve this problem? By the same means as he did before: he speaks not of their praises but of the benefits of God. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 6.1

3:2 *Entrusted with the Oracles of God*

THE ORACLES OF GOD FIRST ENTRUSTED TO THE JEWS.

ORIGEN: Even though the oracles of God are now entrusted to the Gentiles as well, they were first entrusted to the Jews, as Paul says. Is he speaking here of the letters and the books or of the meaning and the general gist of the law? For we see many Jews who from infancy to old age never stop studying, yet they never come to a knowledge of the truth. How can it be true that they have some advantage in having been entrusted with the oracles of God first, when they do not understand what they are saying or the things about which they are making assertions? 2 ... It must be understood that these things are being said about Moses, the prophets and others like them, to whom the oracles of God were entrusted, because there can be no doubt that they were Jews and that they had the circumcision. It would also apply to anyone who was wise, an intelligent listener or a gifted counselor. These the Lord is said to have removed from Jerusalem because he was offended by the ungodliness of the people. 3 ... Even the apostles of Christ and Paul himself, the vessel of election, came from the Jews and from the circumcision. He had far more in every way than those whom he taught who were of the Gentiles. For the oracles of God were entrusted to the Jews. Note moreover that Paul says that the oracles of God were entrusted to the Jews, not merely the letter of the text. So it is possible for us to understand that those who read but do not understand, as well as those who read but do not believe, have had only the letter entrusted to them, of which the apostle says: The letter kills. 4 But the oracles of God are entrusted to those who understand and believe what Moses wrote and who believe in Christ, as the Lord said: If you believed Moses you would believe me, for he wrote of me. 5 But if the Jew has received more in receiving the letter and something more in the oracles of God, does this mean that those of the Gentiles who have come to Christ are somehow left out? Or is there some way in which they have more than the Jews? Listen to what the Lord says to the Gentile centurion who believed: Truly I say to you, I have not found such faith even in Israel. 6 Therefore you see that when it comes to faith, the Gentiles have much more.... When it comes to the letter, the Jews have

much more in every way, but when it comes to faith, it is the Gentiles who have much more.
COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁷

THE JEWS ENTRUSTED THEMSELVES TO THE ORACLES.

CHRYSOSTOM: What does entrusted mean? It means that the Jews had the law put into their hands because God thought so highly of them that he entrusted them with oracles which came down from on high. I know that some people take the entrusted not of the Jews but of the oracles, as if to say: The law was believed in. But the context does not allow this interpretation. For in the first place he is saying this in order to accuse them and to show that, in spite of the fact that they enjoyed many blessings from above, they still showed great ingratitude. Then look at [verse 3]. If some of the Jews did not believe, how is it that some say that the oracles were believed in? So what does Paul mean? He means that God entrusted the oracles to the Jews, not that the Jews entrusted themselves to the oracles, for the context does not make sense otherwise. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 6.¹³

3:3 The Faithfulness of God

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD NOT NULLIFIED.

ORIGEN: The oracles of God were entrusted to the Jews, as we have said above, but some of them did not believe either God or his oracles. Those who did not believe were carnal, as Paul says elsewhere: The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him. ¹⁶ But their faithlessness does not nullify the faithfulness of God. By God's faithfulness we understand either the faith which God had when he entrusted his oracles to them or the faith by which those who received the oracles from God believed in him. We are therefore reminded that their faithlessness has not nullified the faithfulness of God, which he has shown to us. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹⁷

CYPRIAN: The sanctity and worth of the confessors (i.e., martyrs) was not shattered because the faith of a few of them was broken. TREATISES ON THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH 22.¹⁸

WHAT DOES IT MATTER IF SOME WERE UNFAITHFUL?

CHRYSOSTOM: The unbelief of the Jews does not reflect badly on God but rather shows his honor and love of man to be all the greater, in that God is seen to have bestowed honor on people who would dishonor him. Look how he has revealed them to be guilty of misdeeds because of what they gloried in. The honor God showed to them was so great that even when he saw what the result of it would be, he

did not withhold his good will toward them. But the Jews made the honors bestowed on them a means of insulting him who honored them. Paul said: What if some of them did not believe? Wasn't it clear that it was all of them who did not believe? If Paul had told the truth directly he might have appeared to be a severe and hostile accuser. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 6.23

3:4 Let God Alone Be True

WHETHER THIS MAKES DAVID AND PAUL LIARS.

ORIGEN: If one is to be righteous, one must keep the law in every particular, which is almost impossible for human nature to achieve. Therefore every one is a liar. For since every man is a liar, it follows that on that day when the Lord comes to judgment with men, only he will be justified in what he says. For his words are true in everything, because they are the words of truth. It should also be understood that this saying, i.e., that every man is a liar, is taken from Psalm 115. 28 ... Now someone might object that if all men are liars, then Paul too, being a man, will also be a liar! But in that case David, who originally said it, would also be a liar, and what he said would be false, just because he was a liar.... The whole statement would thus become nonsense, which is absurd! COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.29

OBEYING GOD'S PRECEPTS.

CYPRIAN: If every man is a liar and God alone is true, what else ought we servants and bishops of God to do except to reject human errors and lies and to remain in the truth of God, obeying the precepts of the Lord? LETTERS 67.8.30

WHETHER GOD CAN LIE.

AMBROSE: Does God tell a lie? He does not. It is impossible for God to tell a lie. Is this an impossibility because of some weakness? Certainly not! How could he be the cause of all things if there were something which he could not cause? What then is impossible to him? Nothing that is difficult for his power but only that which is contrary to his nature. It is impossible, it is said, for him to tell a lie. 32 The impossibility comes not from weakness but from his power and greatness, for truth admits of no lie. LETTERS TO BISHOPS 14.

HOW IS GOD JUSTIFIED?

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul is saying something like this: Even if every one of the Jews was an unbeliever ... God would only be the more justified. What does the word justified mean? It means that if there were a trial and an examination of the things which God had done for the Jews and also of what they had done to him, the victory would be with God, and all the right would be on his side. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 6.37

THE HERETIC DESTROYS SOULS.

JEROME: If everyone who utters a lie has already destroyed his soul, and all of us are liars, are we all going to perish? What Scripture says ... we should interpret as referring to heretics.... The doer of the deed has indeed killed his own soul, but the heretic—the liar— has killed as many souls as he has seduced. HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 2.39

GOD IS TRUE.

AUGUSTINE: God in himself is true; you in yourself are a liar —in him you can be true! HOMILIES ON I JOHN 1.6.40

3:5 *The Justice of God*

WHETHER GOD'S WRATH IS UNJUST.

ORIGEN: Paul says that it is wrong to say that God is unjust for bringing wrath on men. For how will the one who judges the world be thought to be unjust, when his very title of Judge shows that he does nothing without judgment? And where there is judgment, it follows that there will be justice. For the words judge and judgment are both derived from justice. The idea being expressed here does not accord with God or with the wisdom of God, but with man and with what has just been said, viz.: All men are liars. 43 But it is perfectly logical and right to say that justice is the enemy of unrighteousness, just as life is the enemy of death and light is the enemy of darkness. Therefore God, in whom is justice, is said to bring wrath on men, in whom unrighteousness dwells. For justice and unrighteousness are natural enemies. So how could God be regarded as unjust, simply because he is fighting unrighteousness? COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.44

WHETHER GOD'S JUSTICE EXCEEDS OUR CONCEPTIONS OF JUSTICE.

CHRYSOSTOM: What does Paul mean? God honored the Jews, but they dishonored him. This gives God the victory and shows the greatness of his love toward man, in that he continued to honor them in spite of what they were like. But if this is true of us (someone might say), why am I to be punished when I have contributed to God's victory by dishonoring him? Paul answers this by a corresponding absurdity. In effect, he says that if this man were the cause of God's victory and he was punished as a result, it was an injustice. But if God is not unjust and the man was punished, then he could not have been the cause of God's victory.... For God's justice far exceeds what we think of as justice and is based on other ineffable criteria.
HOMILIES ON ROMANS 6.⁴⁸

3:6 God Judges the World

THE WHOLE WORLD.

ORIGEN: In this passage the word world means the people who are in this world, just as we read elsewhere that the whole world is in the power of the evil one. ⁵² COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁵³

3:7 Human Falsehood, God's Truthfulness

EVEN THROUGH HUMAN FALSEHOOD GOD'S TRUTHFULNESS ABOUND.

ORIGEN: There are many kinds of religion in this world, many schools of philosophy, and many teachings which promote false assertions and are backed up with lying arguments. Those who invent them have a false reputation for wisdom—people of little or no authority. We should recognize them for what they are. Because of them many false statements are commonly accepted as true. The whole world, including religion, is now burdened with lying opinions. Even the elect are being led astray, if you can imagine that. The truth of God is now attacking and refuting every lie. Faith in God's truth, God's wisdom and God's Word is undercutting all claims of false teaching. By each of these lies which had previously been asserted by men, the truth of God is abounding, by demonstrating their superficiality and by communicating the simple truth of faith in each and every case. In this way, says the apostle, the truth of God abounds through the falsehood of men. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁵⁷

WHETHER EVIL IS THE CAUSE OF GOOD.

CHRYSOSTOM: The logic of this argument can easily tend toward the absurdity that good comes out of evil and that evil is the cause of good. In that case, one of two options follows: Either God is clearly unjust in punishing, or if he does not punish, then he gets his victory from our vices. Either of these conclusions is absurd. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 6.58

3:8 *Why Not Do Evil?*

TWISTING SCRIPTURE.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: These people twist the Scriptures when they read them by their tone of voice, in order to serve their own preferences. They alter some of the accents and punctuation marks in order to force wise and constructive precepts to support their taste for luxury. STROMATA 3.39.2.59

WHY NOT DO EVIL THAT GOOD MAY COME?

ORIGEN: This is an argument raised by unjust people against the Christian faith. They blaspheme us even more by suggesting that because we believe that God's truthfulness abounds in the falsehood of men and that his justice is confirmed by our unrighteousness, we also believe that we should do evil so that good may come of it and that we should tell lies so that God's truthfulness will shine out even more clearly because of it. But in claiming that this is what we think they are blaspheming us, as if these things were somehow the logical conclusion of our beliefs. But in fact the logic of our beliefs does not accept this line of reasoning, because we understand that God is a just and true judge. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.60

WHETHER FORGIVENESS ENCOURAGES SIN.

CHRYSOSTOM: The people Paul is referring to here are Gentiles who thought in this way themselves. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 6.62

3:9 Under the Power of Sin

ALL HUMANITY IS UNDER THE POWER OF SIN.

ORIGEN: Here it must be understood that the reference is to all men, whether they are under the written law [of Moses] or the natural law. For we understand that this applies to the Gentiles in the same way as we have already said above. ¹ When they begin to do the works of the law by nature and become a law for themselves, then they are reproached by their conscience for the things they do which are contrary to that law. For this reason it seems to me that those who have thought that the law of nature is the law of God and that the law of Moses is merely the written law are correct. If Paul was speaking of the written law, the law of Moses, when he said: Sin is not imputed when there is no law, ² neither Cain ³ nor those who perished in the flood ⁴ nor those who were burnt with fire at Sodom ⁵ would have had their sins imputed to them. But since we see that not only did they have their sins imputed to them, they also suffered retribution for them, it is clear that Paul was speaking here of the natural law, which with the exception of the early years of childhood, is present in all men. For this reason he was quite right to say that all are under the power of sin. Whence it seems to me that the philosophers were right when they said that every mortal being on coming to the age of discretion, when by the entry of the natural law it might distinguish between good and evil, first of all discovers what is evil and afterward combats it by means of instructions, precepts and warnings, so as to move on to virtue. I think that Paul was agreeing with them when he said: But when the commandment came, sin sprang to life. ⁶ ... It must not be thought that everyone is guilty of all the sins which are listed below. Rather, some are guilty of some of them, and others are guilty of others but in such a way that taken together the whole range of sinfulness is found in the human race. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁷

3:10 None Is Righteous

COMPARING JERUSALEM, SODOM AND THE CHURCH.

ORIGEN: It may appear that there are other scriptural passages which seem to contradict this one by suggesting that some people were righteous, e.g., when it is said of Sodom in relation to Jerusalem: Sodom is righteous compared with you. ¹³ But note carefully what Scripture actually says. It does not say that Sodom was righteous but that since Jerusalem had committed so many sins and what it was doing was so awful, Sodom appeared to be righteous by comparison.... For this reason, I am afraid that when I look at those of us who are in the church of God and who claim to follow his law and the commands of the gospel,

there are not a few unbelievers who appear to be righteous by comparison. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹⁴

NO ONE HAS BROUGHT GOODNESS TO FULL FRUITION.

ORIGEN: That no one has done good, not even one, is a hard saying and difficult to understand. How is it possible that no one, Jew or Greek, has ever done anything good? Are we supposed to believe that nobody has ever shown hospitality, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, delivered the innocent from the hands of the powerful or done anything similar? It does not seem possible to me that Paul was intending to assert anything as incredible as that. I think that what he meant must be understood as follows. If someone lays the foundation for a house and puts up one or two walls or transports some building materials to the site, can he be said to have built the house, just because he has set to work on it? The man who will be said to have built the house is the one who has finished off each and every part of it. So I think that here the apostle is saying that no one has done good in the sense that no one has brought goodness to perfection and completion. If we ask ourselves who is truly good and who has done good perfectly, we shall find only him who said: I am the good shepherd, and again: The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹⁵ COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹⁶

3:11 *No One Seeks God*

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY.

ORIGEN: Even the apostle Paul himself says that he knows in part and understands in part. ²¹ So who is there who can make a claim that he understands? For however much he may understand, it will appear that he understands through a glass darkly and that only after he lays aside this earthly body will he see face to face. ²²... Thus it is that no one understands, no one seeks for God. For as long as we are preoccupied with the cares of the body and seek the things of the body, we cannot seek God nor can we think his thoughts. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.²³

3:12 *All Have Gone Wrong*

WHO DOES GOOD?

ORIGEN: It seems to me that Scripture would not say that they had gone wrong if there had not been a time when they were standing in the right way. From this it appears that the original work of God in creating a rational nature was right and that this being was put in the right way by the gift of the Creator himself. But since he turned aside from this to sin. Scripture rightly says that he has gone wrong. Remember how Adam, the first man, was deceived by the serpent and turned aside from the right way of paradise to the fallen and crooked paths of this mortal life. ²⁸ As a consequence therefore, everyone who comes into this world in the following of Adam has gone wrong and become unworthy, just as he did. ²⁹ COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.³⁰

3:13 *The Venom of Asps*

IMPURITY ON DISPLAY.

ORIGEN: This comes from Psalm 5[:10]. It seems to me that Paul is using this text to describe different types of human sin. The analogy: Every grave contains the uncleanness of the dead body inside. This is why our Lord said in the Gospel that the scribes and Pharisees were whited sepulchres. On the outside they appear to be beautiful, but on the inside they are full of all sorts of uncleanness. ³⁴ But in this passage Paul seems to be revealing something more than this about the sins of those whom he is talking about, because he says that they are an open grave, not one which is shut and covered up. Those who were called a closed sepulchre had enough sense of shame not to reveal their sins to the public. But these people are called an open grave because they have their uncleanness and impurity on display, and they are so accustomed to evil that... whenever they open their mouth, instead of speaking the Word of God, the word of life, they open their throat and speak the word of death, the word of the devil, not from the heart but from the grave. Whenever you see a man cursing and swearing, you may be sure that he is one of this type. They use their tongues to deceive. To deceive means to say one thing and think another. I am not certain that even the justified and the elect are entirely free of this sin. Some commit it more and others less. The only one who is perfect in this respect is the one of whom it is written: He had committed no sin, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ³⁵ There may be someone who is careful and cautious enough to avoid major failings in this respect, but who is there who does not fall into this trap either from a sense of shame or from neglect? Occasionally things which should be done are overlooked because of forget

fullness, and in order for no blame to appear they are excused in a way which does not correspond to the facts. This is why Peter, realizing that these are all different types of deception, wrote this in his epistle: Put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn babes, long for pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation. ³⁶ The bite of the serpent kills the body with its poison. Even a bite of a poisonous word may kill the soul by deception. ³⁷ This may be applied both to those who surround others with slanderous remarks and of those who, by heretical teaching tainted with the poison of the devil, deceive the souls of the simple. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.
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3:14 Curses and Bitterness

A MOUTH FULL OF CURSES.

ORIGEN: Paul did not say that their lips were full of the poison of asps. For although many may be involved in sins of that kind, there are not many who are totally given over to the harm which that poison can do. On the other hand, there are many whose mouths are full of curses and bitterness. For whose mouth is so pure that he never curses? I am not speaking now of those who deserve to be cursed but of those whom God has not cursed, i.e., the just and innocent. For this vice is so prevalent and so automatic a trait of human weakness, especially with respect to those who are under or inferior to us, that many people would not even think to call it cursing. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁴¹

3:15 Swift to Shed Blood

THE FEET THAT MOVE TO UNDERMINE THE LIFE OF THE SOUL.

ORIGEN: This may seem to be an infrequent crime. But we take it to include not only those who shed blood by killing the body but also those who by some deception or other separate the soul from God.... For if the one who separates the body from the soul which gives it life is called a murderer, how much more truly will the one who separates the soul from the true life, which is God, be called a murderer? Feet in this passage refers to the way we live our life, as the prophet says: My feet had almost stumbled. ⁴⁴ COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁴⁵

3:16 *Ruin and Misery*

3:17 *The Way of Peace*

CHRIST OUR PEACE.

ORIGEN: Christ is our peace. ⁵² Therefore the way of peace is the way of Christ, which sinners do not know. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁵³

3:18 *Fear of God*

WHAT OUGHT TO BE FEARED.

ORIGEN: If someone is always thinking of what will please or displease God, then it can be said that the fear of God is always before his eyes. But such a person must be experienced and diligently instructed in the law of God so as not to be afraid when there is no reason to fear. For the fear of God must always be placed before our eyes: not the eyes of the flesh—for it is not something visible or corporeal that we are talking about here—but the eyes of the mind, to which an understanding and awareness of the fear of God are evident and by which, as we have said above, we can discover what ought and ought not to be feared. The one who fears God does not fear the powers of this world. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁵⁷

3:19 *The World Held Accountable to God*

THE WHOLE WORLD.

ORIGEN: Here we must consider carefully what this law is that speaks to those who are under the law. By what it says to them it deprives them of every excuse, so that they can find no hiding place for their sins. It is this which stops every mouth and makes the whole world accountable to God. Now if we want to take this as referring to the law of Moses, which without doubt spoke only to those who had been circumcised from their mother's womb and had learned what the law was, how is it possible that by that law, which applies to only one nation, every mouth should be stopped and the whole world should be held accountable to God? What have the other nations to do with that law, and why does it affect the entire world? And how is it that a knowledge of sin is said to have originated with the law of Moses, when there

were many before his time who were well aware of their sins? From this it appears that the apostle Paul is not speaking here about the law of Moses but about the natural law which is written on the hearts of men.... This natural law speaks to all men who are under that law with the sole exception, it seems to me, of those children who are not yet able to distinguish good from evil.... When Paul says the whole world he is not talking about trees and rocks and so on but about the rational animal, i.e., the human being. Anything which is not rational is excluded from consideration in this context. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁶¹

EVERY MOUTH STOPPED.

CHRYSOSTOM: Note that Paul was in the habit of referring to the entire Old Testament as the law ... for here he calls a psalm the law. When he talks about every mouth being stopped, he does not mean that the purpose of their sinning was to shut them up but that the reason they were rebuked was that they might not sin in ignorance. Furthermore, it was not just the Jews ⁶³ he was referring to but the whole of mankind. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.⁶⁴

3:20 Knowledge of Sin Comes Through the Law

THE LAW REVEALS SIN.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: The law did not create sin; it revealed it. STROMATA 2.7.34.4.⁶⁹

THE LAW AS GOOD MEDICINE.

ORIGEN: Let us see in what way knowledge of sin comes through the law. It comes insofar as we learn through the law what to do and what not to do, what is sin and what is not sin. It is not, as the heretics claim, that God's law is a bad root or a bad tree through which a knowledge of sin comes. Rather the law is like a medicine through which we perceive the true nature of our disease.... The medicine itself is good, not least because it enables us to isolate the disease and seek to cure it. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁷⁰

THE LAW DISCLOSES SIN.

CHRYSOSTOM: Once more Paul jumps on the law but this time with restraint, for what he says is an accusation not against the law but against the negligence of the covenant people.... The law accomplished its task of disclosing sin to them, but then it was their duty to flee it. But since they did not flee it, they

brought an even greater punishment on themselves, and the good deeds of the law have just provided an excuse for greater chastisement from God. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.⁷³

FOUR STAGES OF RELATION TO THE LAW: BEFORE THE LAW, UNDER THE LAW, UNDER GRACE AND AT REST.

AUGUSTINE: Some think that statements like this are an attack on the law. But they must be read very carefully, so that neither is the law condemned by the apostle nor is free will taken away from man. Therefore, let us distinguish the following four states of human existence: before the law, under the law, under grace and at rest. Before the law we follow the lust of the flesh. Under the law we are dragged along by it. Under grace we neither follow it nor are dragged along by it. At rest ⁷⁵ there is no lust of the flesh. Prior to being addressed by the law, we do not struggle, because not only do we lust and sin, we even approve of sinning. Under the law we struggle but are defeated. We admit that what we do is evil and that we do not want to do it, but because there is as yet no grace, we are defeated. In this state we discover how far down we lie, and when we want to rise up and yet we fall, we are all the more gravely afflicted. The law is good because it forbids what ought to be forbidden and requires what ought to be required. But when anyone thinks he can fulfill the law in his own strength and not through the grace of his Deliverer, this presumption does him no good but rather harms him so much that he is seized by an even stronger desire to sin and by his sins ends up as a transgressor. So when the man who has fallen realizes that he cannot raise himself, let him cry to his Deliverer for help. Then comes grace, which can pardon previous sins, give aid to the struggling, supplement justice with love and take away fear. When this takes place, although fleshly desires continue to fight against our spirit in this life and try to lead us into sin, yet our spirit does not give in to these desires because it is rooted in the grace and love of God and ceases to sin. For we do not sin by having these perverse desires but by giving in to them. These desires arise from the mortality of the flesh, which we inherit from the first sin of the first man, which is why we are born carnal. Nor will they cease until, by the resurrection of the body, we shall obtain the transformation which has been promised to us. Then we shall be in the fourth state, where there is perfect peace. Perfect peace is the state in which nothing will resist us because we do not resist God. Free will existed perfectly in the first man, but in us, prior to grace, there is no free will which would enable us not to sin but only enough that we do not want to sin. But grace makes it possible not only for us to want to do what is right but actually to do it not in our own strength but by the help of our Deliverer, who at the resurrection will give us that perfect peace which is the consequence of good will. AUGUSTINE ON ROMANS 13–18.⁷⁶

3:21 *Witness from the Law and the Prophets*

NATURAL LAW OR MOSAIC LAW?

ORIGEN: We have just said that in the above verses Paul was speaking about the natural law and not about the law of Moses, but now it appears that there can be no doubt that he is referring to the law of Moses, by which the righteousness of God is made manifest through faith in Christ Jesus in all who believe, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, and who are justified not by works but by the grace of God, who has redeemed them in Jesus Christ. Does this mean that our interpretation of the foregoing was mistaken?... Just as there is nothing in this verse which makes it possible for us to argue that it is talking about the natural law and not about the law of Moses, so there is nothing in the preceding verses to indicate that they are talking about the law of Moses and not about the natural law. Thus we would argue that just as the foregoing cannot be used to interpret what we now have before us, so neither should our interpretation of it be altered simply because what follows cannot be read in the same way. Does this mean that the apostle has contradicted himself? There are plenty of people who would like to think so!... But we shall try to show how this passage does not go against our interpretation of the foregoing one. We have often said, and have expounded this most clearly in the preface, that the apostle mentions many different kinds of law in this epistle, and only the most attentive reader will be able to detect when he is shifting from one to another.... The law of nature was able to explain the nature of sin and give us some knowledge of it, but the righteousness of God is above and beyond this, and the human mind is unable to attain it by its natural senses.... For this the law of Moses was required, to teach us what God's righteousness is. Do not be surprised that the word law is used here in two different senses!... Moreover, there is a way to tell which meaning of the word law is intended. The Greek language uses articles in front of proper names. Thus when the law of Moses is intended, the article is used, but when the natural law is meant, the article is omitted. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹

RIGHTEOUSNESS MANIFESTED.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul does not say that the righteousness of God has been given but that it has been manifested, thus destroying the accusation that it is something new. For what is manifested is old but previously concealed. He reinforces this point by going on to mention that the Law and the Prophets had foretold it. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.4

THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS BY WHICH SINNERS ARE CLOTHED.

AUGUSTINE: The righteousness of God is not that by which God is righteous but that with which he clothes man when he justifies the ungodly. To this the Law and the Prophets bear witness.... The righteousness of God is not manifested outside the law, since in that case it could not have been witnessed to in the law. It is a righteousness of God apart from the law because God confers it on the believer through the Spirit of grace without the help of the law. THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER 15.6

3:22 The Righteousness of God Through Faith

OUR FAITH.

CHRYSOSTOM: In order to stop anyone from asking: How can we be saved without contributing anything at all to our salvation? Paul shows that in fact we do contribute a great deal toward it—we supply our faith! HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.9

SALVATION IN THE GOSPEL.

AUGUSTINE: How could Paul have promised glory, honor and peace to the good works of Gentiles apart from the grace of the gospel? Because there otherwise is no acceptance of persons with God. And because it is not the hearers but the doers of the law who are justified, he argues that all, whether Jew or Gentile, shall alike have salvation in the gospel. THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER 44.10

3:23 All Have Sinned

A PROPER FEAR.

IRENAEUS: We ought not to be puffed up or severe on those of ancient times, but ought ourselves to fear, lest after we have come to the knowledge of Christ we obtain no further forgiveness of sins. If later we do things displeasing to God, we are shut out of his kingdom. AGAINST HERESIES 4.27.2.13

NATURE AND THE LAW HAVE FAILED.

SEVERIAN: Paul shows that nature has failed the Gentiles and that both nature and the law have failed the Jews, before going on to mention the grace of the gospel and saying: What do we have by grace which is special and superior? Faith, made effective by the righteousness of Christ.... Paul does not say that all

have broken the law but that all have sinned in a general sense. Now the one who is lacking something tries to make up his deficiency. The Jews had the law, but they were lacking the fullness of grace. PAULINE COMMENTARY FROM THE GREEK CHURCH.¹⁴

NOT TO ELICIT DESPAIR.

CHRYSOSTOM: There is no difference at all between the Greek, the Scythian, the Thracian or even the Jew, for all are in the same plight.... Even if you have not done the same sins as others, you have still been deprived of God's glory just as they have been, because you are among those who have offended.... However, Paul was saying this not to cast them into despair but rather to show the love of the Lord toward man, as he goes on to say [in the following verses]. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.¹⁶

3:24 Redemption in Christ

THE RANSOM OF CAPTIVES.

ORIGEN: Redemption is the word used for what is given to enemies in order to ransom captives and restore them to their liberty. Therefore human beings were held in captivity by their enemies until the coming of the Son of God, who became for us not only the wisdom of God, and righteousness and sanctification, ¹⁸ but also redemption. He gave himself as our redemption, that is, he surrendered himself to our enemies and poured out his blood on those who were thirsting for it. In this way redemption was obtained for believers. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹⁹

3:25 Jesus Christ Is Our Expiation

AN EXPIATION BY CHRIST'S BLOOD.

ORIGEN: Although the holy apostle teaches many wonderful things about our Lord Jesus Christ which are said mysteriously about him, in this passage he has given special prominence to something which, I think, is not readily found in other parts of Scripture. For having just said that Christ gave himself as a redemption for the entire human race so that he might ransom those who were held captive by sin... now he adds something even more sublime, saying that God put him forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This means that by the sacrifice of Christ's body God has made expiation on behalf of men and by this has shown his righteousness, in that he forgave their previous sins, which they had

committed in the service of the worst possible tyrants. God endured this and allowed these things to happen. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.²⁴

SANCTIFYING ONE'S SOUL.

GREGORY OF NYSSA: Christ, being an expiation by his blood, teaches each one thinking of this to become himself a propitiation, sanctifying his soul by the mortification of his members. ON PERFECTION.²⁸

DECLARING GOD'S RICHES.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul calls the redemption an expiation to show that, if the Old Testament type had such power, much more did its New Testament counterpart have it.... What does it mean to show God's righteousness? It is like declaring his riches not only for him to be rich himself but also to make others rich.... Do not doubt, for righteousness is not of works but of faith. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.²⁹

3:26 Justified by Faith in Jesus

AT THIS PRESENT TIME.

ORIGEN: God allowed all this so that afterward, that is to say in our time, he might show forth his righteousness. For at the end of the age, in the most recent times, God has manifested his righteousness and given Christ to be our redemption. He has made him our propitiator. If he had sent him as the propitiator at some earlier time, there would have been fewer people whose sins needed propitiating than there are now. For God is just, and therefore he could not justify the unjust. Therefore he required the intervention of a propitiator, so that by having faith in him those who could not be justified by their own works might be justified. These are the presuppositions on which the apostle's exposition here is based. Paul was right to add at the present time, because at the moment God's righteousness is revealed for our justification. But when the day of judgment comes, it will be revealed for retribution. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.³⁵

3:27 Faith Excludes Boasting

THE PRINCIPLE OF FAITH.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul is at great pains to show that faith is powerful to a degree which no one ever imagined the law could be. For after saying that God justifies man by faith, he takes up the question of the law again. He does not say: Where are the good works of the Jews? but: Where is their boasting? Thus he takes every opportunity to demonstrate that it was all talk and that they had no deeds to back them up. What is the principle of faith? This is salvation by grace. Here Paul shows God's power in that he has not only saved, he has also justified and led them to boast in a different way—not relying on works but glorying only in their faith. In saying this Paul is trying to get believing Jews to behave with moderation and to reassure unbelieving Jews so that they might be persuaded to accept his point of view. For if the one who has been saved is proud because he abides by the law, he will be told that he has stopped his own mouth, that he has accused himself, that he has renounced any claim to salvation and that he has excluded boasting. But the unbeliever may be humbled by these same means and brought to accept the faith. See how great faith is, in that it has removed us from the former things and does not even allow us to boast of them! HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.40

JUSTIFIED BY MERCY AND GRACE.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: For who will glory, or for what, when everyone has become worthless and gone out of the right way, and nobody does good works anymore? Therefore he says that all glorying is excluded.... How? We have acquired the forgiveness of our former sins and have been justified freely by the mercy and grace of Christ. 44 COMMENTARY ON ROMANS.45

3:28 Faith, Not Works of Law

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS AS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.

ORIGEN: It remains for us who are trying to affirm everything the apostle says, and to do so in the proper order, to inquire who is justified by faith alone, apart from works. If an example is required, I think it must suffice to mention the thief on the cross, who asked Christ to save him and was told: Truly, this day you will be with me in paradise. 48 ... A man is justified by faith. The works of the law can make no contribution to this. Where there is no faith which might justify the believer, even if there are works of the law these are not based on the foundation of faith. Even if they are good in themselves they cannot justify the one

who does them, because faith is lacking, and faith is the mark of those who are justified by God.
COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁴⁹

THE DOORS OF FAITH OPEN TO THE WORLD.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul does not say a Jew or one under the law but widens the discussion and opens the doors of faith to the world, saying a man, i.e., the name common to our race. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.⁵¹

APART FROM WORKS OF THE LAW.

AUGUSTINE: This must not be understood in such a way as to say that a man who has received faith and continues to live is righteous, even though he leads a wicked life. QUESTIONS 76.1.⁵⁴

3:29 God of Jews and Gentiles

FATHER OF THOSE WHO KNOW HIM.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: One righteous person is no different from another righteous person, whether Jew or Greek. For God is not only the Lord of the Jews but of all humanity. He is the Father of all who know him. To live well and according to the law is to live. To live rationally according to reason is to live. Those who lived rightly before the law were classed under faith and judged to be righteous— it. Those who were outside the law, having lived rightly, on hearing the voice of the Lord ... may turn and believe with all speed. STROMATA 6.6.⁵⁸

GOD OF LAW AND GOSPEL.

ORIGEN: Here Paul gives a short sharp answer to those who would say that there is one God for the Jews and another for the Gentiles, i.e., one God of the law and another of the gospel. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁶¹

GOD OF ALL.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul shows that the Jews, by trying to put the Gentiles in their place, were insulting God's glory by not allowing him to be the God of all. But if God is God of all, then he takes care of all, and if he takes care of all, then he saves all alike by faith. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.⁶⁵

3:30 God Justifies Believers Through Their Faith

FAITH PREFIGURED IN THE JEWS.

IRENÆUS: We were prefigured in the Jews, and they are represented in us, that is, in the church, and they receive the reward for what they achieved. AGAINST HERESY 4.22.2.⁶⁷

BOTH JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.

ORIGEN: Not only does Paul say that there is only one God for both Jews and Gentiles, but he adds that this God is the one who justifies the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith.... Neither the circumcision nor the uncircumcision enjoys any advantage in this. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁶⁸

JUSTIFIED IN THE SAME WAY.

JEROME: Paul shows clearly that righteousness depends not on the merit of man but on the grace of God, who accepts the faith of those who believe without the works of the law. AGAINST THE PELAGIANS 2.7. 70

ONE GOD.

CHRYSOSTOM: There is only one God, who is Lord of all, both Jew and Gentile. Even in ancient times the blessings of providence were shared by both, although in different ways. The Jews had the written law, and the Gentiles had the natural law, but in this they lacked nothing, because if they tried hard enough they could always surpass the Jews in their observance.... If there was no difference then, much less is there any now, and this Paul establishes even more firmly by demonstrating that both alike stand in equal need of faith. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.⁷¹

DISTINGUISHING “THROUGH FAITH” AND “ON THE GROUND OF FAITH.”

AUGUSTINE: The difference of preposition (on the ground of versus through) does not indicate any difference of meaning but serves simply to vary the phrase. ON THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER 50.⁷³

3:31 *The Law Confirms Faith*

CONFIRMING THE LAW THROUGH FAITH.

ORIGEN: Whoever does not believe in Christ, of whom Moses wrote in the law, destroys the law. But whoever believes in Christ, of whom Moses wrote, confirms the law through faith, because he believes in Christ. The Lord himself said: I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. ⁷⁵ None of the saints nor even the Lord himself has destroyed the law. Rather its glory, which is temporal and transient, has been destroyed and replaced by a glory which is eternal and permanent. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁷⁶

UPHOLDING AND PERFECTING THE LAW.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul's use of the word uphold shows that the law was failing.... The purpose of the law was to make man righteous, but it had no power to do that. But when faith came it achieved what the law could not do, for once a man believes he is immediately justified. Faith therefore established what the law intended and brought to fulfillment what its provisions aimed for. Consequently faith has not abolished the law but perfected it. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 7.⁷⁹

THE LAW UPHELD BY RIGHTEOUSNESS.

AUGUSTINE: How should the law be upheld if not by righteousness? By a righteousness, moreover, which is of faith, for what could not be fulfilled through the law is fulfilled through faith. AUGUSTINE ON ROMANS 19.⁸²

FREEDOM OF CHOICE.

AUGUSTINE: Do we then make void freedom of choice through grace? God forbid! Rather, we establish freedom of choice. As the law is not made void by faith, so freedom of choice is not made void but established by grace. Freedom of choice is necessary to the fulfillment of the law. But by the law comes the knowledge of sin; by faith comes the obtaining of grace against sin; by grace comes the healing of the soul from sin's sickness; by the healing of the soul comes freedom of choice; by freedom of choice comes the love of righteousness; by the love of righteousness comes the working of the law. Thus, as the law is not made void but established by faith, since faith obtains the grace whereby the law may be fulfilled, so freedom of choice is not made void but established by grace, since grace heals the will whereby righteousness may freely be loved. THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER 52.⁸³

LAW CONFIRMED BY FAITH.

AUGUSTINE: The law is confirmed by faith. Apart from faith the law merely commands, and it holds guilty those who do not fulfill its commands, so that it might thereafter turn to the grace of the Deliverer those groaning in their inability to do what is commanded. QUESTIONS 66.1.⁸⁴

TRUTH AND THE IMAGE OF THE TRUTH.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: On account of his humanity Emmanuel is called a prophet, who following Moses is the mediator between God and humanity. The law was a shadow, but even so it presented an image of the truth. Furthermore, the truth hardly destroys its images; rather it makes them clearer. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS.⁸⁶

4:1 Our Forefather Abraham

FIRST TO BE CIRCUMCISED.

CHRYSOSTOM: The Jews kept repeating that Abraham, the friend of God, was the first to be circumcised. Paul wants to show that he was justified by faith. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.³

4:2 Boasting in Works or Faith

JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS AND BY FAITH.

ORIGEN: This is a rhetorical argument, which goes like this: Someone who is justified by works has nothing to boast of before God. But Abraham did have something to glory in before God. Therefore he was justified by faith and not by works.

In this whole passage it seems that the apostle wants to show that there are two justifications, one by works and the other by faith. He says that justification by works has its glory but only in and of itself, not before God. Justification by faith, on the other hand, has glory before God, who sees our hearts and knows those who believe in secret and those who do not believe. Thus it is right to say that it has glory only before God, who sees the hidden power of faith. But the one who looks for justification by works may expect honor mainly from other persons who see and approve of them.

Let no one think that someone who has faith enough to be justified and to have glory before God can at the same time have unrighteousness dwelling in him as well. For faith can not coexist with unbelief, nor can righteousness with wickedness, just as light and darkness cannot live together. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁶

TWO KINDS OF BOASTING.

CHRYSOSTOM: For someone to be justified by faith if he had no works was unusual. But for one who had plenty of good works to delight in being justified not by works but by faith—that was something to cause amazement. It put the power of faith in a new light.

What Paul is saying here is not plain, and so it is necessary to make it clearer. There are two kinds of boasting—one of works and one of faith.... Paul's great strength is particularly displayed in this, that he turns the objection around and shows that what seemed to favor the idea of salvation by works (viz., boasting) belonged much more truly to salvation by faith. For the man who boasts in his works is boasting about himself, but the man who finds his honor in having faith in God has a much better reason for boasting, because he is boasting about God, not about himself. 8... To abstain from stealing or murder is a minor accomplishment compared to believing that God can do the impossible.... The believer boasts not only because he sincerely loves God but also because he has received great honor and love from him. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.⁹

GLORY BELONGS TO GOD.

AUGUSTINE: Since Abraham without the law obtained glory not by the works of the law (as if he could fulfill the law in his own strength), since the law had not yet been given, the glory belongs to God, not to him. For he was justified not by his own merit, as if by works, but by the grace of God through faith. AUGUSTINE ON ROMANS 20.¹⁰

BELIEVING ALL THINGS POSSIBLE WITH GOD.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: What can we say to those who insist that Abraham was justified by works because he was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac on the altar? ¹² Abraham was already an old man when God promised him that he would have a son and that his descendants would be as countless as the stars of the sky. ¹³ Abraham piously believed that all things are possible with God and so exercised this faith. God reckoned him to be righteous on this account and gave Abraham a reward worthy of such a godly mind, viz., the forgiveness of his previous sins.... So even if Abraham was also justified by his willingness to

sacrifice Isaac, this must be regarded as an evident demonstration of a faith which was already very strong.

¹⁴ EXPLANATION OF THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS.¹⁵

4:3 Abraham's Belief

ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD.

IRENAEUS: Abraham believed that God was the maker of heaven and earth, the only true God, and he also believed that God would make his seed as numerous as the stars of heaven. ¹⁷ AGAINST HERESIES 4.5.3.¹⁸

BELIEVING WHOLLY IN GOD.

ORIGEN: Was Abraham justified just because he had the faith to believe that he would be given a son? Or was it also because of all the other things which he had believed previously? ... Before this point, Abraham had believed in part but not perfectly. Now, however, all the parts of his earlier faith are gathered together to make a perfect whole, by which he is justified. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹⁹

HEIRS OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

AMBROSE: I do not demand a reason from Christ. If I am convinced by reason, I deny faith. Abraham believed God. Let us also believe, so that we who are the heirs of his race may likewise be heirs of his faith. ON THE DEATH OF HIS BROTHER SATYRUS 2.89.²⁰

THE POWER OF HIM WHO MADE THE PROMISE.

CHRYSOSTOM: The Master proclaimed that Abraham was just because he outran the weakness of his human nature. He strained with his whole mind toward the power of him who had made the promise. BAPTISMAL INSTRUCTIONS.²²