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Romans and Work

Theology of Work Project

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Romans and Work

Introduction to Romans

Paul's letter to the Romans is best known for its vision of God's gracious actions toward humanity through the cross and resurrection of Christ. "It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Romans 1:16). There is something deeply wrong with us individually, and with the world as a whole, from which we need to be saved, and Romans tells us how God is saving us from it.

Romans is deeply theological, but it is not abstract. God's salvation is not a concept for analytical discourse in Romans, but a call to action (Rom. 6:22). Paul tells how God's salvation affects our wisdom, our honesty, our relationships, our judgment, our ability to endure setbacks, our character, and our ethical reasoning, all of which are essential to our work. Here, in the nitty-gritty of human relationships and the desire to do good work, is where God's salvation takes hold in our world.

Written some time during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero (54-68 AD), Romans hints of darkness and danger surrounding the Roman house churches, which comprised both Jewish and Gentile converts to Christ. Some of the Jewish members of the congregations had been exiled by an edict of the emperor Claudius in 49, and had only recently returned, probably having lost their property and financial stability in the mean time (Acts 18:2). Anti-Jewish sentiment in the wider Roman culture surely exerted pressures upon the Christian churches. Paul's extended reflection on God's faithfulness to both Jew and Gentile in this letter was not an abstract pondering of the ways of God, but a skillful theological reflection on these historical events and their consequences. The result is a set of practical tools for making moral decisions leading to a new quality of life in every place where people live and work.

The letter to the Romans has been exceptionally important in the development of Christian theology. To give just two examples, Martin Luther broke with the Pope largely because of his disagreement with what he perceived to be the Roman Catholic understanding of Romans. And Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* was arguably the most influential theological work of the 20th century.^[1] In the past 25 or 30 years, a major theological debate concerning the relationship between salvation and good works has arisen about Romans and the rest of Paul's letters, often called, "the new perspective on Paul." The general commentaries on Romans explore these issues at length. We will focus specifically on what the letter contributes to the theology of *work*. Of course, we have to have a basic understanding of Paul's

general points before applying them to work, so we will do a certain amount of general theological exploration as needed.

The Gospel of Salvation—Paul’s Vocation (Romans 1:1-17)

The opening verse of Romans announces Paul’s own vocation, the *work* that God has called him to do: proclaiming the Gospel of God in word and deed. So what *is* the Gospel of God? Paul says that it is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’” (Romans 1:16-17, NRSV). For Paul, the Gospel is more than words—it is *the power of God for salvation*. He emphasizes that this salvation is not for one group of people only, but is intended to help anyone on earth to be among the people of God, by faith. Romans, then, is above all about God’s salvation.

What is salvation? Salvation is the work of God that sets human beings in right relationship with God and with one another. As we will see momentarily, what we are being saved *from* is broken relationships—with God and with other people—that unleash the evil forces of sin and death in the world. Therefore salvation is first of all the healing of broken relationships, beginning with the healing that reconciles the Creator and the created, God and us. Our reconciliation with God leads to freedom from sin and a newness of life that is not limited by death.

Christians have sometimes reduced Paul’s gospel of salvation to something like, “Believe in Jesus so that you personally can go to heaven when you die.” This is true, as far as it goes, but grossly inadequate. To begin with, a statement like that says nothing about relationships other than between the individual and God, yet Paul never ceases talking about relationships among people and between people and the rest of God’s creation. And Paul has much more to say about faith, about life in Jesus, about God’s kingdom, and about the quality of life both before and after death than could ever be encapsulated in a single slogan.

Likewise salvation cannot be reduced to a single moment in time. Paul says both that we “were saved” (Rom. 8:24) and that we “will be saved” (e.g., Rom. 5:9). Salvation is an ongoing process, rather than a one-time event. God interacts with each person in a dance of divine grace and human faithfulness over time. There are decisive moments in the process of being saved, of course. The central moment is Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. “We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son,” Paul tells us (Rom. 5:10), and “he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also” (Rom. 8:11).

Each of us might also regard the first time we said we believe in Christ as a decisive moment in our salvation. Romans, however, never speaks of a *moment* of personal salvation, as if salvation happened

to us in the past and is now in storage until Christ comes again. Paul uses the past tense of salvation only to speak of Christ's death and resurrection, the moment when Christ brought salvation to the world. When it comes to each believer, Paul speaks of an ongoing process of salvation, always in the present or future tenses. "One believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved" (Rom. 10:10). Not "believed" and "confessed", past tense, but "believes" and "confesses," present tense. This leads directly to "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved," future tense (Rom. 10:13). Salvation is not something that *was* given to us. It is always *being* given to us.

We take the trouble to emphasize the ongoing action of salvation because work is one of the pre-eminent places where we act in life. If salvation were something that happened to us only in the past, then what we do at work (or anywhere in life) would be irrelevant. But if salvation is something going on in our lives, then it bears fruit in our work. To be more precise, since salvation is the reconciliation of broken relationships, then our relationships with God, with other people, and with the created world *at work* (as everywhere in life) will be getting better as the process of salvation takes hold. Just to give a few examples, our salvation is evident when we take courage to speak an unpopular truth, listen to others' views with compassion, help colleagues attain their goals, and produce work products that help other people thrive.

Does this mean that we must work—and keep working—to be saved? Absolutely not! Salvation comes solely through "the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of one man, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:15). It "depends on faith" (Rom 4:16) and nothing else. As N.T. Wright puts it, "Whatever language or terminology we use to talk about the great gift that the one true God has given to his people in and through Jesus Christ, it remains precisely a *gift*. It never is something we can earn. We can never put God into our debt; we always remain in his."^[2] We do not work to be saved. But because we are being saved we do work that bears fruit for God (Rom. 7:4). We will return to the question of how salvation is given to us in "[Judgment, justice and faith \(Romans 3\)](#)".

In sum, salvation is the ultimate work of Christ in the world, the goal towards which believers always "press on," as Paul puts it (Philippians 3:12). Salvation underlies everything Paul and everything believers do in work and life.

Our need for salvation in life and work (Romans 1:18-1:32)

We saw in Romans 1:1-17 that salvation begins with reconciliation to God. People have become estranged from God because of their "godlessness and wickedness" (Romans 1:18). "Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him" (Rom. 1:21). We were created to walk in intimacy with God among the creatures of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1 and 2), but our

relationship with God has become so broken that we don't even recognize God anymore. Paul calls this state a "debased mind" (Romans 1:28).

Lacking the presence of mind to remain in the presence of the real God, we try to make our own gods. We have "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and four-footed animals or reptiles" (Rom. 1:23). Our relationship with God is so thoroughly damaged that we cannot tell the difference between walking with God and carving an idol. When our real relationship with the true God is broken, we create fake relationships with false gods. Idolatry, then, is not merely one sin among others, but the essence of a broken relationship with God. (For more on idolatry, see "[You shall not make for yourself an idol](#)" (Exodus 20:4) at www.theologyofwork.org.)

When our relationship with God is broken, our relationships with other people also break down. Paul lists some of the broken aspects of human relationships that ensue.

They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Romans 1:29-31)

We experience nearly all these forms of broken relationships at work. Covetousness, strife and envy over others' positions or paychecks, malice and rebellion towards those in authority, gossip and slander of co-workers and competitors, deceit and faithlessness in communications and commitments, insolence, haughtiness and boastfulness of those who experience success, foolishness in decisions, heartlessness and ruthlessness by those in power. Not all the time of course. Some workplaces are better and some worse. But every workplace knows the consequences of broken relationships. All of us suffer from them. All of us contribute to causing them.

We may even compound the problem by making an idol of work itself, devoting ourselves to work in the vain hope that it alone will bring us meaning, purpose, security, or happiness. Perhaps this seems to work for a time, until we are passed over for promotion or are fired or laid off or retire. Then we discover that work comes to an end, and meanwhile we have become strangers to our family and friends. Like "mortal men and birds and four-footed animals and reptiles," work was created by God (Genesis 2:15) and is inherently good, yet it becomes evil when elevated to the place of God.

All have sinned (Romans 2-3)

Sadly, this brokenness extends even to Paul's own workplace, the Christian church, and in particular the Christians in Rome. Despite being God's own people (Romans 9:25), "called to be saints" (Rom.

1:7), the Christians in Rome are experiencing a breakdown in their relationships with one another. Specifically, Jewish Christians are judging Gentile Christians for not conforming to their own peculiar expectations, and vice versa. “You say, ‘We know that God’s judgment on those who do *such things* is in accordance with the truth,’” Paul notes (Rom. 2:2). Each side claims that they know God’s judgments and speak for God. Claiming to speak for God makes their own words into idols, illustrating in miniature how idolatry (breaking relationship with God) leads to judgment (breaking relationship with other people).

Both sides are wrong. The truth is that both Gentiles and Jews have strayed from God. Gentiles, who should have recognized the sovereignty of God in the creation itself, have given themselves over to the worship of idols and to all the destructive behavior that follows from this basic mistake (Rom. 1:18-32). Jews, on the other hand, have become judgmental, hypocritical, and boastful that they are the people of the Torah. Paul summarizes both situations by saying, “All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law” (Rom. 2:12).

But the crux of the problem is not that each side misunderstands God’s expectations. It is that each side judges the other, destroying the relationships that God had brought into being. It is crucially important to recognize the role of judgment in Paul’s argument. Judgment causes broken relationships. The specific sins noted in Romans 1:29-31 are not the causes of our broken relationships, but the results. The causes of our broken relationships are idolatry (towards God) and judgment (towards people). In fact, idolatry can be understood as a form of judgment, the judgment that God is not adequate and that we can create better gods on our own.

Therefore, Paul’s overarching concern in chapters 2 and 3 is our judgment of others.

You have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. You say, “We know that God’s judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth.” Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? (Rom. 2:1-3)

If we wonder what we have done that puts us in need of salvation, the answer above all is judgment and idolatry, according to Paul. We judge others, though we have no right to do so, and thus we bring God’s judgment on ourselves as he works to restore true justice. To use a modern metaphor, it is like the Supreme Court overturning a corrupt judge in a lower court who didn’t even have jurisdiction in the first place.

Does this mean that Christians are never to assess people's actions or to oppose people at work? No. Because we work as God's agents, we have a duty to assess whether the things happening in our work places serve or hinder God's purposes and to act accordingly (see Rom. 12:9-13:7 for some examples from Paul). A supervisor may need to discipline or fire an employee who is not doing his or her job satisfactorily. A worker may need to go over a supervisor's head to report an ethical or policy violation. A teacher may need to give a low grade. A voter or politician may need to oppose a candidate. An activist may need to protest a corporate or government injustice. A student may need to report cheating by another student. A victim of abuse or discrimination may need to cut off contact with the abuser.

Because we are responsible to God for the outcomes of our work and the integrity of our work places, we do need to assess people's actions and intentions and to take action to prevent injustice and do good work. But this does not mean that we judge others' worthiness as human beings or set ourselves up as morally superior. Even when we oppose others' *actions*, we do not judge *them*.

It can be difficult to tell the difference sometimes, but Paul gives us some surprisingly practical guidance. Respect the other person's conscience. God has created all people in such a way that "what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness" (Rom. 2:15). If another person is genuinely following his or her own conscience, then it is not your job to judge him or her. But if you are setting up yourself as morally superior, condemning the other person for following their own moral compass, you are probably passing judgment in a way for which "you have no excuse" (Rom. 2:1).

Judgment, justice and faith (Romans 3)

Judgment, the source of broken relationships (Romans 3:1-20)

What can be done with a world of people separated from God by idolatry and from one another by judgment? God's true justice is the answer. In Romans 3, as Paul describes what happens in salvation, he puts it in terms of God's justice. "Our injustice serves to confirm the justice of God" (Rom. 3:5).

Before proceeding, we need to say a bit about the terminology of justice and righteousness. Paul uses the Greek word for justice, *dikaiosynē* and its various forms, 36 times in Romans. It is translated as "righteousness" most often, and as "justice" (or "justification") less frequently. But the two are the same in Paul's language. The primary use of *dikaiosynē* is in courts of law, where people are seeking justice to restore a situation that is not right. Therefore salvation means being made right with God (righteousness) and with other people and all of creation (justice). A full exploration of the relationship between the words "salvation", "justification", "righteousness" and "salvation" is beyond the scope of

this article, but will be addressed in any general commentary on Romans.[3]

If this seems abstract, ask yourself whether you can see concrete implications at work. Is it the case that the (false) judgments people make about one another are the root of broken relationships and injustice where you work? For example, if a manager and employee disagree over the employee's performance review, which of these causes greater damage, the performance gap itself, or the hostility arising from each others' judgment? Or if someone gossips about another person at work, which causes greater damage, embarrassment over the item that was gossiped about, or resentment over the judgment revealed by the gossip's tone and the listeners' snickers?

If our false judgment is the root of our broken relationships with God, other people, and the creation, how can we possibly find salvation? The thing we need—justice/righteousness—is the one thing we are most incapable of. Even if we want to be put back into right relationships, our inability to judge rightly means that the harder we try, the worse we make the problem. "Who will rescue me?" from this fate, Paul cries (Rom. 7:24).

We cannot hope to be rescued by anyone else, for they are in the same boat we're in. "Everyone is a liar," Paul tell us (Rom. 3:4). "There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one" (Rom. 3:10-12). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

Yet there is hope—not in humanity, but in God's faithfulness. "Will their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God?" Paul asks "By no means!" he replies (Rom 3:3-4). On the contrary "injustice serves to confirm the justice of God." This means our workplaces are settings for grace just as much as our churches or families. If we feel that our workplace is too secular, too unethical, too hostile to faith, too full of greedy, soulless people, then it is exactly the place where the cross of Christ is effective! God's grace can bring reconciliation and justice in a factory, office block, or petrol station just as fully as in a cathedral, abbey, or church. Paul's gospel is not only for the church, but for the whole world.

God's justice, the solution to our false judgments (Romans 3:21-26)

Given that our judgment is false and hypocritical, how can we ever find righteousness and justice? This is the question that leads into the dramatic crux of Romans 3. God's response is the cross of Christ. God gives his justice/righteousness to us because we are unable to bring justice/righteousness ourselves. God accomplishes this through the cross of Jesus, in which he demonstrates that "he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

God's means of accomplishing this is the death and resurrection of Jesus. "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us (Rom 5:8)." God freely chose to accept the cross of

Christ as though it were a holy sacrifice of atonement in the Jewish temple (Rom. 3:25). As on the Day of Atonement, God chose to pass over people's wrongdoing, in order to establish a kind of new beginning for all who believe. And although Jesus was a Jew, God regards the cross as an offer of salvation to all people. Through the cross, everyone can be restored to a right relationship with God.

Although we lack righteousness/justice, God has both in infinite supply. Through the cross of Jesus, God gives us the righteousness/justice that restores our broken relationships with God, other people, and all creation. When God gives us salvation, he gives us righteousness/justice.

The *righteousness* of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the *righteousness* of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now *justified* by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his *righteousness*, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is *righteous* and that he *justifies* the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:21-26, emphasis added)

The cross is God's surprising justice, surprising because although God is not the sinner, God makes the sacrifice. Does this mean anything in today's secular workplaces? It could be a very hopeful note. In situations where the problems in our workplaces are caused by our own error or injustice, we can count on God's righteousness/justice to overcome our failings. Even though we can't make ourselves right, God can work his righteousness/justice in us and through us. In situations where others' error and injustice cause the problems, we may be able to set things right by sacrificing something of ourselves—in imitation of our savior—even though we did not cause the problem.

For example, consider a work group that operates in a culture of blame. Rather than working together to fix problems, people spend all their time trying to blame others whenever problems arise. If your workplace is a culture of blame, it may not be your fault. Perhaps your boss is the blamer-in-chief. Even so, could a sacrifice by you bring reconciliation and justice? The next time the boss starts to blame someone, imagine if you stood up and said, "I remember that I supported this idea last time we talked about it, so you'd better blame me too." What if the time after that, two or three other people did the same thing along with you? Would that begin to make the blame game fall apart? You might end up sacrificing your reputation, your friendship with the boss, even your future job prospects. But is it possible that it could also break the hold of blame and judgment in your work group? Could you expect God's grace to take an active role through your sacrifice?

Faith/Faithfulness, the entry to God's justice (Romans 3:27-31)

In the previous section we looked at Romans 3:22-26 and highlighted the righteousness/justice that God gives us in salvation. Now let us look again at the passage to highlight the role of faith.

The righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through *faith* in Jesus Christ for all who *believe*. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through *faith*. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has *faith* in Jesus. (Rom. 3:21-26, emphasis added)

Clearly, God's gift of righteousness/justice is intimately tied up in faith and belief. This brings us to one of the most famous themes in Romans, the role of faith in salvation. In many ways, the Protestant Reformation was founded on paying attention to this and similar passages in Romans, and their importance remains central to Christians of virtually every kind today. While there are many ways of describing it, the central idea is that people are restored to a right relationship with God by faith.

The Greek root-word *pistis* is translated as "faith" (or sometimes "believe," as in one instance above), but also as "faithfulness" as in Romans 3:3. The English language distinguishes between faith (mental assent, trust, or commitment) and faithfulness (actions consistent with one's faith). But in Greek there is only the single word *pistis* for both faith and faithfulness. There is no separating what a person believes from the evidence of that belief in the person's actions. If you have faith, you will act in faithfulness. Given that in most workplaces our faithfulness (what we do) will be more directly evident than our faith (what we believe), the relationship between these two aspects of *pistis* takes on a particular significance for work.

Paul speaks of "the *pistis* of Jesus" twice here, in Romans 3:22 and 3:26. If translated literally the Greek says *pistis of Jesus*," not "*pistis in Jesus*," The literal wording of Romans 3:22 is thus, that we are saved by *Jesus' faithfulness* to God (the *pistis of Jesus*). In other passages *pistis* clearly speaks refers *our faith* in Jesus, such as Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." In truth, our faith in Jesus cannot be separated from Jesus' faithfulness to God. Our faith in Jesus comes about because of Jesus' faithfulness to God on the cross, and we respond by living faithfully to him and placing out trust in him. Remembering that our salvation flows from Jesus' faithfulness, not merely our state of belief, keeps us from turning the possession of faith into a new form of works righteousness, as if our act of saying "I believe in Jesus" is

what brings us salvation.

The full meaning of faith/faithfulness in Paul's writing has two important implications for work. First of all, it puts to rest any fear that by taking our work seriously we might waver in recognizing that salvation comes solely by God's gift of faith. When we remember that Christ's faithfulness on the cross has already accomplished the work of salvation, and that our faith in Christ comes solely by God's grace, then we recognize that our faithfulness to God in our work is simply a response to God's grace. We are faithful in our work because God has given us faith as a free gift.

Secondly, the faithfulness of Christ impels us to become more and more faithful ourselves. Again, this is not because we think that our faithful actions earn us salvation, but because having been given faith in Christ, we earnestly desire to become more like him. Paul speaks of this as the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5, 26). Without faith, it is impossible to be obedient to God. But if God gives us faith, we can respond in obedience. In fact, much of the latter half of Romans is devoted to showing us how to be more obedient to God as a result of the grace God has given us through faith.

An exemplary faith: Abraham trusted God's promises (Romans 4)

As we have seen in Romans 1-3, the cross of Christ brings salvation to all people—Jews and Gentiles alike. In Christ, God puts all people back into right relationship with God and one another without regard to the provisions of the Jewish Law. For this reason, Paul's principal focus throughout Romans is helping the divided and quarreling Christians in Rome to reconcile their broken relationships in order to live faithfully into what God has accomplished in Christ.

This interpretation of Christ's death raises a problem for Paul, however, since he is writing not only to uncircumcised Gentiles but also to circumcised Jews, for whom the Law still matters. Further, Paul's interpretation seems to ignore the story of Abraham, understood to be "father" of the Jews, who was in fact circumcised as a sign of his covenant with God (Genesis 17:11). Doesn't the story of Abraham suggest that entering the covenant of God requires male circumcision for all peoples, whether Jewish or Gentile?

"No," argues Paul in Romans 4. Interpreting the story of Abraham from Genesis 12:1-3, 15:6 and 17:1-14, Paul concludes that Abraham had faith that God would honor his word and make the childless Abraham the father of many nations through his barren wife Sarah. Consequently, God reckoned Abraham's faith as righteousness (Romans 4:3, 9, 22). Paul reminds his readers that God's acknowledgment of Abraham's righteousness took place long *before* Abraham was circumcised, which came *later* as a *sign* of his already-existing faith in God (Rom. 4:10-11).

In other words, at the time God reckoned Abraham's faith as putting him in right relationship with God,

Abraham shared the same status as an uncircumcised Gentile in Paul's world. Thus, concludes Paul, Abraham became the father of both Jews and Gentiles through the righteousness of faith rather than righteousness under the Jewish Law (Rom. 4:11-15).

The example of Abraham in Romans 4 provides Christians with great hope for our work and workplaces. Abraham's example of trusting God's promises—despite adverse circumstances and seemingly impossible odds—emboldens us not to waver in trust when we facing challenges at work or when God seems not to be present (see Rom. 4:19). God did not immediately fulfill the promise to Abraham, which further encourages us to be patient in waiting for God to renew or redeem our circumstances in life.

Grace reigns for eternal life through Jesus Christ (Romans 5)

In Romans 5 Paul links this divine gift of righteousness to the obedience of Christ and the grace that now flows into the world through him. Several important features of this chapter illuminate our experiences of work.

Grace transforms suffering in our life in Christ (Romans 5:1-11)

In Romans 5:1-11 Paul offers more encouragement by reminding the Romans that *through* Christ we have *already* "gained access" to God's "grace in which we stand" (Rom. 5:2). Grace signifies God's life-giving power that raised Jesus from the dead. Grace continues to bring new and more abundant life into the world to and through Christ's followers. By living *Christ's* obedient life of faith and faithfulness in our own circumstances, we experience God's life-giving grace that can bring us joy and peace at work, at home, and in every context of life.

Nevertheless, trusting the grace of God often calls for steadfast patience in the face of many challenges. Just as Christ suffered in the course of his obedience to God, we, too, may experience suffering when we embody Christ's life of faith and faithfulness. Paul even says he "boasts" in his suffering (Rom. 5:3), knowing that his suffering is a participation in the suffering Jesus experienced in his mission to reconcile the world to God (Rom. 8:17-18).

Moreover, suffering often brings growth.

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts. (Rom. 5:3-5)

Therefore God does not promise that life and work will be happy for believers all the time. Many people suffer at work. Work can be boring, degrading, humiliating, exhausting, and heartless. We can be underpaid, endangered, and discriminated against. We can be pressured to violate our consciences and God's principles. We can be fired, laid off, made redundant, downsized, terminated, unemployed or underemployed for long periods. We can bring suffering on ourselves by our own arrogance, carelessness, incompetence, greed, or malice against others. We can suffer even in good jobs. We should never be content with abuse or mistreatment at work, but when we have to endure suffering at work, all is not lost. God's grace is poured out on us when we suffer, and it makes us stronger if we remain faithful.

To give an example, preparing the soil and caring for crops cannot guarantee that the grain will grow tall or the vegetables will ripen. Poor weather, drought, insects, and blight can ruin the harvest. Yet, through grace, farmers may come to accept all these aspects of nature, while trusting God's care. This in turn shapes the patient, faithful character of farmers who come to care deeply for all of God's creation. A deep appreciation of nature, in turn, can be a great asset for the work of farming.

Similarly, grace empowers us to remain faithful and hopeful even when the employer for whom we work closes their doors during hard economic times. So, too, God's life-giving power sustains many highly educated young adults who still have trouble finding meaningful employment. Grace also inspires a team to persevere in developing a new product, even after repeated failures, knowing that what they learn by failing is what makes the product better.

God's love sustains us through all kinds of suffering in life and work. "Hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts." Even when suffering threatens to harden our hearts, God's love makes us agents of his reconciliation, which we have received in Christ (Rom. 10-11).

Grace and righteousness lead to eternal life through Christ (Romans 5:12-21)

Romans 5:12-21 reflects a dense and complex theological argument involving a number of different contrasts between the disobedient Adam and the obedient Christ, through whom we are made righteous and promised eternal life. The passage gives us assurance that Christ's obedient act of self-giving for others puts all who come to him into right relationship with God and one another. As participants in Christ's faith and faithfulness, we receive a share of the divine gifts of righteousness and eternal life promised by God through Christ. Therefore we no longer participate in Adam's disobedience, but find eternal life by participating in Christ's obedience to God.

Paul speaks of God's grace operating in both the present time and eternity. Reconciliation has already been given through Christ (Rom. 5:11), so that we are already able to live God-honoring lives. Yet God's reconciliation is not yet complete and is still in the process of "*leading to eternal life*" (Rom. 12:21). If

we have received Christ's reconciliation, then our work now is an opportunity to contribute to the better future where Christ is leading. Innovators gain new possibilities to create, design, and build products that improve the common good. Service workers have new opportunities to make others' lives better. Artists or musicians can create aesthetic beauty that enhances human life for God's glory. None of these are means to eternal life. But every time we work to make the world more like God intends it to be, we receive a foretaste of eternal life. When we remain obedient to Christ's pattern of faith and faithfulness in our workplace settings, no matter what the circumstances, we can trust that our life is eternally secure in the hands of our faithful God.

Walking in Newness of Life (Romans 6)

Although God's grace has come into the world to bring reconciliation and justice, there are still evil spiritual powers at work opposing the life-giving power of God's grace (Romans 6:14). Paul often personifies these evil spiritual forces, calling them such names as "sin" (Rom. 6:2), or "flesh" (Rom. 7:5), or "death" (Rom. 6:9), or "this world" (Rom. 12:2). Human beings must choose whether, through their actions in daily life, to partner with God through Christ or with these evil forces. Paul calls choosing to partner with God, "walking in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). He compares walking in newness of life to Christ's new life after being raised from the dead. "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). In our lives here and now, we can begin to live—or "walk"—in reconciliation and justice just as Christ now lives.

To walk in newness of life requires us to abandon our judgmentalism and to do God's justice rather than continuing in our self-serving habits (Rom. 6:12-13). As instruments of God's justice, believers act in ways *through which* the life-giving power of God's grace builds up people and communities in Christ. This is far more active than merely refraining from bad behavior. Our calling is to become instruments of justice and reconciliation, working to root out the effects of sin in a troubled world.

For example, workers may have fallen into a habit of judging management as evil or unfair, and vice versa. This may have become a convenient pretext for workers to cheat the company, use paid time for personal activities, or fail to do excellent work. Conversely, it may be a convenient excuse for managers to discriminate against workers they don't personally like, or to evade safety or workplace fairness regulations, or to withhold information from workers. Merely following the regulations or refraining from cheating would *not* be walking in newness of life. Instead, walking in newness of life would require us first of all to give up our judgments of the other side. Once we no longer regard them as unworthy of our respect, then we can begin to discern specific ways to restore good relationships, re-establish just and fair dealings with one another, and build up each other and the organization.

Making this kind of change in our life and work is exceedingly difficult. Paul says that sin continually

seeks to “exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.” However good our intentions, we soon fall back into our broken ways. Only God’s grace, made real in Christ’s death, has the power pry us free from our habits of judgment (Rom. 6:6).

Therefore God’s grace does not cast us “free” to wander aimlessly back into our old ills. Instead he offers to strap us into new life in Christ. The bindings will chafe whenever we begin to wander off course, and Paul admits that walking in newness of life will feel a lot like slavery at first. Our choice, then, is *which kind* of slavery to accept, slavery to newness of life, or slavery to our old sins. “You are slaves of the one you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness [justice]” (Rom. 6:25). “But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification [newness of life]. The end is eternal life” (Rom. 6:22). The advantage of walking in newness of life is not that it feels freer than slavery to sin, but that it results in justice and life, rather than shame and death.

Walking in newness of life in the workplace (Romans 6)

What does it mean to be a “slave” of God’s grace in our places of work? It means that we do not make decisions at work based on how things affect us, but about how they affect our master, God. We make decisions as God’s stewards or agents. This is actually a familiar concept in both Christian faith and the secular workplace. In the Christian faith, Christ himself is the model steward, who gave up his own life in order to fulfill God’s purposes. Similarly, many people in the workplace have a duty to serve the interests of others, rather than their own. Among them are attorneys, corporate officers, agents, trustees and boards of directors, judges, and many others. Not many workplace stewards or agents are as committed as Jesus was—willing to give their lives to fulfill their duties—but the concept of agency is an everyday reality in the workplace.

The difference for Christians is that our duty ultimately is to God, not the state or shareholders or anyone else. Our overarching mission must be God’s justice and reconciliation, not merely obeying the law, making a profit, or satisfying human expectations. Unlike Albert Carr’s claim that business is just a game in which normal rules of ethics don’t apply, [4] walking in newness of life means integrating justice and reconciliation into our lives at work.

For instance, walking in newness of life for a high school teacher might mean repeatedly forgiving a rebellious and troublesome student, while also seeking new ways to reach that student in the classroom. For a politician, walking in newness of life might mean drafting new legislation that includes input from a number of different ideological perspectives. For a manager, it might mean asking the forgiveness of an employee in front of everyone who is aware of the manager’s transgression against the employee.

Walking in newness of life requires us to look deeply into our patterns of work. Bakers or chefs might

easily see how their work helps feed hungry people, which in itself is a form of justice. The same bakers and chefs might also need to look more deeply at their personal interactions in the kitchen. Do they treat people with dignity, to help others succeed, to bring glory to God? Walking in newness of life affects both the ends we try to accomplish and the means we use to do so.

The invasive power of “sin” (Romans 7)

In chapter 7, Paul continues to emphasize that newness of life in Christ frees us from being “captive” to the “old written code” of the Law (Rom. 7:6). Nonetheless, the Law itself is not the problem with human existence, for “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Rom. 7:12). Instead, concludes Paul, the problem is the God-opposing power he calls “sin,” taking up residence in human beings (Rom. 7:13). Sin has taken advantage of the Law’s commandments by using them as tools to deceive people (Rom. 7:11), thus preventing each person from being able to obey the Law as God intended (Rom. 7:14, 17, 23).

Sin’s power is not merely making bad choices or doing things we know we shouldn’t. It is as if an evil power has invaded the territory of each person’s spirit and taken control, “sold into slavery under sin,” as Paul puts it (Rom. 7:14). Under this slavery to sin, we are unable to do the good called for in the commandments and known in our hearts (Rom. 7:15-20). This occurs despite our good intentions to do what God desires (Rom. 7:15-16, 22).

In other words, knowledge of what is good is not enough to overcome the power of sin that has invaded us! “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Rom. 7:19). We can only be rescued from this plight by the intervention of another, more powerful spiritual force, the Holy Spirit that becomes the focus in Romans 8.

Peer Groups at The Workshop

By Jane Lancaster Patterson and John Lewis

A member of one of our weekly reflection groups at The Workshop had a subordinate whose work had substantially deteriorated over the past months. She had resolved to terminate the employee and was asking the group to help her imagine the most faithful way to handle that responsibility. The group discussed how the standards and norms of the surrounding culture would suggest a direct conversation with the employee, clearly explaining the reasons for the termination. "But how would Jesus do it?" the group asked one another. After further conversation, she left to ponder how to approach her challenging task.

The next week she returned with a moving story. Instead of immediately terminating the employee, she opened the conversation with "Is there something happening in your life that I should know about that might be affecting your work?" The question opened the floodgates for the employee to tell her about his ailing mother and the family difficulties brought about by the daily care he was providing to his mother.

By acting with humility rather than exercising her power and status as the employer, this woman embodied the cross of Christ. She did not terminate the employee, but worked with him to adjust his schedule so that he could meet his familial *and* work responsibilities. The employee's work improved only somewhat over time. But by following the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, she and the others in her workplace experienced a peace not present before the conversation. The event also fostered a deeper level of trust and confidence in her leadership among all the employees.

The Workshop is located in San Antonio, Texas, USA

We are well aware that knowing what God wants is not enough to keep us on the right track in workplace situations. For instance, even when we know in our minds that God wants us to treat everyone with respect, we sometimes fall prey to the false perception that we could get ahead by speaking poorly about a co-worker. Likewise, in the work of parenting, mothers and fathers know that shouting in anger at a young child is not good. But sometimes the power of sin overtakes them and they do so anyway. A lawyer who charges clients for services by the hour knows that he or she should keep scrupulous time records, but may nevertheless be overpowered by sin to pad hours to increase income.

Alone, we are especially vulnerable to the power of sin within us. Wherever we work, we would do well to seek out others (Rom. 12:5) and help one another resist this power that tries to overcome our will to do what is right and good. For example, a small but growing number of Christians are joining small "peer groups" of people who work in similar situations. Peer groups meet anywhere from an hour once a week, often at work locations, to half a day once a month. Members commit to telling each other the details of situations they face at work and to discussing them from a faith perspective, developing options and committing to action plans. A member might describe a conflict with a co-worker, an ethical lapse, a feeling of meaninglessness, a company policy that seems unfair. After gaining the others' insights, the member would commit to a course of action in response and would report to the group about results at future meetings. For more on this, see "[Equipping Churches Connect Daily Work](#)

to Worship” at www.theologyofwork.org.

Living according to the Spirit (Romans 8)

Living according to the Spirit leads to a new quality of life (Romans 8:1-14)

Believers are free from the Law, but walking in newness of life is based on a firm moral structure (hence, “the law of the Spirit,” Rom. 8:2). Paul calls this moral structure “living according to the Spirit” or “setting our minds on the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5). Both terms refer to the process of moral reasoning that guides us as we walk in newness of life.

This kind of moral compass does not work by listing specific acts that are right or wrong. Instead it consists of following the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” that has freed believers “from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2).^[5] The words “life” and “death” are the keys. Living according to the Spirit means doing whatever brings life instead of death. “To set the mind on the flesh [our old patterns of judgment] is death but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). Setting the mind on the Spirit means looking for whatever will bring more life to each situation.

For example, the Jewish Law taught that “you shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). But living according to the Spirit goes far beyond not literally murdering anyone. It actively seeks opportunities to bring better life to people. It can mean cleaning a hotel room so that guests remain healthy. It can mean clearing the ice from a neighbor’s sidewalk (pavement) so pedestrians can walk safely. It can mean studying for years to earn a Ph.D. in order to develop new treatments for cancer.

Another way to put it is that living according to the Spirit means living a *new quality of life* in Christ. This comes from setting aside our judgments of what another person deserves and seeking instead what would bring them a better quality of life, deserved or not. When making assignments, a manager could assign a task that stretches subordinates’ abilities, rather than limiting them to what they are already capable of, then inviting them to check in every day for guidance. When asked to lend a replacement tool, a skilled tradesperson could instead show a junior worker a new technique that will prevent breaking the tool the next time around. When asked “Why did our dog die,” a parent could ask a child, “Are you afraid someone you love might die?” instead of only explaining the pet’s immediate cause of death. In each of these situations, the moral goal is to bring a better quality of life to the other person, rather than to fulfill a demand of the law.

Bringing life, rather than fulfilling the law, is the moral compass of those who are being saved by God’s grace. We are free to live according to the Spirit rather than to enslave ourselves to the law because “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

A habit of discrimination

As a young man, I worked in a farm supply warehouse in southern Delaware. After a while I realized that all the white workers—including me, the new hire—had the clean, easy job of loading and unloading farm supplies. All the black workers were assigned to backbreaking work in the hot dust-choked seed-bagging room. It didn't seem like management or the white workers were particularly racist. It was just a fact of life that nobody talked about, black people got the worst jobs. Nobody even seemed to think about it, and after a while I didn't either.

William Messenger, as told to the TOW Project, January 10, 2014

Paul's inclusion of "peace" as an aspect of setting our minds on the Spirit (Rom. 13:6, as above) points out the social aspects of living according to the Spirit because peace is a social phenomenon.^[6] When we follow Christ, we try to bring a new quality of life to our society, not just to ourselves. This means paying attention to the social conditions that diminish life at work and elsewhere. We do what we can to make life better for people we work among. At the same time, we work to bring justice/righteousness to the social systems that shape the conditions of work and workers.

Christians can be a positive force for improvement—even survival—if we can help our organizations set their minds on the need for a new quality of life. We probably can't change our organizations much on our own. But if we can build relationships with others, earn people's trust, listen to the people nobody else listens to, we may help the organization break out of its ruts. Plus, we bring the secret ingredient—our faith that God's grace can use us to bring life to even the deadest situation.

Conversely, if we do not set our minds on the Spirit at work, we can be arrogant and destructive, whether in our relationships with fellow workers, competitors, clients, or others. Setting our minds on the Spirit requires constantly evaluating the *consequences* or *fruit* of our work, always asking whether our work enhances the quality of life for other people. If we are honest in our assessments, no doubt it also requires daily repentance and the grace to change.

Suffering with Christ in order to be glorified with Christ (Romans 8:15-17)

Paul contrasts life in the Spirit with life under the Jewish Law. Paul says believers have received a "spirit of adoption" as children of God, rather than "a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear" (Rom. 8:15). Everyone who "belongs to" Christ (Rom. 8:9-10) is now an adopted child of God. In contrast, those under the Law live in slavery to the power of sin and also in fear, presumably fear of the Law's threats of punishment for disobedience. Believers are free of this fear, since there is now "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). When we live faithfully in Christ, we do not face the Law's threats of punishment, even when we get things wrong in our daily life and work. Hardships and failures may still mar our work, but God's response is not condemnation but redemption.

God will bring something worthwhile out of our faithful work, no matter how bad it seems at present.

At least two aspects of these verses inform our approach to work or life in our workplaces. First, as adopted sons of God, we are never alone in our work. No matter what our dissatisfaction or frustrations with the people we work among, or the work, or even a lack of support for the work from our families, the Spirit of God in Christ abides with us. God is always looking for an opportunity to redeem our suffering and turn it into something good and satisfying in our lives. As we observed earlier in connection with Romans 5, faithfully enduring hardship and suffering in our work can lead to the formation of our character and ground our hope for the future. See "[Grace transforms suffering in our life in Christ \(Romans 5:1-11\)](http://www.theologyofwork.org)" at www.theologyofwork.org.

Second, at one time or another, most people encounter failures, frustrations and hardships in their work. Our work places obligations on us that we wouldn't otherwise have, even obligations as simple as showing up on time every day. Faithfully engaging these challenges can actually make the work more rewarding and satisfying. Over time these experiences give us greater confidence in God's redeeming presence and greater experience of his motivating and energizing Spirit.

In some situations you may be welcomed and promoted for bringing reconciliation and justice to your place of work. In other situations you may be resisted, threatened, punished or terminated. For example, bad relationships are an unfortunate feature of many workplaces. One department may habitually sabotage another department's accomplishments. Strife between managers and workers may have become institutionalized. People may be terrorized by an office bully, an academic clique, a shop floor gang, a racial dividing line, or an abusive boss. If you bring reconciliation in situations like these, productivity may increase, turnover may be reduced, morale may soar, customer service may rebound, and you may be praised or promoted. On the other hand, the bullies, cliques, gangs, racial divides and abusive bosses are almost certain to oppose you.

Eagerly awaiting bodily redemption for ourselves and God's creation (Romans 8:18-30)

Being "glorified" with Christ (Rom. 8:17) is our hope for the future. But according to Paul that hope is part of a *process* that is already underway. We are to engage patiently in it, with the expectation that at some point it will be completed (Rom. 8:18-25). The gift of the Holy Spirit already received as "first fruits" of this process (Rom. 8:23) signifies our adoption as sons of God (Rom. 8:14-17, 23). This constitutes proof that the process is underway.

This process culminates in "the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23)." This is not a rescue of our souls *out of* our physical bodies, but the transformation of our bodies along with the entire creation (Rom. 8:21). This process has already begun, and we experience its "first fruits" (Rom. 8:24) in our life and

work today. But far more and better is yet to come, and at present the “whole creation” “groans” in “labor pains” as it eagerly anticipates being set free from its own “bondage to decay” (Rom. 8:19-23). Paul is clearly drawing on imagery from Genesis 2-3, where not only Adam but also creation itself was subjected to decay and death, no longer able to live into what God created them to be. This reminds us to consider the impact of our work on all of God’s creation, not only on people. (For more on this topic, see “[Dominion—Genesis 1:26; 2:5](http://www.theologyofwork.org)” at www.theologyofwork.org).

Wayne Alderson at Pittron Steel

Wayne Alderson created a cooperative, collegial working environment at Pittron Steel, and the company was rewarded with productivity and quality gains that made it very profitable. It was so successful that it was bought out by another company. The new management reverted to the traditional management vs. labor work environment, firing Wayne and the managers who had created the collegial environment. Workplace strife ensued, and the company’s productivity declined until it went out of business seven years later.

The good work that Wayne and his workforce did at Pittron was extinguished, although his ideas have been copied by others and are still in use in other companies today.^[7]

The process is slow and sometimes painful. We “groan” while we wait for it to be accomplished, Paul says, and not only us individually, but “the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains” (Romans 8:22-23). This echoes the groaning of Israel while enslaved in Egypt (Exodus 6:5) and reminds us that nearly 30 million people are still enslaved in the world today.^[8] We can never be content with merely our own release from the evil forces in the world, but must serve God faithfully until he completes his salvation in every part of the world.

Nonetheless the salvation of the world is sure, for “all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). God is at work in us now, and the time is coming when God’s salvation will be complete in the world. God’s original verdict, “It is very good” (Genesis 1:31) is vindicated by the transformation at work in us now, to be fulfilled in God’s time.

Because the transformation is not yet complete, we have to be prepared for difficulties along the way. Sometimes we do good work, only to see it wasted or destroyed by the evil that remains in the world at present. Even if we do good work, our work may be vandalized. Our recommendations may be watered down. We may run out of capital, lose the election to a scoundrel, drown in red tape, fail to engage a student’s interest. Or we may succeed for a time, then find our results undone by later events. Health workers, for example, have been on the verge of eradicating polio on several occasions, only to face new outbreaks due to political opposition, ignorance, vaccine-related transmission, and the swift pace of modern travel.^[9]

Nothing can come between us and the love of God (Romans 8:31-39)

God is for us, says Paul, having given his own son for “all of us” (Romans 8:31-32). Nothing at all is able to come between us and the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35-39). “Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). Many of these things seem to threaten us in the sphere of work. We face menacing or incompetent bosses (rulers). We get stuck in dead end jobs (things present). We make sacrifices now—working long hours, taking classes after work, serving in low-paid internships, moving to another country looking for work—that we hope will pay off later, but may never pan out (things to come). We lose our jobs because of economic cycles or regulations or unscrupulous actions by powerful people we never even see (powers). We are forced by circumstance, folly, or the crimes of others into degrading or dangerous work. All these things can do us real hurt. But they cannot triumph over us.

Christ’s faithfulness—and ours, by God’s grace—overcome the worst that life and work can do to us. If career progress, or income, or prestige is our highest goal at work, we may end up disappointed. But if salvation—that is, reconciliation with God and people, faithfulness, and justice—is our chief hope, we will find it amidst both the good and bad in work. Paul’s affirmations mean that no matter what the difficulties we encounter with our work, or the complexities and challenges we face with co-workers or superiors in our workplaces, the love of God in Christ always abides with us. The love of God in Christ is the steadying force in the midst of adversity now, as well as our hope for bodily redemption in the future.

God’s character is to have mercy on everyone (Romans 9-11)

In Romans, chapters 9-11, Paul returns to the immediate problem the letter is meant to address—the conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Since this is not our primary concern in the theology of work, we will summarize quickly.

Paul discusses God’s history with Israel, with special attention to God’s mercy (Rom. 9: 14-18). He explains how God’s salvation comes also to the Gentiles. Jews experienced God’s salvation first, beginning with Abraham (Rom. 9:4-7). But many have fallen away, and at present it seems like the Gentiles are more faithful (Rom. 9:30-33). But the Gentiles should not become judgmental, for their salvation is interwoven with the Jews (Rom. 11:11-16). God has preserved a “remnant” of his people (Rom. 9:27, 11:5) whose faithfulness—by the grace of God—leads to the reconciliation of the world.

For Jews and Gentiles alike, then, salvation is an act of God’s mercy, not a reward for human obedience (Rom. 9:6-13). With this in mind, Paul takes on a number of arguments on both sides, always

concluding that “God has mercy on whomever he chooses” (Rom. 9:18). Neither Jews nor Gentiles are saved by their own actions, but by God’s mercy.

Salvation from God, says Paul, comes by confessing Jesus as Lord and believing that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9-10). In other words, salvation comes to everyone who trusts in the life-giving power of God that enriches the lives of both Jews and Gentiles who follow Jesus as Lord (see Rom. 10:12-13). Disobedience – whether of Gentiles or Jews – provides God with the opportunity to show the world the mercy of God toward everyone (Rom. 11:33). Paul’s concern in this letter is to *reconcile* broken relationships between Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus.

Romans 9-11 offers hope to all of us in our work and in our workplaces. First, Paul emphasizes God’s desire to have mercy on the disobedient. All of us, at one point or another in our working lives, have failed to embody Christ’s faith and faithfulness in some aspect of our work. If God has mercy on us (Rom. 11:30), we are called to have mercy on others in our work. This does not mean ignoring poor performance or keeping quiet in the face of harassment or discrimination. Mercy is not the enablement of oppression. Instead, it means not letting a person’s failures lead us to condemn the person in their entirety. When someone we work with makes a mistake, we are not to judge them incompetent, but to assist them in recovering from the error and learning how not to repeat it. When someone violates our trust, we are to hold him or her accountable, while at the same time offering a forgiveness that, if met with repentance, creates a path for re-establishing trust.

Second, this section of the letter reminds us of our responsibility to persevere as faithful Christians so that we might be the faithful “remnant” (Rom. 11:5) on behalf of those who have temporarily stumbled in their obedience of faith. When we see those around us fail, our task is not to judge them, but to stand in for them. Perhaps our faithfulness can mitigate the damage done to others and even deliver those who caused it from harsh punishment. If we see a colleague mistreat a customer or a subordinate, for example, perhaps we can intervene to correct the situation before it becomes a firing offense. When we remember how close we have come to stumbling, how many times we have failed, our response to others’ failings is mercy, as was Christ’s. This does not mean we allow people to abuse others. It does mean we put ourselves at risk, as did Christ, for the redemption of people who have erred under the power of sin.

Third, these chapters remind us to demonstrate for the rest of our colleagues what the obedience of faith looks like in daily life and work. If we actually walk in newness of life (see ["Walking in newness of life" Rom. 6](#)) and set our minds on how our actions can bring a new quality of life to those around us (see ["Living according to the Spirit leads a new quality of life" Rom. 8](#)), won’t others be attracted to do the same? Our actions at work may be the loudest praise we can ever offer to God and the most attractive witness our co-workers ever see. God’s desire is for everyone in the world to be reconciled to God and to one another. So every aspect of our work and life becomes an opportunity to bear witness

for Christ—to be one of God’s reconciling agents in the world.

Fourth, we need to remain humble. When we, like the factions to whom Paul was writing, judge our own position as superior to those around us, we imagine that we have the inside track to God. Paul speaks directly against this arrogance. We don’t know everything about how God’s is at work in others. As General Peter Pace, retired chairman of the joint chiefs of staff of the US armed forces puts it, “You should always tell the truth as you know it, and you should understand that there is a whole lot that you don’t know.”^[10]

The specific ways we embody this ministry of reconciliation in the world are as diverse as our work and workplaces. Thus, we turn to Romans 12 for further direction from Paul on how to discern ways to carry out God’s reconciling love in our work.

The Community of Grace at Work (Romans 12)

Romans 12 highlights the social and community aspects of salvation. Paul was not writing to an individual but to the community of Christians in Rome, and his constant concern is their life together—with a special emphasis on their work. As we saw in Romans 1-3, salvation in Christ comprises reconciliation, righteousness and justice, and faith and faithfulness. Each of these has a communal aspect—reconciliation *with others*, justice *among people*, faithfulness *to others*.

Be transformed by the renewing of your minds (Romans 12:1-3)

To bring the communal aspect of salvation to life means a reorientation of our minds and wills from self-serving to community-serving.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. (Rom. 12:2-3)

Let’s begin with the second half of this passage, where Paul makes communal aspect explicit. “I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.” In other words, think less about yourself and more about others, more about the community. Later in chapter 12 Paul amplifies this by adding, “Love one another with mutual affection” (Rom. 12:10), “Contribute to the needs of the saints,” and “Extend hospitality to strangers” (Rom. 12:13), “Live in harmony with one

another” (Rom 12:17), and “Live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18).

Equipping others for success

By Don Flow, Owner and CEO, Flow Automotive

Living love for Christian leaders is defined by the life of Jesus, who came to serve, not to be served. Equipping others is the appropriate use of power by leaders because it directs the purpose of the use of power to the enabling of the other to flourish in service to the community. Power used in this manner is an expression of a profound love and an appreciation for the unique giftedness of all people. It is not power over but power in service to the other. Power used in this manner releases the gifts of others. This means Christian leaders must have a deep knowledge of the people with whom they work, what their gifts are, and they must help each person understand how important their gifts are for the entire organization. Christian leaders will be committed to the importance of every person in the organization and to all of the work done. For Christians, ‘there are no little people (Schaeffer) and there is no ordinary work (Lewis) Source: Talk given at KIROS, Seattle, 2008.

The first part of this passage reminds us that we are unable to put others first without God’s saving grace. As Paul pointed out in Romans chapter 1, people are enslaved to a “debased mind” (Rom. 1:28), “futile in their thinking,” darkened by “senseless minds” (Rom. 1:21), which result in doing every kind of evil to one another (Rom. 1:22-32). Salvation is liberation from this slavery of the mind, “so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Only if our minds are transformed from self-centeredness to other-centeredness—imitating Christ, who sacrificed himself for others—can we put reconciliation, justice, and faithfulness ahead of self-serving aims.

With transformed minds, our purpose shifts from justifying our self-centered actions to bringing new life to others. For example, imagine that you are a shift supervisor at a restaurant and you become a candidate for promotion to manager. If your mind is not transformed, your chief goal will be to beat the other candidates. It will not seem hard to justify (to yourself) actions such as withholding information from the other candidates about supplier problems, ignoring sanitation issues that will only become visible in the others’ shifts, spreading dissent among their workers, avoiding collaboration on improving customer service. This will harm not only the other candidates, but their shift workers, the restaurant as a whole, and its customers. On the other hand, if your mind is transformed to care first about others, then you will help the other candidates perform well, not only for their sake, but also for the benefit of the restaurant and its workers and customers.

Sacrificing for the sake of the community (Romans 12:1-3)

Needless to say, putting others ahead of ourselves requires sacrifice. “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice,” Paul exhorts (Rom. 12:1). The words “bodies” and “living” emphasize that Paul means

practical actions in the world of daily life and work. Each believer becomes a living sacrifice by offering their time, talent, and energy in work that benefits other people and/or God's entire creation.

We can offer a living sacrifice to God every waking moment of our lives. We do it when we forgive someone who transgresses against us in our workplace or when we take the risk to help heal a dispute between others. We offer a living sacrifice when we forego unsustainable use of the earth's resources in pursuit of our own comfort. We offer a living sacrifice when we take on less-than-satisfying work because supporting our family matters more to us than finding the perfect job. We become a living sacrifice when we leave a rewarding position so our spouse can accept a dream job in another city. We become a living sacrifice when, as a boss, we take the blame for a mistake a subordinate makes in his or her work.

Involving the community in your decisions (Romans 12:1-3)

The transformation of the mind "so that you may discern what is the will of God" (Rom. 12:2) comes hand in hand with involving the community of faith in our decisions. As those in the process of being saved, we bring others into our decision making processes. The word Paul uses for "discern" is literally "to test" or "to approve" in Greek (*dokimazein*). Our decisions must be tested and approved by other believers before we can have confidence that we have discerned the will of God. Paul's warning "not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think" (Rom. 12:3) applies to our decision-making capability. Don't think you have the wisdom, the moral stature, the breadth of knowledge, or anything else needed to discern God's will by yourself. "Do not claim to be wiser than you are" (Rom. 12:6). Only by involving other members of the faithful community, with its diversity of gifts and wisdom (Rom. 12:4-8) living in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16), can we develop, test, and approve reliable decisions.

Can we talk about the real issues?

As told by Al Erisman

When I was in Nepal I was asked to talk with a group of Christians about ethics. One person asked for advice in how to handle a difficult bribery situation. I asked if the group of Christians gathered there had ever come together to pray for wisdom about this concern. The person asking the question said no, they were ashamed of the issue and didn't talk about it together. I told them I could outline some principles from the Scripture to consider, but said the only specific advice I would offer was to commit to talking as community about how to handle such a difficult issue. I was from the outside and didn't have all of the cultural and economic context. They needed to talk about their actual struggles, not just about safe topics with easy answers.

[11]

This is more challenging than we might like to admit. We may gather to receive moral teaching as a

community, but how often do we actually talk to one another when making moral decisions? Often decisions are made by the person in charge deliberating individually, perhaps after receiving input from a few advisors. We tend to operate this way because moral discussions are uncomfortable, or “hot” as Ronald Heifetz puts it. People don’t like to have heated conversations because “most people want to maintain the status quo, avoiding the tough issues.”^[12] In addition, we often feel that community decision making is a threat to whatever power we possess. But making decisions on our own usually just means following pre-conceived biases, in other words, being “conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2).

This raises a difficulty in the sphere of work. What if we don’t work in a community of faith, but in a secular company, government, academic institution or other setting? We could assess our actions communally with our co-workers, but they may not be attuned to the will of God. We could assess our actions communally with our small group or others from our church, but they probably will not understand our work very well. Either—or both—of these practices is better than nothing. But better still would be to gather a group of believers from our own workplace—or at least believers who work in similar situations—and reflect on our actions with them. If we want to assess how well our actions as programmers, fire fighters, civil servants, or school teachers (for example) implement reconciliation, justice and faithfulness, who better to reflect with than other Christian programmers, fire fighters, civil servants, or school teachers? See “[Equipping Churches Encourage Everyone to Take Responsibility](#)” in *The Equipping Church* at www.theologyofwork.org for more on this topic.

Work as Members of One Another (Romans 12:4-8)

One essential practical application of walking in newness of life is to recognize how much we all depend on one another’s work. “For as in the body we have many members, and not all of the members have the same function, so we, who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Rom. 12:4-5). This interdependence is not a weakness, but a gift from God. As we are being saved by God, we become more integrated with each other.

Paul applies this to the work that each of us does in our particular role. “We have gifts that differ” (Rom. 12:6a) he notes, and when he names a few of them, we see that they are forms of work: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, compassion. Each of them is a “grace given to us” (Rom. 12:6b) that enables us to work for the good of the community.

Don't go it alone

Sherron Watkins, recognized by *Time* magazine as one of the persons of the year for her whistle blowing in the Enron scandal, reflected on what she learned about taking a stand. She said, "In hindsight, I also wish that some of my peers had gone with me to meet with Ken Lay. Jordan Mintz was an in-house lawyer who was very concerned about this. I did not know that he had already taken these things to another law firm, and they had said they are very problematic. I did not know that Vince Kaminski had protested these things. So if I had just Vince and Jordan with me, the outcome might have been different.... If someone is in the unfortunate position where I was, I say don't go it alone. I should have found a few more people to go with me because then they could not have dismissed me as one lone person." [13] *Ethix* conversation, June 2007.

Paul develops this process in the context of a specific community—the church. This is fitting because the entire letter revolves around a problem in the church—the conflict between Jewish and Gentile believers. But the list is not particularly "churchy." All of them are equally applicable to work outside the church. Prophecy—"to proclaim a divinely imparted message" or "to bring light to something that is hidden" [14]—is the ability to apply God's word to dark situations, something desperately needed in every work place. Ministry—with its cognate "administration"—is the ability to organize work so that it does in fact serve those it's supposed to serve, e.g., customers, citizens, or students. Another term for it is "management." Teaching, exhortation (or "encouragement"), and leadership are obviously as applicable to secular settings as to church. So is generosity, when we remember that giving our time, our skills, our patience, or our expertise to assist others at work are all forms of generosity.

Compassion is a vastly underrated element of work. While we might be tempted to view compassion as a hindrance in the competitive world of work, it is actually essential for doing our work well. The value of our work comes not merely from putting in hours, but from caring about how our goods or services serve others—in other words, by compassion. An autoworker who does not *care* whether his or her parts are put on properly is of no use to the company, customers, or co-workers, and will sooner or later be a candidate for dismissal. Or if the auto *company* doesn't care whether its workers care about its customers, the customers will soon enough switch to another brand. The exceptions to this are products and services which intentionally profit from customers' weaknesses—addictive substances, pornography, products that play on fears about body image and the like. To make money in cases like this it may be necessary *not* to have compassion for customers. The very fact that it's possible to make money from harming customers in these fields suggests that Christians should try to avoid those workplaces in which compassion is not essential to success. Legitimate occupations make money from meeting people's true needs, not from exploiting their weaknesses.

With all these gifts, the life-giving power of God is experienced in particular *acts* and ways of *doing* things. In other words, the power of God that enriches people's lives comes through concrete *actions*

taken by the followers of Jesus. God's grace produces action in God's people for the good of others.

Specific behavioral principles to guide moral discernment (Romans 12:9-21)

Paul identifies specific guiding principles to help us serve as conduits to others for God's life-giving power. He introduces this section with his overarching concern to let love be genuine—or, literally, “unhypocritical” (Rom. 12:9). The rest of Romans 12:9-13 elaborates on genuine love, including honor, patience in suffering, perseverance in prayer, generosity to those in need and hospitality to everyone. Of particular note is Romans 12:16-18, where Paul encourages the Romans to “live in harmony with one another.” Specifically, he says, this means associating with the least powerful in the community, resisting the urge to repay evil for evil, and, whenever possible, to live peaceably with everyone.

If we have genuine love, we care about the people we work for and among. By definition, when we work, we do so at least partly as a means to an end. But we can never treat the people we work among as a means to an end. Each is inherently valuable in his or her own right, so much so that Christ died for each one. This is genuine love, to treat each person as one for whom Christ died and rose again to bring new life.

We show genuine love when we honor the people we work with, calling every person by name, regardless of their status and respecting their families, cultures, languages, aspirations, and the work they do. We show genuine love when we are patient with a subordinate who makes a mistake, a student who learns slowly, a co-worker whose disability makes us uncomfortable. We show genuine love through hospitality to the new employee, the late-night arrival, the disoriented patient, the stranded passenger, the just-promoted boss. Every day we face the possibility someone will do us some evil, small or great. But our protection is not to do evil to others in self-defense, nor to be worn down into despair but to “overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). We cannot do this by our own power, but only by living in the Spirit of Christ.

Living under the power of God (Romans 13)

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities,” says Paul. “Those authorities that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom. 13:1). Knowing that the systems of Rome's rule were not in line with God's justice, this counsel must have been hard for some in the Roman churches to hear. How could obeying the idolatrous, ruthless Roman emperor be a way of living in the Spirit? Paul's answer is that God is sovereign over every earthly authority, and God will deal with the authorities at the right time. Even Rome, powerful though it might have been, was ultimately subject to the power of God.

In the workplace, it is often true that “rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad” (Rom. 13:3).

Bosses often organize work effectively and create a fair environment for ironing out disputes. Courts regularly settle cases involving patents, land title, labor relations, and contracts equitably. Regulators often serve to protect the environment, prevent fraud, enforce workplace safety, and ensure equal access to housing opportunities. Police generally apprehend criminals and assist the innocent. The fact that even non-believing authorities so often get things right is a mark of God's grace in the world.

But authorities in business, government, and every workplace, can get things devastatingly wrong and sometimes abuse power for selfish ends. When this happens, it helps to distinguish between human-generated powers (even if they are significant) and the power of God that lies over, behind, and through all of creation. Often the human powers are so much closer to us that they can tend to block out our sense of God's movement in our lives. This passage serves as an encouragement to discern where God is active, and to join our lives to those activities of God that will foster true fullness of life for us and for all.

People who worked at Tyco International when Dennis Kozlowski was CEO must have wondered why he was allowed to get away with raiding the company's coffers to pay for his outrageous personal lifestyle. We can imagine that those who tried to do work with integrity may have felt afraid for their jobs. Some otherwise ethical people may have succumbed to the pressure to participate in Kozlowski's schemes. But eventually Kozlowski was found out, charged and convicted of grand larceny, conspiracy and fraud. [15] Those who trusted that justice would eventually be restored ended up on the right side of the story.

Paul offers practical advice to the Roman Christians, who were living right in the center of the most powerful human authorities the western world had ever known. Obey the law, pay your taxes and commercial fees, give respect and honor to those in positions of authority (Rom. 12:7). Perhaps some had thought that, as Christians, they should rebel against Roman injustice. But Paul seems to see self-centeredness in their attitude, rather than God-centeredness. Self-serving rebelliousness will not prepare them for God's "day" (Rom. 13:12) that is coming.

For example, in some countries tax evasion is so commonplace that needed services cannot be provided, bribery (to enable the evasion) corrupts officials at every level, and the tax burden is unfairly distributed. The government loses legitimacy in the eyes of both the tax payers and the tax evaders. Civil instability slows economic growth and human development. No doubt, much of the money that is collected is used for purposes inconsistent with Christian values, and many Christians may respond by evading taxes along with everyone else. But what would happen if Christians committed, in an organized fashion, to pay their taxes *and* to monitor the government's use of funds? It could take decades to reform government in this manner, but would it eventually work? Paul's argument in Romans 12 suggests it would.

Many Christians live in democracies today, which gives the additional responsibility to vote for wise laws that express God's justice as best we can. Once the votes are counted, we have a responsibility to obey the laws and the authorities, even if we disagree with them. Paul's words imply that we are to obey the legitimate authorities, even while we may be working to change unjust ones through democratic means.

In every sphere of life, we have an ongoing responsibility to resist and to transform all unjust systems, always putting the common good above self-interest. Even so, we are to show respect to the authorities, whether at work, school, church, government, or civic life. We believe that change will occur not because we express outrage, but because God is sovereign over all.

Paul completes chapter 13 by noting that by loving other people, we fulfill the commandments. Living in the spirit inherently fulfills the Jewish Law, even by those who don't know it. He reiterates that this comes not by human striving, but by the power of Christ in us. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," he concludes (Rom 13:14).

Welcoming—Living Peacefully with Different Values and Opinions (Romans 14:1-15:33)

At this point in the letter, Paul has finished developing his method of moral reasoning. Now he pauses to give some implications arising from it in the unique context of the Roman churches, namely in the disputes among believers.

The chief implication for the Roman churches is *welcome*. The Roman Christians are to welcome one another. It's not hard to see how Paul derives this implication. The goal of moral reasoning, according to Romans 6, is to "walk in newness of life," meaning to bring a *new quality of life* to those around us. If you are in a broken relationship with someone, welcome is inherently a new quality of life. Welcome is reconciliation in practice. Quarrels seek to exclude the other person, but welcome seeks to include him or her, even when it means respecting areas of disagreement.

Welcoming overcomes quarrels over differing opinions (Romans 14)

"Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions," begins Paul (Rom. 14:1). The "weak in faith" may be those who lack confidence in their own convictions on disputed issues (see Rom. 14:23) and rely on strict rules to govern their actions. Specifically some of the Jewish Christians kept the strictures of Jewish dietary laws and were offended by other Christians consuming non-kosher meat and drink. Apparently they refused even to eat with those who did not keep kosher.^[16] Although they regarded their strictness as a strength, Paul says it becomes a

weakness when it causes them to judge those who do not share their conviction. Paul says that those who keep kosher “must not pass judgment on those who eat [non-kosher meat].”

Nonetheless, Paul’s response to their weakness is not to argue with them, nor to ignore their beliefs, but to do whatever will make them feel welcome. He tells those who do not keep kosher not to flaunt their freedom to eat anything because doing so would require the kosher-keepers either to break fellowship with them or to violate their consciences. If there is no kosher meat to be found, then the non-kosher should join with the kosher and eat only vegetables, rather than demanding that the kosher-keepers violate their consciences. “It is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat” (Rom. 14:20), Paul says.

Both groups feel strongly that their views are morally important. The strong believe that for Gentiles to keep kosher is a refusal of God’s grace in Christ Jesus. The weak believe that *not* keeping kosher—and the merely eating with people who don’t keep kosher—is an affront to God and a violation of the Jewish Law. The argument is heated because freedom in Christ and obedience to God’s Covenants are truly important moral and religious issues. But relationships in the community are even more important. Living in Christ is not about being right or wrong on any particular issue. It is about being in right relationship with God and with one another, about “peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

Moral disagreements can be even more difficult at work, where there is less common ground. An interesting aspect in this regard is Paul’s special concern for the weak. Although he tells both groups not to judge each other, he places a greater practical burden on the strong. “We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Rom. 15:1). Our model for this is Jesus, “who did not please himself” (Rom. 15:3). This means that those who are in the right, or in the majority, or who otherwise have the most power are called to voluntarily refrain from violating the consciences of others. In most workplaces, the opposite occurs. The weak must accommodate themselves to the dictates of the strong, even if doing so violates their conscience.

Imagine, for example, that someone in your workplace has religious or moral convictions that require a particular modesty of dress, say covering the hair or the shoulders or legs. These convictions could be a form of weakness, to use Paul’s terminology, if they make that person uncomfortable around others who do not conform to their idea of modest dress. Probably you would not object to the person wearing such modest dress themselves. But Paul’s argument implies that you and all your co-workers should also dress modestly according to the other person’s standards, at least if you want to make your workplace a place of welcome and reconciliation. The strong (those not hampered by legalism about dress codes) are to welcome the weak (those offended by others’ dress) by accommodating to their weakness.

Remember that Paul does not want *us* to demand that others accommodate to *our* compunctions. That

would turn us into the weak, whereas Paul wants us to become strong in faith. We should not be the ones tsksking about others' dress, language, or taste in music on the job. Imagine instead, that Christians had a reputation for making everyone feel welcome, rather than for judging others' tastes and habits. Would that help or hinder Christ's mission in the world of work?

Welcoming builds up the community (Romans 14:19-15:33)

Another aspect of welcoming is that it strengthens the community. "Each of us must please the neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor" (Rom. 15:3) in much the same way that a welcoming host makes sure that a visit strengthens the guest. The "neighbor" here is another member of the community. "Let us then pursue what makes for peace and *mutual* upbuilding," Paul says (Rom. 14:19). Mutual upbuilding means working together in community.

From chapters 14 and 15, we see that welcoming is a very powerful practice. Paul is not talking about simply saying hello with a smile on our face. He is talking about engaging in deep moral discernment as a community, yet remaining in warm relationship with those who come to different moral conclusions, even on important matters. As far as Paul is concerned, the continuing relationships in the community are more important than the particular moral conclusions. Relationships bring a quality of life to the community that far exceeds any possible satisfaction from being right about an issue or judging another to be wrong. It also is a more attractive witness to the world around us. "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, *for the glory of God* (Rom. 17:7). When we welcome one another, the final result, by God's mercy (Rom. 15:9) is that "all the peoples praise him" (Rom. 15:12).

A Community of Leaders (Romans 16:1-16, 22-23)

Chapter 16 of Romans belies many people's common assumptions about the nature of Paul's work, namely that he was a solitary, heroic figure, enduring hardships to carry out his lonely and exalted calling to spread the Gospel among the Gentiles. In Romans 16, however, Paul makes it clear that his work was a community effort. Paul mentions 29 co-workers by name, plus many more by terms such as "the church in their house" and "the brothers and sisters who are with them." Paul's list sets equal value upon the work of both women and men, without distinct roles for either, and seems to include people of various social stations. Several are clearly wealthy, and some of those may be freedmen and freedwomen. Others may well be slaves. Paul praises the particular work of many, such as those who "risked their necks" (Rom. 16:3), "worked very hard" (Rom. 16:6), "were in prison with me" (Rom. 16:7), "worked hard in the Lord" (Rom. 16:12), or acted "as a mother to me" (Rom. 16:13). He mentions the work of Tertius, "the writer [scribe] of this letter" (Rom. 16:22) and Erastus "the city treasurer" (Rom. 16:23).

Observing Paul within such a wide circle of co-workers undercuts the modern western emphasis on individuality, especially in the workplace. Like everyone he names, Paul worked *in community for the good of community*. This final section of the letter lets us know that the Gospel is *everyone's* work. Not all are apostles. We are not all called to leave our jobs and travel around preaching. Paul's list of the varied gifts of service in Romans 12:6-8 makes that clear. No matter what kind of work occupies our time, we are called to act as servants of the good news of God's salvation for all people. See "[Work as Members of One Another \(Romans 12:4-8\)](http://www.theologyofwork.org)" at www.theologyofwork.org.

These greetings also remind us that church leaders are workers. It is sometimes tempting to see Paul's work as somehow distinct from other kinds of work. But Paul's repeated reference to the *work* of those he names reminds us that what is true of Paul's ministry is true of all workplaces. Here, where we spend much of our time each week, is where we will either learn to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4)—or remain mired in the power of death. In our workplace relationships we are invited to seek the good of the other, according to the model of Christ. In the often mundane work of our minds and hearts and hands, is where we are offered the chance to become channels of God's grace for others.

In the final verses of Romans, it is apparent that no one's work stands in isolation, but is interwoven with the work of others. Paul recognizes those who have gone before him, passing on their faith to him; those who have worked beside him; those who have risked their lives for him and for their common work. This point of view calls each of us to look at the whole fabric of community that constitutes our place of work, to consider all the lives intertwined with ours, supporting and enhancing what we are able to do, all who give up something that they might want for themselves in order to benefit us and to benefit the work that goes beyond us into God's world.

Conclusions (Romans)

Paul's dominant concern in Romans is salvation—God's reconciliation of the world through the cross of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God is working to reconcile all people to himself, to reconcile people to each other, and to redeem the created order from the evil forces of sin, death, and decay. Paul's concern is not abstract, but practical. His aim is to heal the divisions among Christians in Rome and to enable them to work together to accomplish God's will for their lives and work.

In this setting, Paul shows how salvation comes to us as a free gift bought by God's faithfulness in the cross of Christ and by God's grace in bringing us to faith in Christ. In no way does this free gift imply that God does not care about the work we do and the way we work. Instead Paul shows how receiving God's grace transforms both the work we do and the way we do it. Although we don't work to earn salvation, as God is saving us, he gives us the amazing diversity of gifts needed to serve one another and build up our communities. As a result, we walk in a new way of life, bringing life in Christ to those

around us and, in God's time, to the fullness of creation.

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ENDNOTES

- [1] See, for example, Ian A. McFarland, *Creation and Humanity: The Sources of Christian Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 138.
- [2] N.T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (Harper, 2010), 69.
- [3] See, for example, N.T. Wright. *The Letter to the Romans*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).
- [4] Albert Z. Carr, "Is Business Bluffing Ethical?," *Harvard Business Review* no. January-February 1968

(January 1, 1968).

- [5] As we discussed in the earlier section on Romans 6, Paul understands “sin,” and “death” and the “flesh” as spiritual forces in the world that lead people to act in ways that are contrary to God’s will and produce chaos, despair, conflict, and destruction in their lives and in their communities.
- [6] The latter point is made by Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Hermeneia, 2007), 487.
- [7] Al Erisman, “Wayne T. Alderson: Valuing People Helps Business” (conversation with Wayne Alderson), *Ethix* issue 66, July-Aug. 2009, accessible at <http://ethix.org/2009/10/01/valuing-people-helps-business>
- [8] “Inaugural Global Slavery Index Reveals More Than 29 Million People Living in Slavery”. *Global Slavery Index 2013*. 4 October 2013. Accessed at <http://www.globalslaveryindex.org/category/press-release> on April 8, 2014.
- [9] “Poliomyelitis Eradication” in *Wikipedia*, accessed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poliomyelitis_eradication on March 31, 2014.
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- [11] Al Erisman, as told to the Theology of Work Project in Boston on January 29, 2014.
- [12] Martin Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, 1st ed. (Harvard Business Press, 2002), 114.
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- [14] Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 960.
- [15] Michael J. De La Merced, “Released from Prison,” *New York Times*, December 4, 2013, B6.
- [16] N.T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 735.

