

Out of Horror, Hope:
A Biblically Based Study of Torture's Ravages and
Potential Responses in the Reformed Tradition

from the

No2Torture Group (studyguide@No2Torture.org)

Second Session:

Do We Live to Ourselves? Do We Die to Ourselves?

(Total time: 53–68 minutes)

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Objectives

- To use Bible study to build an understanding of humanity's experience of, and God's response to, torture.
- To enable all to consider the experience of cruelty or degradation, so as to understand the role power plays in the torture process.
- To continue to encourage hope by confessionally acknowledging our complicity and repenting, and then to hear words of forgiveness based on the *The Confession of 1967* (9.45), *The Declaration of Barmen* (8.04), or Scripture.

Scripture used in this session:

1. Romans 14:7–12 (see commentary in Appendix 1 and/or the in-depth commentary in Appendix 2 that covers Romans 14:1–12).

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Bible passages are from the:

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Session outline:

- 1. Summary of Our Experience of First Session** (3 minutes)
- 2. Identifying the Role of Power in Torture** (15 minutes)
- 3. Study of Romans 14:7–12** (10 minutes)
- 4. Are We Our Brother's Keeper?** (15 minutes, optional)
- 5. A Victim's Personal Account of Torture** (3 minutes)
- 6. Asking for God's Forgiveness** (20 minutes)
- 7. Closing** (2 minutes)

Handouts provided for this session:

1. *Torture Fatigue* by Silja J.A. Talvi (for Exercise 4, optional)
2. *It's Time to Say No to Torture* (Part 1) by Doug King
3. *The Confession of 1967* (9.45) and *The Theological Declaration of Barmen* (8.04)

Facilitators should prepare for the session by:

1. Contemplating the Scripture passage that will be discussed
2. Reading all articles
3. Setting up newsprint pages with headings, if desired

Items needed for this session:

Newsprint

Marking pens

Bibles

Copies of the resource articles

Paper strips, two per participant (if Exercise 2A is chosen)

Pens/pencils (if Exercise 2A is chosen)

Paper for group use

Do We Live To Ourselves? Do We Die To Ourselves?

1. Summary of Our Experience of First Session (3 minutes)

In the first session we were challenged to use our minds, hearts, and souls to begin to grasp the complexities of the policy, practice and experience of torture in our society. We sought to respond in a proactive manner to what we sense that God is saying on this issue. We did this by:

- Reflecting on one person's story of torture.
- Learning how torture is defined in our contemporary context.
- Finding the hope expressed in Jeremiah which assures us that God works among us in times of trial and that people who experience torture can be pulled up and out of desperation. We remembered that God's voice is reflected in these passages.

2. Identifying the Role of Power in Torture (15 minutes)

Here the facilitator may select either of the two exercises offered below. The first exercise may be somewhat less emotionally difficult for people to experience.

- A. This exercise offers a sense of reality to what may otherwise feel surreal. It also gets at the issue of where interrogation stops and torture begins.
- a. Hand out 2 strips of paper to each participant.
 - b. Ask them to write the names of two people they love, one name on each strip.
 - c. Next fold the strips in half and put them in a hat provided by the facilitator. All this should take no more than 2 minutes.
 - d. The facilitator then selects two and puts one in each pocket. Tell the participants to imagine a situation in which the person whose name is in the right pocket has been accused of kidnapping the person in the left pocket and is holding them in a closet in an unknown location with only three hours worth of air. What would you be willing to do to person A in order to find the location of person B? Remember that either, or both, could be your loved ones. Remember also that person A may have been picked up as a result of someone else providing bad information to the authorities.

- e. Ask them to share the things they considered doing, as well as how they felt about the possibility that the persons involved could be their loved ones. Draw out the feelings of powerlessness and how it feels to be oppressed.
 - f. Put their thoughts on newsprint. Be sure everyone has a chance to share if they so desire.
 - g. Allow 5 minutes for sharing, then conclude the conversation by summarizing the role of power as a common element in people's experiences. Someone may have already observed that a lack of power was a common experience. Others may note a temptation to use force or violence.
 - h. Note the ambiguities in the situation and affirm the difficulty in drawing a clear line between proper interrogation and abuse. Yet, gently push the group to describe where to draw that line.
- B. This second exercise enables people to identify the role of power in oppressive and dehumanizing situations.
- a. Invite participants to think for 1–2 minutes about a time when they felt they had been treated unjustly. Ask them to think about why they felt that way.
 - b. Have them then turn to a person next to them and share their experience. Tell them that, as they share, they should listen for common feelings and understandings about why they felt as they did. Give each person 2 minutes to tell his/her story.
 - c. Call everyone back together. Ask them to identify common feelings and understandings — or themes — for the whole group. Draw out the feelings of powerlessness and how it felt to be oppressed.
 - d. Record the responses on newsprint. Be sure everyone has a chance to share if they so desire.
 - e. Allow 5 minutes for sharing, then conclude the conversation by summarizing the role of power as a common element in people's experiences. Someone may have already observed that a lack of power was a common experience. Affirm that observation, noting that the lack of power often plays a major role in people's experiences of being treated unjustly. People who are treated unjustly often feel powerless to change the situation. Often the power to make decisions and policy are within the control of those who act unjustly.
 - f. Close by noting that the misuse of power often contributes to forms of systemic oppression such as domestic violence, sexual slavery rings, racism, and, yes, torture against detainees.

3. Study of Romans 14:7–12 (10 minutes)

In Romans 14:7–12, Paul is talking about our accountability to God for how we treat other people. This leads us to consider our roles and responsibilities for actions done in our names by the our government.

- Give the group some background on Romans 14:7–12 using the short commentary provided in Appendix 1.
- Invite one volunteer to read the passage aloud.
- Then invite the group to reflect together on these questions:
 - a. What does this passage say about accountability and passing judgment? Can we hold people accountable without passing judgment?
 - b. Who should be held accountable for the treatment of detainees? Why? How?
 - c. Are we, as U.S. citizens, complicit? In what ways? If so, what is our responsibility to: the prisoners, the troops at all levels of command, our nation, the nations of the detainees, each other, God?

4. Are We Our Brother's Keeper? (15 minutes)

This is an optional exercise. Facilitators are invited to offer this portion of the event if they feel it would not be providing too much information in too little time. This could also be offered as “homework,” thus allowing more time for the remainder of the lesson. Also please note: Of all the readings used in this series, this one has proven to evoke the greatest emotional responses. It is painful for some people to read. If used, facilitators should warn participants of this and encourage them to be in communication with you and others in the class about their responses.

- Hand out the *Torture Fatigue* article.
- Allow time to briefly peruse the article while considering where God is in the situations described by the author.
- Then ask participants to complete reading this at home.
- Recognize the article's graphic nature and indicate that this is a difficult reading.
- Give people permission to feel what they are feeling as they read.
- Invite them to share their initial reactions with the group.
- Ask them to consider what the answer is to Talvi's question:

“Could it be that Americans are subconsciously trying to stay sane by desensitizing themselves and finding cathartic release in endless media depictions of torture and brutality?”

5. A Victim's Personal Account of Torture (3 minutes)

Many people experience the effects of torture. Certainly the person being tortured feels great pain, but others may also be affected: the person performing the torture could experience psychological difficulties during or after the event. The families of both perpetrator and victim are impacted. Persons who been tortured also exhibit physiological complications in their lives. While we will look at the implications of torture on physical health in deeper detail next week, today we will hear the story of a victim.

- Hand out the *It's Time to Say No to Torture* (Part 1) article by Doug King. Note the web address, so those who want to read the entire article can do so.
- Ask them to read this article at home and consider these questions in relation to this person's life:
 - a. "Are we outside the perimeter of guilt for the torture inflicted upon people in the name of security?"
 - b. "Are we responsible for these people – or anyone that may be tortured in the name of security?"

6. Asking for God's Forgiveness (20 minutes)

- Choose one of these three texts on which to base the exercise:
 - a. Romans 14:7–12,
 - b. *The Confession of 1967* (9.45), or
 - c. *The Theological Declaration of Barmen* (8.04)
- Divide the class into small groups of 4–6.
- If not already done, hand out Bibles if using Romans 14:7–12, or copies of the alternate texts, otherwise. (Allow 1 minute.)
- Invite small groups to work together to compose a confessional prayer based on the chosen text. (Allow 15 minutes.)
- Have each group select a scribe who will record the prayer and then read it aloud for all to hear. (Allow 3 minutes.)
- Thank the groups for their efforts.
- Then unveil for all to see the assurance of grace (below) that has been pre-written on newsprint. Invite everyone to share in the oral reading of the assurance. (Allow 1 minute.)

“Children of God, remember that because of your belief in Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.”

7. Closing (2 minutes)

- Thank everyone for attending.
- Remind them that last week they were asked to consider how they can best serve Christ given the information they learned that day, as well as to respond to the materials through journaling, drawing, etc.
- Ask if anyone would like to share their thoughts or creations.
- Ask them to continue prayerful consideration of the same question this week and to continue to respond creatively to the information on this subject.
- Invite them to return for the next session.
- Ask if they would join hands and say the Lord's Prayer or Psalm 23 together.

Appendix 1

Commentary on Romans 14:7–12

Paul's letter to the Romans is his longest letter contained in the New Testament. It was written to the Christians in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, probably in 57/58 C.E. Paul himself did not found the church in Rome, but Jewish Christians probably did. Thus, Paul was writing to a church he had not visited.

We know that by the first century, there were some 40,000 to 50,000 Jews living in Rome. It is from this sizable Jewish community that the Jewish Christians came and, because of this, there was considerable friction within the synagogues and the Jewish community. Thus in 49 C.E., the Emperor Claudius expelled all of the Jews from Rome. They were not allowed to return until Nero became emperor in 54 C.E.

In the absence of the Jewish leadership, the Gentile leadership of the church grew. When the Jews returned, they expected to regain their leadership, but the Gentiles were not eager to let this happen.

In all probability, the Jewish Christians were more steeped in the Law and followed the dietary restrictions and the keeping of sacred days that were a part of the Jewish tradition. This was not a part of the religious practices of the Gentiles, and they did not see the need for keeping the Jewish dietary laws.

Thus, the historical context for this passage is one in which there was fighting between different ethnic groups over which religious practices were the right ones. The Gentiles, who were in the majority, did not like the Jews who kept the dietary laws, and the Jews looked down on the Gentiles because they did not obey the laws.

Paul addresses this quarreling by reminding them that they all belong to God and everything they do is for God and not for themselves. We are all subject to God and God alone, Paul reminds us. In the end, it is God to whom we will be accountable. However, he goes on to say that Christians should not do anything that would be harmful to their sisters or brothers. Furthermore, they should not just tolerate one another, but should try to understand and get to know one another – welcome one another. Paul is trying to help the Romans understand that Christ is Lord of the whole world and we are subject to God first. Christ's lordship is greater than any differences of ethnicity or background.

Sources:

The Women's Bible Commentary, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, Editors, Westminster, John Knox Press, 1992.

"The Letter to the Romans" by N. T. Wright in The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol X, Abingdon Press, 2002.

An Introduction to the New Testament by Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Doubleday Publishers, 1997.

"Romans" by Daniel Patte, in the Global Bible Commentary, Daniel Patte, General Editor, Abingdon Press, 2004.

Appendix 2

In-depth Commentary on Romans 14:1–12 (Pentecost 17, A)

Introductory comment. Paul intervenes in a hot conflict that threatens to split the Christian community in Rome (14:1–15:13). The situation is delicate, and Paul is never more brilliant. Although the issues dividing the community may seem unpromising for our edification, the strategy Paul adopts to resolve them is exemplary and of enduring value. He is consistently admirable in his ability to separate out the surface issues from the real issues. The surface issues have to do with the religious observance of dietary laws and holy days. The real issues, however, concern the identity of Jesus Christ and the community united to him. Paul strives to reframe the communal conflict in christocentric terms. Only by seeing the disputes within a larger framework that places Christ at the center can the community be kept from tearing itself apart. By establishing this larger framework, Paul is in a position to make wise and discriminating judgments. Although he believes that one side is correct in its views and the other mistaken, he does not align himself fully with either one. If anything, he protests most vigorously against the side with which he fundamentally agrees.

Paul sides with “the strong,” but repudiates their attitudes and practices. He opposes “the weak,” but respects the integrity of their consciences. While he expects them to change their views, he gives them time and space to do so. The weak do the wrong things – in the right way. To go against the conscience, Paul insists, even when it is mistaken, would be sinful. Paul will not force the weak to do this, and he admonishes the strong – who affirm the right things, but in the wrong way – to abandon their scorn, their self-righteousness and their sense of superiority. Paul understands that these attitudes are profoundly destructive of community. Repairing the community is by far the overriding consideration. Destroying it over relatively minor matters would be far worse than forcing through the right views at the expense of those who conscientiously dissent. Paul must therefore pass judgment without becoming guilty of the very attitudes to which he properly objects. He must avoid becoming guilty of judgmentalism himself. For the sake of self-consistency as well as for the sake of the beleaguered community, he must model the idea that the judgment of grace differs from graceless judgment. By penetrating to the deeper spiritual issues concerning union with Christ, and by openly upholding the truth of the matter while discriminating carefully among the vices and virtues of the disputants, Paul emerges as a masterful pastoral theologian.

The christocentric reframing of the dispute occurs in four sections. First, to counteract judgmentalism, Paul reminds the community that the Lord alone is the judge (14:1–12). Second, against the particular obtuseness of the strong, Paul reminds them that the Lord by his death showed a special solicitude for the weak (14:13–23). Third, to highlight that the

strong have distinctive obligations, he shows how the Lord subordinated his own interests to those of others (15:1–6). Finally, again appealing especially to the strong for forbearance, he reminds them that while they were yet weak and impenitent, the Lord became their servant for the good of all (15:7–13). Only the first of these sections will be discussed here.

v. 1. Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for quarrels over disputed matters.

In this statement we find a personal address, an unfavorable description of certain members in the community, and an implicit critique of those addressed. The description offers a clue to the rest of the statement.

There are members in the community whom Paul regards as *weak in faith* (a designation that seems already to exist; it is probably how “the strong” viewed their opponents). In exactly what sense they are weak will emerge as the argument unfolds. By characterizing them in this way, however, Paul immediately signals his assessment of which party needs to be corrected on the substance of the disputes that endanger the community. Note that he does not describe them directly as the mistaken, however, but as *the weak*. The remedy that will need to be found requires their strengthening more nearly than their correction. Although the description is unfavorable, it also foreshadows the consideration that Paul will show toward this group.

Since it is unlikely that the weak would need to be exhorted to welcome themselves, it seems that the personal address is directed to those who are not of this group. Those who are not weak need *to welcome the others*. The exhortation implies that those not weak have been less than welcoming. Paul aligns himself with their view of the disputed issues by calling the others weak in faith. But at the same time he uses his agreement with the strong to encourage attitudes and actions that are more generous. They are not to bar their opponents from the community. They are to be forbearing rather than forbidding. They are not to exclude, but to welcome the weak in faith.

It would seem that when those not weak in faith get together with those who are, *they quarrel over disputed matters*. Paul takes the risk of intervening in order to bring this quarrelling to an end. The risks are not small, since Paul wishes to be on good terms with the community, to visit them some day, and even to enlist their support for his future missionary ventures. The risks are outweighed, however, by the seriousness of the need. While it is unlikely that the quarrels are always initiated only by one party, Paul seems to place the onus of responsibility for avoiding them on those whom he has directly addressed. Those who are not “weak in faith” are not only to welcome the others, but to take it upon themselves to bring the quarrelling to an end before matters get any worse.

v. 2. One person believes it is permissible to eat all things, while another, being weak, eats only vegetables. The disputed matter about which the quarrelling has broken out

concerns *what it is permissible to eat*. An initial definition emerges for what being *weak* means. The weak feel they are permitted *to eat only vegetables*. Since they were initially described as *weak in faith* (v. 1), they presumably see themselves as bound by some sort of religious obligation. A sense of religious obligation would seem to be what lies at the heart of the rancor. Something that might not otherwise be greatly important has skyrocketed. Religious obligations are perceived to be at stake on both sides of the dispute. That is why the very fabric of the community is threatened. The weak have a sense of religious obligation that the strong insist is simply false. The strong believe they may *eat all things*. They feel so adamantly about it that they threaten to exclude the weak from the community, or they at least convey the message that the weak are not especially welcome. Paul has his work cut out for himself. He needs to expand the sense of religious obligation on both sides.

v. 3. Let not the person who eats despise the one who abstains. Let not the person who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats. For God has welcomed him. Although these statements would seem as even-handed as one could wish, they contain certain nuances. The one who eats is exhorted *not to despise the other*. The attitude of scorn or contempt seems to be a serious failing among those who are strong. It reflects their sense of superiority over against the others. Paul knows how corrosive scorn can be to the bonds of community, especially a community in conflict.

The one who abstains, on the other hand, is exhorted *not to pass judgment on the other*. The shade of difference would seem to be that whereas the weak are despised by the strong, the strong are condemned by the weak. The weak, being rigorists, would not perceive themselves as weak. Nor would they perceive themselves as being rigid. They would rather perceive themselves as upholding a high principle. They would perceive those who violated the principle as blameworthy, especially if they refused to mend their ways. Paul knows that judgmental attitudes will prevent the community from flourishing.

In context, the final pronoun of the last sentence, though grammatically restricted, would seem unrestricted in intent. It seems unlikely that Paul would follow the balanced pair of exhortations with a one-sided conclusion – *For God has welcomed him* – as though God had welcomed only the one who eats all things. (On the other hand, Paul might be redressing a perceived imbalance left over from v. 1.) In any case, Paul begins to expand the framework of communal discernment.

Everything depends *on God – and on whom God has welcomed*. The members of the community have more in common than anything that sets them apart. The defining elements of their life together are not at stake. The members on both sides of the dispute are baptized. They have all undergone catechesis, confessed the apostolic faith, and presented themselves in baptism to God. They are not in dispute about essentials. When they emerged from the waters of baptism, *God welcomed them* – all of them – as those who belong to Christ.

v. 4. Who are you to judge a servant who belongs to the household of another? It is before his own lord that he stands or falls. But he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. This critique of judging might seem to be directed primarily against the weak. It might seem to pick up on the admonition against judging previously addressed to them (v. 3). However, the following sentence (v. 5) represents both groups as subjects of the verb *to judge*. In context, it seems advisable to continue taking these statements in an unrestricted sense, and so as referring to both parties.

Neither the strong nor the weak has any jurisdiction over the other. Neither has the authority to pass judgment on the other. Neither is lord of the other. They are each *servants belonging to the household of another*. Judgment must be left to the lord to whom the servant belongs. Only by the judgment of the one who really counts – the servant’s lord – will the servant stand or fall. Paul has spoken more or less analytically. He has simply indicated that neither party is properly in a position to pass judgment on the other. He concludes, however, not only by specifying who it is that *is* in a position to judge, but what that judgment will actually be! *But he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

Paul is confident in the Lord, and he invites each party to the dispute to join him in this confidence. The servants who are correct will be strengthened in their stand. Those who have fallen into error, however, will be lifted up, so that they too will stand. Either way, it is the Lord, not they themselves, who is able to make them stand. Being a judge gracious to sinners, he has already done so – and will continue to do so again. The two parties need to look away from each other to the Lord, and then back to each other again as those who belong to the Lord. Paul invites them to put scorn and blaming behind them. He invites them to look with confidence to the Lord – this Lord, the one to whom they must each see that the other belongs. He encourages them to look to the Lord who can and will bring about a good outcome, if only they will turn to him, because he truly *is able to make them stand*.

Paul has made his first move in separating out the surface issues from the real issues. Dietary laws are a surface issue. They have led the community into a dangerous situation of mutual blaming and recrimination. Members of the community stand in judgment over one another. The real issue has to do with *who holds the office of judge*. No one in the community is the Lord and therefore no one is the Judge. The only one who is in a position to judge is the Lord to whom the servants belong. The servants are in no position to pass judgment on one another. *Who are you to judge a servant who belongs to the household of another?* If the true Judge has welcomed baptized sinners to be his servants, and if he is able to make them stand despite all their failings, then they must welcome one another and be forbearing toward others in their shortcomings. They must not arrogate to themselves the office of judge.

Justification by faith alone, baptism, and Christ’s resurrection from the dead are thus, implicitly, the chief articles of faith that Paul draws upon to meet the pastoral crisis at hand.

Justification undercuts the self-righteousness of both parties, reminding them that they are in no position to judge. Baptism reminds them who it is to whom the other actually belongs. And Christ's resurrection grounds their proper confidence in the risen Lord, whose judgment alone can resolve the dispute by making the party that has fallen into error eventually rise up and stand with the party established by him (and *not* by itself) in truth.

v. 5. One person judges one day to be above another, while another person judges all days to be alike. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. The relative indifference of the questions is clear to Paul. Besides the observance of dietary requirements, the observance of *holy days* is also in dispute. Since these observances are perceived as matters of religious obligation, they must be treated accordingly. If one's devotion to God is at stake, *one must be fully convinced in one's own mind*. Ambivalence, lukewarmness or insincerity would be out of place. Regardless of the substance of one's convictions (leading to observance or non-observance), one's attitude must be appropriate to the case, even if one is mistaken.

Whether to acknowledge "holy days" and observe them is another surface issue. The real issue is honoring the Lord. Setting aside special days (over and above the Lord's day) for religious observance is not harmful, even if unnecessary or mistaken. Regarding every day as a special day (so that *all days are alike*) is preferable, even if not more virtuous, to setting aside some days as holy. Everything depends on the quality of one's devotion to God. No reason exists why devotion cannot be properly maintained in either case.

v. 6. The one who observes the day observes it to the Lord. And the one who eats meat eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God. And the one who abstains from meat abstains to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God. The quality of devotion is not diminished on either side of the disputes. *The Lord is acknowledged, thanked and praised for who he is*, regardless of *the observance or non-observance of days and food laws*, and regardless of the propriety or impropriety of either course. The full weight of conviction is in evidence on either side. Paul highlights the subjective aspect of the practices in contradistinction to their objective content. He especially emphasizes the vertical or Godward aspect in contradistinction to judgmental attitudes toward those of differing views. If essentials were at stake, the objective content would be more important, and those of differing views would be a direct threat to the integrity of the community. But since catechesis, the apostolic faith and baptism are not at stake – since the Lord is known and praised for who he is – what matters more than anything else is the quality of devotion to him.

v. 7. For not one of us lives to himself, and not one dies to himself. The argument takes an abrupt, unexpected turn. The floor is dropping out of the common structure presupposed by both sides. Paul is moving to a whole new level.

Regardless of which side one may be on, *not one of us is at the center*. Not one properly lives to himself. Not one properly takes himself as the object of ultimate devotion. Nor does anyone die to himself. No one is finally the meaning of his own life and death. No matter what illusions one may hold about oneself and one's religious rectitude, death un.masks them all. Not one of us is the ultimate reality toward which we are headed in death. If in death we come *face to face with God*, the life we now lead takes on an aspect of seriousness and sobriety. Perhaps we ought not to be too quick in scorning or blaming others. *For not one of us lives to himself, and not one dies to himself.*

v. 8. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die we die to the Lord; so then whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord's. All relativities of this life pale in relation to the Lord, even religious relativities, which are supposedly the highest. Such matters ought not to be made more important than they are. What matters in living is the one to whom we ultimately live, and what matters in dying is the one to whom we ultimately die. It is a great thing if we know that we live to the Lord. It is a great thing because it de-centers us from being *homo incurvatus in se* ("the human being turned in upon himself," Luther's famous definition of sin) and affords a proper sense of perspective. The Lord is at the center, and we are at the periphery. The Lord is the Lord, and we are merely his servants, unprofitable ones at that. Matters of life and death are not finally in our hands. No matter how desperately we may strive to control them, control is largely an illusion, and is rarely worth the price we may pay in striving to attain it, if it is not given by a power not our own.

If the ultimate reality of our lives is indeed the Lord, then we belong to him in life and in death. We are not our own. We were bought with a price. The community that Paul addresses knows something of what that price was and by whom it was paid. It knows that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It knows that God is of purer eyes than to behold evil. Yet it also knows that God has turned his wrath to the service of mercy, and his anger in benefit of compassion. It knows that the Lord has lived and died as one of us, so that we might live and die to him. It knows in any case that he cannot be escaped, that *whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord's*.

Judging and blaming others in the community is a surface issue. The real issue is the Lord's judgment of us. That is Paul's pointed comment to both sides.

v. 9. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. The Lord to whom we live and die is the Lord who lived and died as one of us – *Christ died and lived again*. He is not merely the Christ for those who receive him as the Christ. He does not depend on our consent in order to be who he is. It is rather we who depend on his consent, for he is Lord. He died to remove our sins and lived again to bestow his life. It is not he who belongs to us, but we who belong to him. He will make of us what he will, for he is *Lord of both the dead and the living*.

His death and resurrection are the enactment of his Lordship. By them he became what he was from the beginning – *the Lord*. He united his eternal being to a temporal becoming. His life in our place was the one true life before God. He lived the life that we failed to live. Therefore, he is *Lord of the living*. His death, in turn, was the death of death. He conquered and abolished the death that was ours – by dying for us. On the cross he became what he was – the death of death. Therefore, he himself, not death, is Lord, and he is *Lord of the dead*. The dead have their future not in death but in him. Jesus is victor. He has triumphed in life and in death. He is *Lord of both the dead and the living*.

Because this Lord is able to make us stand (v. 4), and has proven his readiness to do so, we may approach him with confidence. But because he is also a righteous Judge, we can only approach him at the same time with humble and contrite hearts, in fear and trembling. Paul endeavors to instill a proper sense of the latter into the community.

v. 10. But you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or indeed why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

Meditatio now becomes *applicatio*. Paul drives home his meditation on the real issue.

Precisely who, he asks, is in a position to judge whom? The Lord who is able to make us *stand* (v. 4) will make us *stand* before the judgment seat of God, and not one of us will be excluded. *For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God*. It is not others who must give account to us, but we who must give account to God. Not one of us can forget this destiny without peril.

This destiny is forgotten when members of the community turn upon one another in judgment, as if the prerogative belonged to them. The members of the community are *brothers and sisters*. They are members of one another, because they share a common bond beyond themselves. Christ is the tie that binds them to one another from the heart, and he is the Lord to whom they must all give account. They must not proceed as if his prerogative in judgment were theirs. They must not proceed as if they were lords and judges of those who belong to Christ, even when those brothers and sisters may have gone astray in certain respects. Again, they are and remain brothers and sisters. Essentials are not at stake. They must treat one another accordingly.

Although each side to the dispute has sinned against the other, each has done so in its own way. The weak stand in judgment over the strong (v. 3), even as the strong despise the weak (v. 3). The weak condemn the strong for not being properly disciplined in devotion to God. The strong scorn the weak for not robustly living out the freedom of the Gospel; the Gospel, they believe, and Paul agrees, has liberated the community from superseded regulations about ritual purity [cf. v. 14].) *But why?* Why are the strong – who remain the *brothers and sisters* of the those on the other side – *judged* by the weak? And why, in turn, are the weak – who remain no less *brothers and sisters* of those who disagree with them – *despised* by the

strong? How can each side fail to realize that their severe attitudes of blaming and scorn are all of a piece and threaten to destroy the community? How can each side fail to realize that the other side still belongs to Christ, and so cannot be shunned? How can each fail to see that in the name of God they are actually jeopardizing themselves – before God? *For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.*

v. 11. For it is written: *As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.* The word of the apostle stands in line with the word of the prophets. By serving the word of the prophets in light of the Gospel of Christ, the apostle serves the Word of God. The apostle reminds the community that he is not delivering his mere opinion. The Lord who spoke through the prophets is the same Lord attested by the apostolic faith. That Lord is indeed the living God. He has life in himself. Life is of his very essence – *As surely as I live.*

Certainly, nothing other than God has life except on loan as God's gift. The Lord of all life is therefore *worthy of thanks and praise.* He is to be acknowledged for who he is – by all that lives but is not God. God will be honored and confessed *as the Lord* – if not in one way, then in another; if not in this life, then before the throne of judgment on the Last Day; if not in the form of faithfulness, then in some other, less happy way. No one will be finally exempted from giving proper veneration to the Lord. *Every knee shall bow, and every tongue give praise.*

v. 12. So then each one of us shall give an account of himself to God. Paul draws the first section of his argument to a close. He has accomplished his two main goals. He has relocated the dispute by placing it into a new context, and he has spoken the judgment of grace.

The context presupposed by the disputants was too narrow. It failed to take the total relevant context into account. Only by restoring Christ to the center can the full context emerge. When Christ is seen in the position that is properly his, horizons are necessarily expanded, and everything appears in a new light. His relation to the community determines their relation to him, and their relation to him determines their relation to one another. When they disregard the centrality of Christ, their perceptions of one another become twisted and broken. In the interim time between the turning of the ages, Christ does not guarantee that those who belong to him will never go astray. But he does establish bonds that determine how members of the community are to respond when they perceive brothers and sisters falling into error. Under no circumstances are members of the community to arrogate to themselves the authority that belongs to Christ alone. When errors emerge and conflicts break out, but essentials are not at stake, they are to do everything possible to preserve the bonds of community. Above all, they are to refrain from attitudes of blaming and scorn. They are not to despise, shun or cut one another off. Since the “weak” were probably mostly Jewish Christians and the “strong” mostly Gentile Christians, the fault lines appearing here

were fraught with tragic implications for the future.

Because he keeps his focus on the Lord, Paul is able to pronounce a judgment that is not graceless but gracious. He is able to discriminate as wisely among ideas as among attitudes and feelings. He looks for what the disputants have in common. What they have in common is a solidarity both in sin and in grace. Their solidarity in sin is both general and particular. Their general solidarity ought to remind them of the abyss from which they have all been delivered, and so to promote mutual humility and forbearance. Their particular solidarity, however, is that each has fallen into sinful attitudes toward the other. These attitudes are sundering the very body to which they mutually belong, the body of Christ. Nevertheless, because they belong to Christ, they remain brothers and sisters who belong to one another. Christ has made them to stand, and he will make them to stand. He will deliver them, as he has delivered them, from the abyss, and so from their continuing failures and shortcomings. That is their particular solidarity in grace as grounded in its larger generality. But the one who has made and will make them to stand is the one who will nonetheless also make them stand before the judgment seat of God. That no one will escape the divine judgment is as much the Word of God as that Christ is Lord of both the dead and the living. That we live and die to the Lord does not preclude our living and dying to judgment. What we do to our brothers and sisters on earth has consequences for all eternity. The judgment of grace, though gracious, is nonetheless a judgment. Paul attests this judgment. He applies it to the dire circumstances in the community. But he does so in supreme objectivity – with proper passion but without spite or rancor – because he never loses sight of his vocation to attest the Word of God. *So then each one of us shall give an account of himself to God.*