'Under Grace: The Christ-Gift and the Construction of a Christian Habitus'

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Barclay, John M.G. 'Under Grace: The Christ-Gift and the Construction of a Christian Habitus'
Pages 59-76 in Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013
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a narration of world history: the entire human family since the beginning of time has been incorporated in the character of Adam and has been following the narrative trajectory of that character, which ends in the eternal misery of pride; but in Christ, a new corporate humanity is taking shape and moving toward a different goal, the eternal happiness of life in humility before God. For Augustine, then, the self is not an autonomous, individual essence, but a pattern embedded in two overlapping and intersecting narratives.

Ironically, the position typically assigned to Augustine is exactly the view that he worked so hard to overturn: the doctrine of an autonomous individual self, which he found in the Pelagian teaching and vehemently resisted, arguing instead that we must bear with one another’s weaknesses since we are all tangled up together in the same corporate moral history. Augustine can seem like an austere figure; but by the standards of his time, there was something almost Dickensian in his defense of the ordinary person and of ordinary Christian piety. Augustine resisted every claim that perfection is attainable in this life. With constant slips and mistakes, the believer is always still learning how to play the part of Christ instead of the part of Adam.

And it is precisely this commitment to the business of ordinary, flawed Christian living that supports Augustine’s immense concern with Christian unity. Whatever segregates the church into separate spiritual communities, whatever sets the few above the many, whatever tends towards the formation of a spiritual aristocracy in distinction from ordinary believers—all this Augustine condemns as a return to “boasting.” For him, the cure is always a simple return to Paul’s teaching: there is no room for boasting, since proud Gentiles and proud Jews, proud lawbreakers and proud law-keepers are all brought and refashioned anew in community, divided by nothing and united solely by the humility of Christ.

God’s power, Augustine reminds us—in another of his striking improvisations of Paul—is like “maternal love, expressing itself as weakness.” The powerful weakness of a humble God—is the persona that we are slowly learning to adopt, as more and more we cast off the old self and put on the new, clothing ourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ.

87 For a summary, see Henry Chadwick, Augustine of Hippo: A Life (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 57–61.

88 Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos, 58.10.
eternal life (via ... ἡ χάρις βασιλεύσῃ διά δικαιοσύνης εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν, 5:21).

Romans 6 spells out the phenomenology of this counter-reign. In baptism, believers are wholly reconstituted. The “old human nature” (the residue of Adam) is put out of action by participation in the crucifixion of Christ, so that believers are released from slavery to sin (τοῦ μὴκετ δουλεύειν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, 6:6). At the same time, drawing on the miraculous resurrection life of Christ, they enter a “newness of life” with a new structure of allegiance (6:4). They are no longer to let sin reign in their mortal bodies (ὑπὸ ... βασιλεύσωτε ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ἡμῶν σώματι, 6:12). The echo here of 5:21 (note the common terms, βασιλεύειν, ἁμαρτία, δίκαιος/θνητός) implies that instead of sin something else will reign, and from 5:21 we know what that is: χάρις.

That implication is confirmed by 6:14, where, using variant language for the same phenomenon, Paul says that “sin will not lord it over you (ὑμῶν κυριεύσει), because you are not under the law but under grace” (ὑπὸ χάριν; cf. 5:20-21). Once again, grace is described as a power, this time more explicitly as a “power over.” Accordingly, the subsequent verses (6:15-23) are replete with the language of “slavery” and “obedience”: everyone is subject to one power or another, sin or righteousness, and Paul pointedly thanks God that they have been freed from one in order to be enslaved to the other (6:18, 22). There is no neutral zone in Paul’s cosmos, no pocket of absolute freedom, no no-man’s land between the two fronts. The gift of God in Jesus Christ has established not liberation from authority or demand, but a new allegiance, a new responsibility, a new “slavery” under the rule of grace. Although not itself an imperative, grace is imperatival: it bears within itself the imperative to obey.

To make such a claim will elicit in some circles howls of protest, on both theological and exegetical grounds. The theological objections will come from those influenced by the rich theology of Martin Luther. Concerned to liberate his contemporaries from their image of Christ as a hyper-demanding legislator, who was preparing to judge them on the final Day, Luther insisted that God comes to us in Christ only as Savior: “Christ is not Moses, not a taskmaster or a lawgiver; he is the dispenser of grace, the Savior, and the Pitier.” Drawing a general contrast between gospel as gift and law as demand, Luther insists: “The Law is a taskmaster; it demands that we work and that we give. ... The Gospel, on the contrary, does not demand; it grants freely; it commands us to hold out our hands and to receive what is being offered. Now demanding and giving, receiving and offering, are exact opposites and cannot exist together.” On closer inspection one would see that what really concerned Luther was not the bare notion of obedience or demand, but the idea that God demands anything which is necessary for salvation. Outside of this sphere there is plenty of scope for the language of obedience and duty (see Luther’s Catechisms!), but this obedience is never instrumental: it does not acquire any further gain or favor from God. Nonetheless, such statements of Luther as those just quoted have been taken to mean that grace carries no obligations and issues no commands: it is gift, purely gift, and in principle outside the domain of reciprocity or return. The modern, Western notion of the “pure” gift, wholly disinterested and without strings attached, indeed owes a lot to Luther (among other influences) and has become deeply entrenched in some theologies of grace. Romans 6, however, is a thorn in its side, and I shall argue that although Paul in this chapter encapsulates a theology of the incongruity of grace, grace given without prior conditions of fit or worth, he does not, and does not need to, perfect the notion of grace as “gift without return.” When he says that believers are “under grace” he means that grace carries demands.

Exegetically, any underlining of the language of obedience and slavery in Romans 6 is frequently challenged by one reading of 6:19, where Paul follows his strong statement that “you have been enslaved to righteousness” with the phrase “I speak in a human fashion because of the weakness of your flesh” (ἐνθώπιών λέγω διὰ τὴν ἀσθενείαν τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν, 6:19). This is often read as a kind of apology: Paul does not really mean anything so straightforward as believers being subject to imperatives like slaves—after all, he later says they have received...

2 LW 26.208; WA 40:1 337.15–19.
3 Although Luther is sometimes understood (and criticized) as holding a notion of gift without reciprocity, careful readers have recently insisted this is not so. There is at least the return to God of gratitude and honor; see Oswald Bayer, “The Ethics of Gift,” LQ 24 (2010): 447–68. But the crucial point is that this return is never instrumental, in the sense that it is never a means to a subsequent favor or gift from God.
4 For the notion that “grace” can be “perfected” (drawn to a fullness or extreme) in various directions, see John M. G. Barclay, Paul and the Gift (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).
a spirit of adoption, not of slavery (8:15). He really expects them to serve God willingly, "from the heart" (6:17), without having to submit to external pressure or demand, but he speaks in this "human fashion" to make a point in an unfortunately exaggerated fashion. I am not convinced. The metaphor of slavery is repeated with such force in this passage, both before and after 6:19, and is used so un-self-consciously elsewhere in Romans both for Paul's (1:1) and for the Roman believers' relationship to God (12:11; 14:4), that it would be hard to conclude that Paul thought the metaphor fundamentally inappropriate. He may be excusing the rather odd expression "slavery to righteousness" (6:18; cf. 6:22: enslaved to God), or he may be not excusing himself at all, but explaining why he insists on this figure, lest they be tempted by pride (in "fleshly weakness") to think themselves above any kind of enslavement (cf. 12:3). In any case, the sense of submission and obligation runs very strongly through 6:11-23, and Paul has no difficulty in describing the "newness of life" as a life lived under the rule of grace.

Ernst Käsemann has been the Pauline scholar most insistent on this Gnadenherrschaft, in his linkage between "grace" and the lordship of Christ. Combating a danger in the Lutheran understanding of gift (exemplified, for him, in Bultmann's existentialist interpretation), Käsemann insists that it is inadequate to think of grace as "gift" unless we also recognize its character as divine power:

The gift which is being bestowed here [in salvation] is never at any time separable from its Giver. It partakes of the character of power, in so far as God himself enters the arena and remains in the arena with it. Thus personal address, obligation and service are indissolubly bound up with the gift. When God enters the arena, our experience is, that he maintains his lordship even in his giving; indeed it is his gifts which are the very means by which he subordinates us to his lordship and makes us responsible beings. This captures very well the sense of powers, submissions, and slaveries that permeate Romans 5-6, reflecting also Käsemann's reading of the cosmic warfare which forms the framework for Paul's theology. It is notable that he does not find it easy to identify the sense of obligation in gift itself, deriving it primarily from the Lord who comes with and in the gift, rather than from the structure of gift-giving itself. I suspect this represents a Western disinclination to recognize gifts as carrying obligations, whereas everyone in antiquity knew (like most people know in most cultures today) that gifts create ties of obligation between the giver and the recipient—indeed the creation of ties is precisely why gifts were given. It was extremely common in antiquity for recipients of gifts to feel themselves obliged to their donors; in fact this is so much taken for granted that it forms the subject of delicate negotiation from both sides (see Seneca, De beneficiis passim).

Paul naturally figures his Gentile converts as under obligation (δειμένους εὐαγγέλιον) to the Jerusalem church for the spiritual goods they have shared (Rom 15:27; cf. 1:14 of his own obligation to preach). It is probably because he did not want to be seen as the donor of the gospel (putting its recipients under obligation to him, rather than to God) that he refused to take fees while founding a church. But the idea that God gives gifts that put us under obligation to him does not seem to be a problem for Paul: his phrase ἐνδοχάριν is paralleled by similar phrases in antiquity, such as the notice in Manetho that the king of Ethiopia was under obligation to Amenophis, king of Egypt, out of gratitude (χάριτι Ἠν Αμενοφιῆς ὀποιχείου). One may add to this an anthropological notion that comes close to the statements of Käsemann, that some gifts are so invested with the personality and interests of the giver (in our culture,

3 See, e.g., C. E. B. Cranfield, The Epistle to the Romans (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975, 1979), 1:325–26, though the apology is only for the figure of slavery not for the sense of "total obligation, total commitment" that characterize the life under grace; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Paul and the Stoics (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 235–37: they should want to do God's will of themselves (like Stoics), not because they have to have.

4 Ernst Käsemann, Commentary on Romans (trans. G. W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 182–83, insisting that "δουλεῖα is the key word in the passage" (182). Although the identical phrase occurs in Gal 4:12, it is not clear how it could here, as there, refer to some physical weakness; but a good short paper by Emerson Powery at the Princeton conference usefully explored this possibility.


9 In Josephus, Πρίγμα 1.246.
Grace

Christ's Life from the Dead—
in Mortal Human Bodies

The theology of Romans is built around the shocking, and in ancient
terms bizarre, fact that God’s gift (in Christ) has been given without
regard to the worth of the recipient. Divine grace did not have to be
figured this way: in most ancient ideologies of grace, both Jewish and
non-Jewish, God’s gifts are given well precisely in being given to the
fitting and the worthy.14 But Paul has come to understand (and expe-
rience, in his life and in the Gentile mission) that God has acted in
Christ by giving without regard to ethnic, cultural, or moral worth, and
thus on the same basis to Gentile and Jew alike. (χάρις does not mean
undeserved gift, in normal Greek usage; it only takes that meaning in
certain contexts, most notably in Paul.) This incongruity between
the gift and its recipients is what is demonstrated in Romans 1–3, and it
forms the core of Romans 4 where the God who (bizarrely) justifies
the ungodly is the God who promises to give offspring not to a young
and virile couple but to Abraham (as good as dead) and Sarah (whose
womb was defunct). Incongruity—the disregard of worth, capacity,
or work—is also the hallmark of Israel’s story, as traced in Romans
9–11, which is why Paul is not despaired of at the unbelief of
his fellow Jews, because God’s mercy operates without regard to prior

12 See, e.g., Maurice Godelier, The Enigma of the Gift (trans. N. Scott; Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1999); Annette B. Weiner, Inalienable Possessions: The
13 This is as true of Philo as it is of Seneca: on the former, see John M. G. Barclay,
“Grace within and beyond reason: Philo and Paul in Dialogue,” in Paul, Grace and
Wenell; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 9–21.

obedience, indeed precisely on behalf of the disobedient. This same
dynamic—God’s something out of a human nothing—permeates the
second main section of the letter (5:12–8:39). The Christ-gift has
arisen not in response to human obedience, but out of an avalanche of
sin (5:12–21), and it takes its grip on human lives not by enhancing or
supplementing their natural capacities but in an act of burial and new
life: the old life is brought to an end and an impossible new life—life
out of death—begins (6:1–11).

Crucial to Paul’s theology is that this new life is not in the first
place an anthropological phenomenon: it is experienced by human
beings only inasmuch as they share in, and draw from, a life whose
source lies outside of themselves, the life of the risen Christ. Their
identity is recentered, since their life is now wholly dependent on the
life of Another, the One who is risen from the dead. Paul repeatedly
draws attention to the resurrection of Jesus throughout these chapters
(6:4, 5, 8, 9; 7:4; 8:11) because he wants to make clear that this “new-
ness of life” (6:4; cf. 7:6) is not some reformation of the self, or some
newly discovered technique in self-mastery; it is an ectopic phenom-
enon, drawing on the “life from the dead” that began with Jesus’ res-
urrection. Believers “live to God” (6:11) as walking, sleeping, eating,
breathing miracles. This new creation life begins, in their case, not the
other side, but this side of their mortality; hence it is not quite descrid-
able as ἐνάστασις, which remains a future hope (6:5). It is not for
nothing that Paul emphasizes several times in these chapters the mortality
of the body: “let sin not reign in your mortal bodies” (ἐν τῷ ὑπέρ τῶν σώματα, 6:12); the Spirit will finally vivify “your mortal bodies” (τῇ ὑπέρ τῶν σώματα υμοῖν, 8:11); the present body is “a corpse on account of
sin” (μετεχῦν διὰ αμεταξίαν, 8:10) and a “body of death” (τῷ σῶμα του βαναστοῦ, 7:24). Whereas Christ has finished with death (6:9), believers
have not: they are dead to sin (6:11) but not to death. This puts
their lives into a state of permanent incongruity: in one respect they
are bound to death (“on account of sin,” that is, as a residue of their
Adamic heritage, 8:10); in another they are alive, in a “life from the
dead,” the eternal life that is at source uniquely Jesus-life.

Luther attempted in several ways to express the permanent,
structurally basic, incongruity of grace in the believer’s life, most famously
in the phrase simul justus et peccator.14 The strongest exegetical base
for that notion comes from Romans 6–8, but it draws on what seems
now to many exegetes a faulty reading of Romans 7-8, as a dialectical depiction of two dimensions of the Christian life. If, to the contrary, 7:7-25 describes life “in the flesh” outside of Christ (cf. 7:5), not life in Christ, Luther’s simul peccator looks less convincing. Nonetheless, Romans 6–8 does express the permanent paradox of grace in the life of the believer, only in a different form. The believer is here described as both mortal and eternally alive, simul morta et vivens. On the one hand doomed to death, in a body that is bound by mortality, the believer is also the site of an impossible new life, whose origin lies in the resurrection of Jesus and whose goal is their own future resurrection (8:11). “If Christ is in you,” says Paul (note the centering of the self from “outside”), “then you too are partakers of Christ’s death (6:5), and of Christ’s life (5:11-21; 7:5, 7-11). That this cannot mean their sinfulness as believers but the sin of the believer is rendered inoperative through the Spirit (capital “S”), which is another way of saying that this “newness of life” is established, sustained, and governed not by believers themselves, but by God. That paradox is the sign that God’s grace is permanently at odds with the natural (post-Adamic) condition of the human being, however much believers may (and should) grow in holiness.

We should be careful to note here the importance of the body as the site of this paradoxical co-existence of mortality and life. After insisting that the σώμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας is rendered inoperative (καταργέοντα) in baptism (6:6), Paul urges the Roman believers to consider themselves “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11) and explains what this “considering” (λογίζομαι) looks like in the following imperatives (6:12-13). These verses form four clauses, two negative (A) and two positive (B):

A₁ Μὴ σὺν βασιλεύετε ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ὄμοι σώματι εἰς τὸ ὑπακούνειν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτοῦ, (v. 12)
B₁ καὶ τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὑπαλαίε ἐν σάρκι ἡμῶν (v. 13)
A₂ μὴ γένεσθαι ὑμῖν ὡς ἔχετε ἐν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, (v. 12)
B₂ ἐάν παραστησήσῃ ἐάντων τῷ θεῷ ὑπάτε ἐπὶ κνησάν εἰς τὸν ἄνωτας (7:23, 25).

It is striking that in three of these four clauses what is ruled or presented is the body (as τὸ σῶμα or τὰ μέλη, the second a particularization of the first). That the first positive command (B') concerns “yourselves” (ἐαυτούς) should not be read in an idealist or dualist frame, as if “the self” is something anterior to, or separable from, the body; to the contrary, the fact that “yourselves” is embedded here in statements about the body suggests that the self can be “ruled” or “presented” only as the body is “ruled” or “presented.” It accords with this that Paul’s puts stress on the μέλη as slaves of either uncleanness or righteousness again in 6:19 and identifies the power of sin (which goes so far as to co-opt the law) as operative in the μέλη no less than three times in chapter 7 (7:5, 23, 25). The body, unambiguously identified in its physicality by the term μέλη, is thus the site where “the self” is identified and defined. Bultmann’s famous discussion of σῶμα as an anthropological term rightly noted how “the body” in Paul can be synonymous with the person (“man does not have a soma; he is soma”). He then quite wrongly took this to mean that we can empty the term (in most places, including Rom 6:12-13) of any overtones of materiality or physicality, since σῶμα means “the self,” as the subject of human action, or the object to whom something happens. Käsemann rightly objected that this made

15 Several papers at the Princeton conference were inclined to the later Augustinian view, shared by the Reformers, that Rom 7:7-25 expresses, in some respects, the continuing experience of the believer. This has the strong weight of Christian experience behind it, but the antithesis of 7:5-6 (corresponding in terminology to 7:7-25 and 8:16) and the language of enslaved captivity under sin (7:14) seems to me to identify 7:7-25 as a description (from a believer-viewpoint) of life “when we were in the flesh” (7:5). The “groaning of 8:23 is not at all the same as the cry of despair in 7:24.

16 I take the ἁμαρτία here to be not their own present sin as believers but the sin of Adam and of their past, in the cosmos infected by sin and thereby doomed to death (5:11-21; 7:5, 7-11). That this cannot mean their sinfulness as believers is indicated by the fact that they are now “dead to sin” (6:11) and “freed from sin” (6:19) in being enslaved to God. Cranfield’s traditional Reformed reading of 7:7-25 leads him to take διὰ ἁμαρτίαν as referring to the sin of the believer (Romans, 1:389). Others rightly resist this but fail instead reference to the believer’s death to sin in baptism (6:11; the expression is tellingly different) or to the condemnation of sin at the cross (8:3); see the discussion in James D. G. Dunn, Romans 1–8 (WBC 38a; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988), 430–31. Although Paul can juxtapose multiple ways of relating “death” to “sin,” the μαρτύρω... διὰ construction suggests a strong contrast between two antithetical but coexisting realities.

17 I will continue to use the traditional translation “limbs” for μέλη, though “organs” might be better (Paul imagines under this category ears, eyes, and sexual organs, as well as feet and hands, 1 Cor 12:12-26); there is a danger that the term becomes dephysicalized if it is taken to mean something as vague as “natural capacities” (e.g., Cranfield, Romans, 1:317–18). For proper emphasis on the physicality of the term, see Robert Jewett, Romans (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 410–11.

a nonsense of most of Paul's uses of the term σώμα, and that Leiblich-
keit (corporeality or physicality) was an essential component of Paul's
anthropology, which could not be confused away by Bultmann's exist-
tential wand. Käsemann himself put stress on the body as the sign of
human "creatureliness," and as the signal of our participation in, and
solidarity with, entities much larger than the individual; in particular
he stressed the condition of belonging to "powers," the body being a
part of the world which is always beholden to a sphere of sovereignty
(Herrschaftsbereich), either divine or antdivine. He thus insists that
in our Romans texts the body language is crucial to Paul's theology:
"that part of the world which we are in our bodies" (das Stück Welt, das
wir in unserm Leibe sind) is what God lays claim to, wresting it from
its enslavement to sin for obedience to righteousness. Moreover, as he
adds, "bodily obedience is necessary as an anticipation of the reality
of bodily resurrection. Otherwise it would not be clear that we are
engaged in the eschatological struggle for power."21

We can perhaps sharpen this further. The body is, for Paul, the
site where the "I" is expressed and enacted; his commitment to the
notion of the "resurrected body" (8:11; cf. 1 Cor 15:42-44) suggests
that the self cannot be operative or communicative in any other way.
If so, the body is the place where the resurrection life of Jesus (the
new self) becomes visible and active in human lives: the renewal of
the mind that Paul speaks of in Romans 12:2 cannot take effect, in
fact cannot be real in any meaningful sense, unless it is expressed in
"the presentation of your bodies" as a living sacrifice (of which he had
spoken first in 12:1). This means that the body is the site of that fun-
damental incongruity of which we spoke just now: it is here in the body
that the believer is both visibly on the path to death and visibly and
demonstrably to display the presence of the miraculous resurrection
of Christ, in service of righteousness and holiness. It is precisely in his
her corporeality that the believer is simul mortuus et vivens (cf. 2 Cor
4:10-11). It is not for nothing that Paul here uses military language
("weapons," 6:13, 19; cf. 13:14) since the body is the critical site of

resistance. Once appropriated by sin, the body is reappropriated by
Christ. The very location where sin once held most visible sway, and
where its former grip still draws our bodily selves towards death, is now
the location where the "newness of life" breaks through into action,
displaying in counterintuitive patterns of behavior the miraculous
Christ-life which draws our embodied selves towards the "vivification"
(8:11) or "redemption" (8:23) of the body. In this tug-of-war between
death and life, Christian obedience in the body, the former strong-
hold of sin, displays the fact that a miraculous counterforce is already
at work. By "putting to death the deeds of the body" (8:13)—that is,
the killer at the site of the crime (see 8:13 with 7:24)—the obe-
dience to righteousness demonstrates that the believer is on a traject-
ory toward a victory whose finale will be the resurrection of the body
and the redemption of the cosmos.

The Construction of a Christian Habitus

Thus far I have spoken of the body as the necessary expressive medium
of the Christ-sourced life in theological terms, remaining relatively
close to Paul's own diction. I now want to add some observations from
a different angle of vision, from the anthropology of culture. These
observations are not intended to replace or to surpass the theological
analysis, but they give some conceptual clarity to one dimension of the
text which is apt to puzzle interpreters.

It has often been remarked that Paul seems to encroach on what
we call "ethics" in Romans 6-8 in a way that seems to anticipate
Romans 12-15 (note the vocabulary links between Rom 6:12-21 and
12:1-2) yet without the specificity of ethical instruction and example
given in those later chapters. There are imperatives here (6:11-13;
8:12-13), but the chapters are concerned not so much with norms or
practices as with ethic-structuring orientations, allegiances, and dispo-
sitions. Even when speaking of the body, Paul is talking about a system
of loyalties and alignments which appears to go "deeper" than this or
that particular practice: at issue is what he calls τοὺς φυσικοὺς—which
governs the body while being expressed not outside or behind it, but precisely in the physical deployment of its "limbs." What is he talking about here? Can we interpret it
in terms that make some sort of sense to us?

One of the best analysts of this level of "structuring structures" is
the anthropological theorist Pierre Bourdieu, who developed the

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19 See esp. Ernst Käsemann, "On Paul's Anthropology," in Perspectives on Paul
(trans. M. Kohl; London: SCM Press, 1971), 1-31. For further critique of Bultmann,
see Robert H. Gundry, Stōma in Biblical Theology, with emphasis on Pauline Anthropology

20 Käsemann, Commentary on Romans, 178.

21 Käsemann, Commentary on Romans, 177; idem, An die Römer, 169-70.
much-discussed and still useful concept of the *habitus*.22 In an effort to go beyond the sterile dualisms of “structure” and “free agency,” of “objective” and “subjective” forces in human action, Bourdieu suggested that, at a level deeper than articulated norms and specified rules, cultures operate by a *habitus*, “a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks.”23 These dispositions concern the unspoken, and often unconscious, systems of classification by which we order reality, as well as the taken-for-granted limits of the possible, the sensible, the proper, and the imaginable, which limit our action without articulation in rules of behavior. In a kind of unending circularity, these dispositions and conceptual schemas are produced by practices but also, in turn, govern practices, at a level so deep that they are very hard to change unless (Bourdieu thought) there are major shifts in physical or economic conditions.24 They represent what we take to be necessary and self-evident, “what goes without saying because it comes without saying.” The *habitus* defines the sense of reality, of responsibility, of beauty, of value, and of the sacred and profane.

For Bourdieu, the *habitus* is crucially *embodied*, inscribed in all manner of bodily habits and expectations: “nothing seems more inef-fable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and, therefore, more precious, than the values given body, made body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of inscribing a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as ‘stand up straight’ or ‘don’t hold your knife in your left hand.’”25 In this respect, “what is ‘learned by body’ is not something that one has . . . but something that one is”—a nice complement to Bultmann’s famous statement about *σῶμα* in Paul (“man does not have a soma; he is soma”), but this time much nearer to Paul’s conception of the physical body. It is at this level of the “structuring structures” of thought and action that Bourdieu places the body not as a medium of some prior, purely mental, activity but as a constitutive ingredient of how we perceive, order, and practice reality itself.26

When Paul talks about “the body of sin” (Rom 6:6), we would be unwise either to “spiritualize” this phrase as signifying something vague like “the sinful person” or to limit its range of meaning to certain physical acts (for instance, the ἐνέπαθεν and κατέφτασεν of 13:13). He seems to have a sense that the body has been commandeered by sin, such that its dispositions, emotions, speech patterns, and habitual gestures are bound to systems of honor, self-aggrandizement, and license which are fundamentally at odds with the will of God. Thus even the Law, good and holy as it is (7:12), ends up “bearing fruit for death” (7:5).

When received by a body “inhabited” by sin (7:17, 20)—endowed with a deeply inculcated *habitus* of sin—it cannot achieve what it promises. The “law” that is at work in the members (7:23) is a set of predispositions and orientations too deep to be altered by the instructions of the Torah, however much the mind may approve of them. What is needed is “rescue from this body of death” (7:24)—a new φρόνησις of cognitive and practical schemas operative in physical deportment, corporeal practice, and bodily appetites.

One could hardly imagine a more effective demonstration of this “rescue” than the physical rite of baptism, which Paul interprets as a transition from death to life performed on and with the body. Henceforth believers give themselves over to this new life (“as alive from the dead,” 6:13), that is, they “present their limbs as weapons of righteousness to God” (6:13; cf. 12:1)—in other words, they are committed to instatiating a new embodied *habitus*. This commitment could never be

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24 The ultimate causality attributed to material, physical, and economic conditions indicates the pull of Marxist determinism in Bourdieu’s work; critics often note that he finds it hard to explain how the *habitus* can be altered. For this reason, it may be that we need to go beyond Bourdieu to explain the change in *habitus* envisaged in Rom 6, while utilizing his thought to illuminate how the *habitus* functions through the medium of the body.


27 The point is well expounded by Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and the Self in the Apostle Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. 141–42 and 185: “ideas should in principle always be seen as part of practices. Together with all other less articulated types of cognition, they enter into the bodily habitus that is expressed in practices” (emphasis in original). This represents a shift from his earlier discussion of Rom 6, which suggested that the cognitive “I” was logically separate from and prior to the body (Paul and the Stoics, 228, 238).
a solo affair: while the body is individual, it is also shaped in and by its social interaction. The attempt to break with the old schematizations (μὴ συσχηματίζεσθαι τῷ ἄλλῳ τούτῳ, 12:2) and to express a new, transformed νόμος (12:2) will require collective practices that challenge the old taxonomic systems (the structuring "antinomies" of the present age) and embody new apperceptions and goals. That is why the bodily reorientation described in Romans 6 is given some exemplification in Romans 12–15, which concerns the formation of a community oriented to the gospel. It is in this community that new social habits are formed; new patterns of speech are practiced (prophecy, teaching, encouragement, prayer, 12:6-7, 12); new emotional commitments are formed ("weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice," 12:15); a new countercultural quest is inculcated for the giving, not the receiving, of honor (12:10); a strong resistance is built up against the instinctual quest for revenge (12:14-21); and the body is deployed in new abstentions from the normal licenses of food, drink, and sex (13:13-14). In relation to food, Paul announces a significant shift from the Jewish taxonomic system of clean and unclean foods (14:14, 20), but only to insist on a new way of perceiving and practicing "strength," which is to support the burdens of the weak (15:1-5). With enormous sensitivity to the difficulty of changing from one habitus to another, Paul requires of all the Roman believers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, an overriding commitment to their common Master, and thus to each other, which will alter the default setting of their habitus in food consumption and hospitality at just enough strategic points to remind them that they belong ultimately not to the Law but to the Lord (cf. 7:1-4). In one sense, the kingdom of God is not about food and drink (14:17), but in another sense it is precisely in practicing a culturally relativized ethic of food and drink, performed exclusively to the Lord and in gratitude to God (14:6-8), that believers are now to show their ultimate allegiance in corporeal practice.

In all such ways, Paul demonstrates what it means to "present your limbs as weapons of righteousness to God" (6:13). The new Christian habitus can be expressed and reinforced only in practice; it requires to be embodied, not simply conceptualized. The impossible "life from the dead," externally sourced in Christ, necessarily entails a new set of orientations and dispositions which structure new patterns of behavior, and Paul seems instinctively aware of what anthropologists have labored to clarify: the refashioning of the self cannot take effect without refashioning the practices of the body.

Grace, Obedience, and Christian Agency

If we draw these observations together, the following eight conclusions emerge:

A. Christian "obedience" responds to the prior, incongruous gift of God in Christ; it is symptomatic of a new life which runs clean contrary to the death-doomed life of the "natural" human being. That incongruity is evident in the fact that this life is present precisely in the mortal human body and is dramatized in the baptismal break with the past. Christian life is an impossible newness given as an unfitting gift, such that everything in this life refers back to its source and foundation in the Christ-gift, and forward to its eschatological fulfillment as eternal life. Everything that can be said about Christian action, obedience, and obligation arises from this generative basis because the very life that believers now live is created and sustained by the resurrection life of Christ, who is present in power. 28

B. Hence the obligation now incumbent on believers is not to "gain" grace (or salvation), nor to win another installment of grace: there is a single χάρις of eternal life (6:23) which runs from the Christ-event to eternity (cf. 8:32), not a series of "graces" won by increases in sanctification. Paul certainly expects that the moral incongruity at the start of the Christian life will be reduced over time, as the believers' slavery to righteousness draws them toward holiness (6:19). In that sense, what began as a morally incongruous gift will be completed as a morally congruous gift for those rendered somewhat worthy of the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Thess 2:12, 3:13). But this does not reduce the essential incongruity of

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grace, since the very life in which this holiness emerges is not the believers' own life (which is doomed to death) but the resurrection life of Christ: right up to the moment of their resurrection a believer remains simul mortuus et vivens.

C. Since the "newness of life" by which the believer now lives is a miraculous gift, there is no possibility of imagining their resulting obedience as their own achievement, self-initiated or independently governed. Their new competence is wholly dependent on the life of Christ, present within. What is given to them is not a new set of competencies added to their previous capacities, nor an enhancement of their previous selves: what is given is rather a death, and the emergence from that death of a new self, essentially ectopic in dependence on the resurrection life of Christ.

D. Because he operates within this frame of thought, Paul does not have to say that the agent operating in and through the believer's agency is really the Spirit or Christ. He can certainly speak of the presence of Christ (or the Spirit) within (8:9-11) and can talk of Christian action as taking place generically in the Spirit (μεταμορφοσθήσεσθαι, 6:13-14). But he does not have to articulate this on each occasion when he speaks of believers as agents. He gives genuine exhortations to genuinely freed agents who are urged to more than passive acquiescence in the work of another. In other words, Paul does not "perfect" the efficacy of grace into a formula of monergism because it is clear for him from the baptismal event that the very life in which the believer acts and decides is a life sourced, established, and upheld by Christ (a "life from the dead"). Within this frame and on this basis, plenty of statements can be made regarding believers as responsible agents, required to present their bodies in one direction rather than another.

E. The theological logic of the Pauline imperative is to live the life that has been given. Paul is not requiring them to turn theory into practice, or possibility into reality: joined to Christ in baptism they really and actually share his risen life. Nor is he requiring them to turn an "objective" truth into a "subjective" reality since they are "alive to God" in every dimension of their subjectivity by participation in Christ. Nor is the imperative the supplement to the indicative in the sense that something incomplete has to be completed in further degrees. The theological logic of indicative and imperative is in one sense much simpler than all of these inadequate conceptualizations. They have been given a new life which can be lived only in activity and practice: this "newness of life" is essentially and not just contingently a matter of περιπατέω (6:4). Practice, action, and obedience are the mode of this new life. In every move they make, believers are either living this new life or living according to the flesh (8:13), the latter still possible because, for as long as they live in the realm of mortality they can fall back into the force-field of sin and death and repudiate the power that tugs them towards life. The imperative is thus to practice (and thereby demonstrate) the new life given, which cannot be said to be active within them unless it is acted out by them.

F. Sociologically, one may put this in other (partly complementary) terms. The new habitus of the believer—the new perceptions, goals, dispositions, and values—can become effective only in practice: outside of practice it is not clear that they would mean anything at all. The believer has a new identity as a slave to God and a slave to righteousness: it is hard to know what that identity could mean if he/she does not actually obey God in everyday practice. Everything one does every moment of time contributes to the formation of one habitus or another: if you do not sow to the Spirit, you are certainly sowing to the Flesh (Gal 6:8). The imperative to live in practice the new life one has been given has, thus, a kind of sociological as well as a theological logic.

G. From both theological and sociological perspectives, the body has emerged as a crucial component of Christian obedience, understandably prominent in Romans 6, as elsewhere in Paul. From a theological point of view, it is the site where the new life headed to eternity and the old life headed for death meet and clash: that it is precisely here the new obedience is displayed provides a vivid demonstration and foretaste of the triumph in Christ of life over death. Sociologically, the new habitus requires embodiment if it is to be effective at all: the body is already pretrained to all sorts of harmful effects and needs to be disciplined and reoriented for the new identity in Christ to take effect. If Christians are to present...
themselves to God, this has to involve their “organs” or “limbs.”

H. Finally, we can comprehend better now the role of obedience “under grace.” Christian obedience is only ever in a responsive mode: it arises in conjunction with faith and gratitude as the answer to a prior gift. The gift is entirely undeserved but strongly obliging: it creates agents who are newly alive, required to live the life they have been given. This obedience is not instrumental (it does not acquire the gift of Christ, or any additional gift from God), but it is integral to the gift itself, as God graciously wills newly competent, freed agents who express in practice their freedom from sin in slavery to righteousness. God’s grace does not exclude, deny, or displace believing agents; they are not reduced to passivity or pure receptivity. Rather, it generates and grounds an active, willed conformity to the Christ-life, in which believers become, like Christ, truly human—that is, obedient agents (5:19). Without this obedience grace is ineffective and unfulfilled.

5
The Shape of the “I”
The Psalter, the Gospel, and the Speaker in Romans 7

Beverly Roberts Gaventa

Few scholarly works have influenced my understanding of a text more than has Paul W. Meyer’s essay “The Worm at the Core of the Apple: Exegetical Reflections on Romans 7.” Meyer argues that the interpretation of Romans 7 has been seriously misled by the assumption that Paul must be referring here either to the “religious person” or to the “irreligious” (the regenerate or the unregenerate, the saved or the lost). In contrast to most customary readings, Meyer demonstrates that in Romans 7, Sin continues to be the major “character” in the argument. As in chapters 5-6, where Sin enters the world, Sin increases in power, Sin reigns like a king, and Sin enslaves, so also in chapter 7 Sin makes use of the Law, Sin deceives and kills, Sin takes captive the human being. Sin actually produces a kind of rupture, not in the self but in the Law (as indicated by 7:25b; see also 8:2). On Meyer’s reading, then, the primary concern in Romans 7 is neither the Law nor the “I” but the way in which Sin’s power can reach into and use even the holy and right and good Law of God.


[32] For a careful analysis of this theme in Barth, see John Webster, Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).