

Peace and Wrath in Paul's Epistle to the Romans

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Introduction

In Romans 1:18, the Apostle Paul writes, “the wrath of God is being revealed against the godlessness and the unrighteousness of humanity. . . .”¹ The Greek noun ὀργή (“wrath”) appears more frequently in Romans (1:18; 2:5 [twice], 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22 [twice]; 12:19; 13:4, 5) than in any other Pauline epistle.² In an epistle in which God's wrath is clearly an important topic, it is interesting that Paul also uses the noun εἰρήνη (“peace”) more frequently in Romans (1:7; 2:10; 3:17; 5:1; 8:6; 14:17, 19; 15:13, 33; 16:20; cf. the verb εἰρηνεύειν 12:18) than in any of his other epistles.³ Even more significant for the purpose of this essay, he brings together the concepts of wrath and peace at three key points: 2:5-10; 5:1-11; and 12:18-21. These three passages belong to what many commentators see as three distinct sections of the epistle (chapters 1-4, 5-8, and 12-15).⁴

This article and three others in this issue on the theme “Judgment and Wrath of God” are based on presentations made at the Mennonite Scholars and Friends Forum, AAR/SBL annual meeting, Chicago, November 17, 2012. The others are: W. Derek Suderman, “Assyria the Ax, God the Lumberjack: Jeremiah 29, the Logic of the Prophets, and the Quest for a Nonviolent God” (CGR 32, no. 1 [2014]: 44-66); Grant Poettcker, “Reassessing Anselm on Divine Wrath and Judgment: A Girardian Approach for Mennonite Atonement Theology” (CGR 32, no.1 [2014]: 80-90); Justin Heinzekehr, “When Anabaptists Get Angry: The Wrath of God in a Process-Anabaptist Perspective” (CGR 32, no. 1 [2014]: 91-101).

¹ All translations are my own.

² 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9

³ 1 Cor. 1:3; 7:15; 14:33; 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:2; 13:11; Gal. 1:3; 5:22; 6:16; Phil. 1:2; 4:7, 9; 1 Thess. 1:1; 5:3, 23; Philemon 3; cf. εἰρηνεύειν 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:13.

⁴ E.g., Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. C.C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1949); C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 1975-79); Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Zurich: Benziger, 1978-82); Paul Achtemeier, *Romans* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven/London: Yale Univ. Press, 1994); Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegetown, MN: *The Conrad Grebel Review* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 67-79

In this paper I would like to accomplish two things. First, I will draw attention to wrath and peace in Romans, focusing on the three passages in which the terminology of wrath and peace occurs in close proximity: 2:5-10; 5:1-11; and 12:18-21. Second, I will comment on how Paul's concept of the relationship between wrath and peace is worked out in the unfolding of the epistle. In particular I will argue that, read together, these passages are points on a trajectory toward the spread of God's peace. Whereas in the early chapters of Romans, it seemed impossible for sinful humanity to experience God's peace, Paul proclaims in chapter 5 the gift of God's peace, which in turn leads to an exhortation to be agents of God's peace toward all in chapter 12. In contrast, in each of the three passages, Paul attributes wrath to God and only to God.

Procedurally, it will be beneficial to deal first with each passage on its own terms before asking how these parts relate to the whole. A helpful image for this investigation is that of a triptych, with its three individual panels. Each panel is independent, yet when they are considered together they influence the interpretation of the whole piece. So, in Romans, each of these passages provides important insights into Paul's understanding of wrath and peace, but these insights are re-cast, even challenged, when considered in light of the epistle as a whole.

Romans 2:5-10

In Romans the Greek words for wrath (ὀργή) and peace (εἰρήνη) occur together for the first time in 2:5-10. In these verses Paul posits a day of wrath yet to come, when the righteous judgment of God will be revealed; wrath and peace stand as two possible outcomes of this judgment. On the one hand, to those who do good God will give glory, honor, life, and peace. On the other, those who do evil, disobey the truth, and are persuaded to obey

Liturgical Press, 1996); Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., *Pauline Theology Volume III: Romans* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002); Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007). Cf. Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004). Tobin has slightly different divisions than the other commentators listed here, but he still sees these three passages as belonging to three different sections of Romans. See comment below about the other section of Romans, chapters 9-11.

unrighteousness will receive wrath, anger, tribulation, and distress.⁵

In Romans 2:5 Paul warns about a coming day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed: "But you, because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Here he seems to imply that the day of wrath is yet to come. The phrase "day of wrath" occurs elsewhere in Scripture as a reference to the final judgment.⁶ That Paul sees the day of wrath as future is underscored by the image that he uses in 2:5: "storing up" wrath. The image of the storehouse is typically one of preparing for future preservation (e.g., storing grain for use as food). However, here it is ominous. Rather than storing up life-giving sustenance, Paul warns his audience that they are storing up wrath for the day of wrath, a reference to eschatological judgment.

How surprising it must have been for Paul's audience to hear him warning them about this coming day. In Romans 1, he announced God's wrath is already being revealed against the godlessness and unrighteousness of humanity (v. 18). The text proceeds with a list of godless and unrighteous behaviors such as idolatry, sexual promiscuity, and murder. The recipients of Paul's letter probably would have supported the verdict that such persons have no excuse (ἀναπολογήτος, 1:20). They might have been flabbergasted when in Romans 2 he turns his invective against them. To the one who judges (presumably, the one who judges those who are committing the acts listed in Romans 1), he declares: "You are without excuse" (ἀναπολογήτος, 2:1).⁷ To paraphrase Paul: *You who think you have avoided God's wrath are*

⁵ A second word for wrath—θυμός—also occurs in 2:8. Thus, Paul uses two words that could both be translated wrath in v. 8: ὀργή καὶ θυμός. Θυμός only occurs in this verse in Romans. To distinguish between these two words in translation, I have translated θυμός here as "anger."

⁶ In the Septuagint (hereafter, LXX), see e.g., Ps. 109 [110]:5; Job 20:28; Zeph. 1:15, 18; 2:2, 3; Ezek. 22:24; also see Rev. 6:17. The most notable exception to viewing "day of wrath" as denoting a future day of judgment is Lamentations, where several times the day of wrath is described as having already occurred (1:12; 2:1, 21, 22). However, the author of Lamentations likely considers the destruction of Jerusalem, an event that has already occurred, as the day of God's final judgment. A number of other New Testament texts do not use the phrase "day of wrath" but reference a coming wrath. See, e.g., Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 11:18.

⁷ It is reasonable to assume that Paul addresses the same interlocutor in 2:5-10: the one judging—the one who is without excuse—is also the one storing up wrath for herself on the

the ones storing up wrath, and you are the ones in need of a warning about the coming day. The day of wrath that is to come is here, and you who think you are secure are not exempt from God's righteous judgment. Moreover, if the wrath of God in Romans 1 already is being revealed, the immediacy of the warning in 2:5-10 is heightened.⁸

Alternatively, Paul hopes for a different outcome for some on the day of wrath. For those who do good and seek eternal life, he anticipates glory, honor, life, and peace.⁹ He even introduces the day of wrath with a note about the wealth of God's kindness, tolerance, and patience (2:4). God's tolerance and patience in no way diminishes the justness of God's wrath; Paul will make this point explicit in 3:5-6. However, a recurring theme in Romans is the delay of God's wrath as an opportunity to demonstrate God's mercy.¹⁰ According to Paul, it is not God's intention that all perish but that all will be saved.¹¹

At this point in the epistle, Paul appears to present the two potential outcomes—either “wrath, anger, tribulation, and distress” for those who do evil or “glory, honor, life, and peace” for those who do good—as equally plausible results of God's righteous judgment on the coming day.¹² However,

day of wrath.

⁸ Paul seems to speak of two different occasions of wrath in the initial chapters of Romans: wrath being revealed in the present (1:18) and a future day of wrath (2:5). It is probably best to think of the wrath already being revealed in Romans 1 as the beginning of God's final, eschatological day of wrath as anticipated in Romans 2:5-10. The two time periods are not fundamentally distinct. Parallels between 1:17 and 1:18 further suggest that the revelation of God's wrath in 1:18 belongs to “the eschatological breaking in of a new age in Christ.” Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 101-102.

⁹ In 2:7, Paul declares that to those who seek eternal life, God will give glory, honor, and immortality (ἀφθαρσία), which Paul appears to equate with eternal life in the same verse. In v.10, peace replaces eternal life in the triad: glory, honor, and peace. The experience of the day of wrath for those who do good will be glory, honor, life, and peace. The correlation of life and peace in 2:7-10 anticipates 8:6, in which the indwelling of the Spirit is life and peace.

¹⁰ E.g., see 9:22-23; 11:17-24; 11:30-32; cf. 3:19-20; 8:20-25; 12:19-20; 15:4. Some might argue that in Romans 1 the “handing over” of godless humanity (vv. 24, 26, 28) is God's delay of wrath until God hands over the Son to deliver humanity (8:32). See Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “God Handed Them Over,” in *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 113-23, 194-97.

¹¹ Paul's clearest statement of this position in Romans is 11:32.

¹² This two outcome judgment scenario is common in Jewish and Christian literature: e.g.,

Paul does not think that anyone does what is good. In chapter 3, he marshals an impressive collection of Scriptural witnesses which testify that “There is no one who is righteous, not one” (v. 11; cf. vv. 12-18). No one knows the way of peace (3:17). While he anticipates two possible outcomes of eschatological judgment, the reality as he perceives it is that everyone is deserving of wrath and no one is deserving of peace. Nevertheless, Paul hopes for peace on the day of wrath: if humans are going to experience the peace that God has in store for them, God will need to intervene and bring it about.

Romans 5:1-11

Paul returns to the topic of peace and wrath in Romans 5:1-11. In this second pericope, he claims that the justified *already* possess peace with God, who has given believers peace and has reconciled them to God's self. On the basis of this, believers have confidence that they will be saved from the wrath to come.

This passage provides a transition to a new section of the epistle; peace introduces this section and serves as the sign for the next part of the argument. In contrast to chapter 3, where no one is righteous and no one knows the way of peace, here Paul declares that “having been justified (or made righteous), “we have” peace with God . . . (v. 1).¹³ Moreover, whereas peace was expected in the future in chapter 2, here it is already the experience of the justified. The indicative verbs in 5:1-2 accentuate the certainty with which Paul states that believers experience peace now.¹⁴ Not only do they

1 Enoch 45:4-6; *Ps.* 34:14-15 [LXX 33:15-16], 37 [LXX 36]:27-28; *Obad.* 15-21; *Joel* 3:11-21; *Matt.* 25:31-46; *4 Ezra* 7:21.

¹³ A textual variant in 5:1 has led commentators to speculate on whether Paul considers peace to be the present experience of Christians (ἔχομεν) or whether he exhorts his hearers to strive for peace (ἐχόμεν). The manuscript tradition is evenly divided. The context of 5:1 has led a majority of interpreters to support the indicative reading ἔχομεν. However, perhaps the debate has created a false dichotomy between peace as gift and peace-making as an activity to which Christians are called. In Romans, God secures peace, but Paul also calls believers to live out God's peace, especially in the latter chapters.

¹⁴ Paul uses the same verb ἔχω in 5:1 and 5:2. An indicative ἔχομεν in v. 1 would balance the indicative ἐσχήκαμεν (“we have access into this grace in which we stand”) in v. 2. The comparable statements regarding peace and grace in 5:1-2 reiterate a connection Paul has established between the two concepts as early as his greeting in 1:7—“grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In 5:2 and 5:3, the verb καυχώμεθα could

have peace, they also have access by faith into grace, in which they currently stand. On the basis of the experience of peace and grace in the present, they are able to boast in the hope of God's glory, being assured of that which is yet to be fulfilled.

Paul's concept of peace with God in Romans 5:1-11 is further elucidated by his statements about reconciliation.¹⁵ Cilliers Breytenbach argues convincingly that the apostle draws his language of reconciliation from the Greco-Roman political sphere, where the term refers to the act of making peace between warring parties.¹⁶ Paul's usage of such terms reflects this Greco-Roman perspective nicely. According to Paul, formerly we were God's enemies, but at that time God took the radical step of reconciling us to God's self; peace with God is the sign of our change in status from enemies to those who have been reconciled.¹⁷

In Romans 5, what God already has accomplished through the Son determines our present experience and gives us assurance for the future. Paul describes himself and his audience as those who were formerly enemies of God (v. 10), but now have been justified, have been reconciled, and are assured of salvation from the coming wrath. In the past we were weak (v. 6), we were sinners (v. 8), and we were enemies of God (v. 10); we were incapable of rectifying our estranged relationship with God. Yet God through Christ has altered our situation, making it possible for us to have peace with God. Christ has redeemed us from the coming wrath (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:10). This is cosmic language expressing the alteration of the power dynamic. Formerly, we were estranged from God and incapable of changing our own circumstances. But now, as those for whom Christ died, we are justified (v. 9; cf. v. 1), we are reconciled (vv. 10-11), and we have peace with God (v. 1). Moreover, this reversal of status makes it possible for believers to look forward in hope, boasting in God's coming glory (v. 2; cf. vv. 3, 11) and being

be read either as an indicative ("we boast") or as a subjunctive ("let us boast"). I read these verbs as indicatives.

¹⁵ In Rom 5:1-11, the close connection between peace and reconciliation is signaled by an *inclusio* of vv. 1-2 and vv. 9-11.

¹⁶ Cilliers Breytenbach, *Versöhnung: Eine Studie zur paulinischen Soteriologie*, WMANT 60 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989), 56-57.

¹⁷ Cilliers Breytenbach, *Grace, Reconciliation, Concord: The Death of Christ in Graeco-Roman Metaphors*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 135 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 172-77.

assured of salvation from the coming wrath (v. 10; cf. v. 11).

Paul anticipates in Romans 5, as in Romans 2, the imminent wrath of God; however, here he offers assurance of salvation in the face of it. Wrath in 5:9 is God's wrath.¹⁸ The revelation of God's wrath has been a theme since 1:18. In addition, as we have seen, the expectation of wrath in Scripture frequently refers to God's final judgment.¹⁹ God's wrath is as real and imminent in chapter 5 as it was in chapter 2; however, here Paul expresses certainty that those who have been justified can expect to be saved from it. The present experience of justification, reconciliation, and peace with God fills believers with confident hope. Of course, peace is not the source of hope; the source is Christ, whose death has brought about their peace and whose life sustains their confidence. For Paul, what God has done through Christ has altered their status—formerly enemies, now at peace with God; thus, Paul anticipates salvation on the day of wrath.

Before proceeding to Romans 12, I want to compare wrath and peace in Romans 5 with Romans 2. In chapter 5, wrath is something to be expected, just as Paul warns about the coming day of wrath in chapter 2. Wrath and peace in the two chapters denote two very different experiences: either the experience of being "enemies," warned about the coming day of wrath, or that of being "reconciled," having "peace with God," and on the side of life. In chapter 2, wrath and peace are both anticipated results of future judgment; yet peace with God is not possible, because Paul thinks no one does what is right. However, in chapter 5 he proclaims that God has altered the power dynamics. As a result believers already possess peace with God, which provides confidence of salvation in the face of the coming wrath.

In this paper, I am addressing three passages in which the Greek terminology for wrath and peace occurs, and for reasons of space will not discuss Romans 9-11. However, similar themes are found in those chapters (e.g., reconciliation [11:15], God's love for enemies [11:28], the delay of wrath for the purpose of mercy [9:22-23]). In my opinion, they contain a similar understanding to that underlying the portrayal of wrath and peace in chapter 5: namely, Paul attributes wrath solely to God (5:9; 9:22) and

¹⁸ The Greek word θεός ("God") does not occur in 5:9; however, the context makes it clear that Paul is referring to the wrath of God here.

¹⁹ See n. 6 above.

anticipates God's transformation of Israel's enmity on account of God's love (5:8-10; 11:28).²⁰

Romans 12:18-21

In Romans 12, the role of peace in the experience of believers is expanded horizontally to living peacefully with all. This chapter builds on the trajectory that Paul has already established: peace, which is anticipated in chapter 2, becomes a reality of peace with God in the present for believers in chapter 5. For this reason Paul in chapter 12 is able to exhort believers out of the peace they have received with God to live in peace with everyone. In contrast to the exhortation to live peacefully, believers are excluded from the realm of wrath and are instructed not to take revenge but to leave wrath to God.

Here, for the first time in the epistle, Paul explicitly appeals to peaceful human interactions: "live peaceably with all persons" (12:18).²¹ In chapter 3 he claimed that no one knew the way of peace. One result of the change in status in chapter 5, from enemies to those having peace with God, is that Paul can now exhort believers to put into practice the peace they have received from God.²² J. Louis Martyn refers to this alteration of status resulting in the

²⁰ I look forward to insights that may arise from a more complete study of how wrath and peace relate to Paul's vision of Israel in Romans 9-11, which I will be pursuing in my dissertation on the topic.

²¹ While the exhortation to live peacefully may be implied in 5:1, the first time that Paul explicitly exhorts his hearers to live peacefully is 12:18. The past few decades have seen growing scholarly interest in the relationship of chapters 12-15 to the rest of the epistle. The trend has been to emphasize the coherence of the letter as a whole. See William S. Campbell, "The Rule of Faith in Romans 12:1-15:13," and Mark Reasoner, "The Theology of Romans 12:1-15:23," in *Pauline Theology Volume III: Romans*, 259-86, 287-300; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 101-102; Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in its Context*, 383. Thus, Paul's exhortations in 12-15 should be seen as appropriate conclusions to the trajectory of the argument in 1-11, not as introducing something new or different.

²² In this final section of the epistle, the exhortations to peacefulness continue to be grounded in the reality of God as the source of peace through the agency of the Spirit. For Paul, the basis for pursuing the things of peace in 14:19 is his prior claim in 14:17 that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Similarly, in 15:13, he concludes both his response to the divisions among Roman Christians in 14:1-15:6 and the body of the letter as whole with a wish that the God of hope will fill the Romans with all joy and peace ... by the power of the Holy Spirit.

possibility of living for God as the creation of “addressable communities.”²³ The immediate communal implications of peace are seen in chapter 14, where Paul's solution to the divisions plaguing the Roman Christian communities is that they pursue peace and the building up of one another (v. 19).²⁴ But he does not limit peace to fellow believers. They are called to participate in bringing God's peace to *all*. By virtue of the peace they have received from God through Christ, he can exhort the Roman Christians to pursue peace both within the Christian community (14:19) and with all persons (12:18).

In contrast to insisting that his readers live peaceably with everyone, Paul says they should leave room for God's wrath (12:19).²⁵ Elsewhere in Romans, as we have seen, he attributes wrath to God's purview. In 1:18 the wrath of God is being revealed against the godlessness and unrighteousness of humanity; in 2:4 the day of wrath is also the day of the revelation of God's righteous judgment; in 3:5 God is just in bringing wrath upon us. That Paul intends for wrath in 12:19 to be understood as God's wrath is clear from the citation of Deuteronomy 32:35: “Revenge is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”²⁶ Paul in these verses claims for God the exclusive right to do what Paul forbids his hearers from doing.

This passage has proven difficult for interpreters. Paul seems to say that our nonviolent response to all, including enemies, hinges upon an eschatological expectation that God will ultimately destroy our enemies.²⁷ However, to read him in this way disregards the central claim of Romans 12:

²³ J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 263-64. Martyn here is writing about Galatians. However, see Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 157-59, 205) for the parallel argument in Romans, especially 12:1ff.

²⁴ For the argument that the divisions in Romans 14-15 are between different Christian house churches rather than individual Christians, see Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

²⁵ Again, θεός (“God”) does not occur in 12:19; however, the context makes it clear that Paul is referring to the wrath of God.

²⁶ The phrase “says the Lord” is not found in Deut. 32:35; Paul adds these words perhaps to further clarify that revenge is not to be taken by believers but left to God. The connection between wrath and revenge with regard to God is also found in Romans 13:4. See n. 31 below.

²⁷ For an example of this argument, see Krister Stendahl, “Hate, Non-Retaliatio, and Love: 1 QS x, 17-20 and Rom 12:19-21,” *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 343-55. For other views on this text, see list in Moo, *Romans*, 788 n. 98.

live in peace.²⁸ In addition, what he says in chapter 12 about God's wrath and enemies must be read in light of the preceding chapters. In 2:4-5 the coming wrath is delayed by the wealth of God's kindness, tolerance, and patience. In 5:1-11 God has provided a way through the death of God's Son to be saved from the coming wrath. Moreover, the death of God's Son that reconciles us to God occurred while we were God's enemies.²⁹ If the rest of Romans is any indication of how God treats enemies, then perhaps there is reason yet to hope that the God of peace has peace and life in store even for *our* enemies.

Putting the Pieces Together

Having briefly examined wrath and peace in Romans 2, 5, 12, let me suggest a few insights that might be gleaned from these individual exegetical inquiries in light of the epistle as a whole.

First, these three passages in which wrath and peace are prominent topics highlight Paul's fundamental distinction between God and humanity. Wrath and peace are both characteristics associated with God; wrath in these chapters is God's wrath. Paul does not shy away from attributing wrath to God, affirming in 3:5-6 that it is not unjust. At the same time the most frequent Pauline epithet for God is "the God of peace."³⁰ God can encompass both wrath and peace without contradiction, but the same is not true for believers. Believers receive peace from God and are called to live into that peace; they are never called to be agents of God's wrath.³¹ The fundamental

²⁸ In my dissertation, I argue that the central statement of Romans 12 is Paul's appeal, "if you are able, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably (εἰρηνεύοντες)" (v. 18). For the structure of chapter 12, see Walter Wilson, *Love without Pretense* [Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2nd series, 46] (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991).

²⁹ Perhaps Romans 9:22-23 intimates a similar understanding of God's wrath being delayed for the purpose of the revelation of reconciliation: while willing to make God's wrath known, God endures with patience "in order that he might make known the riches of God's glory to vessels of mercy."

³⁰ Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:23; cf. 2 Thess. 3:16; Heb.13:20. In addition, Paul claims that the result of the Spirit's indwelling is life and peace (Rom. 8:6).

³¹ There seems to be one exception in Romans in which a human is an active agent in the avenging wrath of God. In 13:4-5, Paul appears to present the authority bearing the sword as one who enacts God's wrath and serves God by taking revenge. This passage is not addressed in the present article. However, I will make two observations. First, Paul does not live in a period when the authorities are Christian. He is trying to explain what he sees around him,

sin is failure to recognize the distinction between Creator and creation. Peace is what believers are called to embody; wrath remains firmly in God's purview.

Second, in these passages there is an interesting trajectory of the spread of peace. In chapter 2, Paul expects peace in the future; however, he insists that the way to peace is not available to humans, since there is no one who does right (chapter 3). Nevertheless, in chapter 5, Paul witnesses to God's in-breaking peace. As a result of God's actions to reconcile people to God's self, believers can experience peace now through life in the Spirit (8:6). While this peace is not the final victory of God's peace over all enemies (16:20), it does result in a new reality. Those who formerly did not know the way of peace are exhorted in chapter 12 to live God's peace horizontally, towards all. Paul's expectation of peace for humans has gone from peace as an impossible future, to peace as God's gift even now, to peace as God's mandate towards all. Thus, the apostle's proclamation of the gospel in Romans could be summed up as the spread of God's reign of peace.

Third, we should note that occurrences of the word "wrath" decrease in the latter chapters of the epistle while "peace" is a prominent theme.³² The topic of wrath seems to fade away in the final section. In an epistle that began with the revelation of God's wrath (1:18), the infrequent use of "wrath" in chapters 12-15 does not justify the claim that it was less important by the end. Nevertheless, as Paul turns toward a vision of Christian living and community, it is peace, not wrath, that seems central. Furthermore, while wrath is introduced in 1:18 as God's apocalyptic revelation, it is the God of peace who receives the final word in 16:20. The increasing emphasis on peace

not exhorting the rulers of his day. Second, even in this instance he ultimately attributes wrath and vengeance to God. There is no strong basis for assuming that wrath in 13:4-5 is not God's wrath. The one bearing the sword does so in keeping with God's wrath. This point is further supported by the close verbal connection Paul draws between the servant of God in 13:4 who is the *ἔκδικος* ("avenger") and the clear affirmation in 12:19: "Vengeance (*ἐκδίκησις*) is mine; I will repay," says the Lord." If vengeance belongs to God, then Paul is giving God credit for the vengeance enacted by God's servant. For a parallel argument from the Hebrew Bible, see the essay in this issue by W. Derek Suderman, "Assyria the Ax, God the Lumberjack."

³² In Romans 12 the exhortation to live peacefully lies at the center of the chapter's literary construction. Also, Paul's solution to the problems facing the Roman Christians is peace (see 14:19; cf. 15:13, 14:17). Paul twice in these chapters refers to God as the "God of peace" (15:33; 16:20).

in the final chapters suggests that Paul's primary eschatological category is ultimately not God's wrath but God's peace.

Conclusion

To summarize, the Greek terminology for wrath (ὀργή) and peace (εἰρήνη) occurs in three passages in Romans (2:5-10; 5:1-11; 12:18-21). Taken together, these passages point up a fundamental distinction for Paul between God and humans. Paul attributes wrath only to God (e.g., 1:18; 2:5-10; 3:5-6; 5:9; 12:19-20). In contrast he exhorts human recipients of God's peace to become agents of peace in the world and in the Christian community. These three passages thus serve as points on a trajectory toward the spread of peace: from peace as an impossible goal in chapters 1-3, to peace with God as a gift through Christ (5:1-11), and finally to the exhortation for believers to live God's peace in the world and in the Christian community (12:17; 14:19).

One implication of this study is that Romans 2:5-10 must be read in light of the trajectory of peace in the epistle. Romans 2:5-10 presents two equally plausible outcomes of eschatological judgment on the day of wrath: wrath, anger, tribulation, and distress for those who do evil, or glory, honor, life, and peace for those who do good. Paul presses the implications of this model to their logical conclusion in light of his conviction that no one is righteous (3:10; cf. 3:11-18, 23). If no one is righteous, no one can experience peace on the day of wrath (3:17); all will be subject to it. Yet, his gospel is the proclamation of a different reality: namely, God through Christ has brought about the reality of peace (5:1). The trajectory of this new reality is that those who have received peace with God can be exhorted to be agents of God's peace (12:18; 14:19).

The result of Christ's bringing about peace for the justified is not the reinstating of two possible outcomes; rather, Christ's peace creates a new trajectory, not based on what humans do but on what God through Christ has done. Those who are justified no longer anticipate the two outcomes judgment scene in 2:5-10; they have peace with God through Christ (5:1).³³

³³ The statement that the two outcomes judgment scene does not apply to the justified does not answer the question of how one attains the status of having been justified. This question invokes long-standing debates in Pauline scholarship as to what Paul's vision is: whether the source of justification is Christ's faithfulness or our faith in Christ as a response to what he has

Where does this leave the concept of “wrath” in Romans? On the one hand, Paul does not deny the reality or justness of God’s wrath; he leaves room for it in 12:19-20 (cf. 3:5-6; 5:9). Neither does he claim that God’s wrath leads to peace (contrast with *1 Enoch* 91:7ff). It is not God’s wrath but God’s love that is demonstrated in Christ dying for us, the result of which is our reconciliation with God and the assurance that we will be saved from God’s wrath (5:8-11). Moreover, Christ died while we were still sinners (5:8), enemies (5:10), and deserving of God’s wrath. Thus, not through wrath but despite the fact that we deserve God’s wrath, God through Christ has justified us, bringing about peace with God (5:1).

On the other hand, wrath is not a central issue for Paul as he turns towards a vision of Christian life in the epistle’s latter chapters. Those who have been justified no longer live in fear of God’s wrath (5:9). He seems to distance them even further from God’s wrath in chapter 12 by claiming they are not to concern themselves with enacting it (12:19-20). Wrath belongs solely to God’s purview. Thus, Paul seems content to affirm the prerogative of God’s wrath, but at the same time he directs attention away from it and towards exhortations for believers to be agents of the new reality of God’s peace in the world (12:18) and within the Christian community (14:19). God’s wrath remains a mystery that he affirms, but his exhortation to believers is to live as agents of God’s peace.

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done—or a combination of these positions. The question is not easily answered. Nevertheless, the abrupt address of 5:1 to those who have been justified and the unfolding of the epistle from this point forward suggest it is addressed to those inside the designation “having been justified,” not to those still needing to be justified. Romans is addressed to believers.