

## Second Sunday after Pentecost

### OLD TESTAMENT – Hosea 5:15-5:6

#### *Punishment Coming for Israel and Judah*

**15 I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.**

**5:15** *return again to my place.* God threatened to withdraw from Israel until, out of desperation, she truly repented. This idea sets the stage for the prophet's next theme. (CSB)

Pictures a lion retiring to its den after the hunt. Due to the people's ongoing apostasy, God's place is now far from Israel. (TLSB)

*seek my face* – This is a truth which is found also in other passages of the Bible, namely, that men seek out the Lord when they are in trouble, they pour out a prayer when His chastening is upon them. Cp. Is. 26, 16. (Kretzmann)

When Israel repents, God will welcome her back. This good news prepares for 6:1–3, where Israel is encouraged to return to a gracious Lord (cf Lk 15:11–32). (TLSB)

#### *Israel and Judah Are Unrepentant*

**“Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. 2 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. 3 Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.” 4 What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. 5 Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. 6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.**

**6:1** *let us return.* A shallow (see v. 4) proposal of repentance (using phrases from 5:13–15), in which Israel acknowledged that God, not Assyria (cf. 5:13), was the true physician (cf. 7:1). (CSB)

Hosea invites Ephraim and Judah to do right. (TLSB)

**6:2** *two days ... third day.* A brief time. Israel supposed that God's wrath would only be temporary. (CSB)

A coming day of deliverance. We would say “in a few days.” God acted in a special way on the third day on other occasions as well, most notably when He gave the Law at Sinai (Ex 19:16) and when Christ rose from the dead. (TLSB)

**6:3** *know the LORD.* A key concept in Hosea (see v. 6; 2:8, 20; 4:1, 6; 5:4). (CSB)

Hosea urges the people to strive for knowledge that begins with “the fear of the LORD.” Israel demonstrates a distinct lack of this knowledge by chasing after Baal. (TLSB)

*spring rains that water the earth.* Israel believed that, as surely as seasonal rains fell, reviving the earth, God's favor would return and restore her. (CSB)

Guaranteed natural events. For sinners, the daily and seasonal rhythms of repentance and faith bring renewal. (TLSB)

**6:4–8:14** The Lord speaks. (TLSB)

**6:4** When Ephraim and Judah join the prophet in confessing sincerely, the Lord will be very pleased. But this was not yet the case. The severity of God's anguish is evident in the two questions He poses. (TLSB)

*What shall I do ... ?* See Isa 5:4. God saw through Israel's superficial repentance. (CSB)

*Ephraim.* Israel, the northern kingdom. (CSB)

*morning cloud ... dew.* Figurative for that which is temporary. (CSB)

In contrast to the Lord's reliability (v 3), the love of God's people was transient, here today and passing away tomorrow. (TLSB)

**6:5** *hewn them.* "Struck or cut them down," as one would a tree. The Lord thus sent prophets to pierce the stubborn hearts of His people by the preaching of His Law. (TLSB)

*by the prophets.* God's spokesmen (see Jer 1:9; 15:19) had denounced the people's sin. (CSB)

*words of my mouth.* The judgments spoken by the Lord's faithful prophets. (CSB)

The prophets were God's spokesmen. Their refrain was "Hear the word of the LORD" (4:1). (TLSB)

*judgment goes forth as the light.* Ter: "Justice is the very fullness of the Deity Himself, manifesting God as both a perfect father and a perfect master: a father in His mercy, a master in His discipline" (ANF 3:308). (TLSB)

**6:6** *steadfast love.* Hebrew *hesed*, a word that can refer to right conduct toward one's fellowman or loyalty to the Lord or both—the sum of what God requires of his servants. Here it perhaps refers to both. The same Hebrew word is translated "love" in v. 4. (CSB)

*not sacrifice.* Sacrifice apart from faithfulness to the Lord's will is wholly unacceptable to him (see 1Sa 15:22–23; Isa 1:11–20; Jer 7:21–22; Am 5:21–24; Mic 6:6–8; Mt 9:13; 12:7). (CSB)

God had commanded sacrifices, yet they were pleasing to Him only if they came from the heart. Jesus quotes this passage in order to condemn the Pharisees' insincerity. (TLSB)

*burnt offerings.* Iren: "It is evident that God did not seek sacrifices and holocausts from them, but faith, and obedience, and righteousness, because of their salvation" (ANF 1:484). (TLSB)

## EPISTLE – Romans 4:13-25

*The Promise Realized Through Faith*

**13 For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. 16 That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness[b] of Sarah's womb. 20 No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” 23 But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**

**4:13** *the promise* – God promised to multiply Abraham’s descendants (Gn 15:5) and to bless all nations through him. This was a prophecy about Jesus. (TLSB)

If Paul wants to speak about the Gospel in the OT, he typically uses “promise” (ἐπαγγελία). Prior to the second century BC, however, that Greek word simply meant any type of “announcement” (literally, “a message upon”), and thus it rarely occurs in the LXX. But since ἐπαγγελία had later developed the notion of “promise” or “pledge,” it is a favorite term for Paul. It occurs particularly as an expression of God’s Word of future blessing to the patriarchs or “fathers.” (E.g., Rom 4:13, 14, 16, 20; 9:4, 8, 9; 15:8; 2 Cor 1:20; 7:1; Gal 3:14–29; 4:23, 28; Eph 2:12; 3:6; see also Acts 13:32; 26:6) (CC)

In Jewish circles, “what is striking is the way in which when the concept ‘promise’ emerges it is subordinated to or its effects seen as mediated through the law.” A couple of examples, which also include the notion of inheritance, illustrate the point. Psalms of Solomon 12 contrasts the deeds of the wicked with the devout who refrain from doing evil. It concludes with this plea: “and let the pious of the Lord inherit the promises of the Lord” (καὶ ὅσοι κυρίου κληρονομήσασαν ἐπαγγελίας κυρίου, Ps Sol 12:6). Prior to the purification of the temple by the Maccabees, 2 Macc 2:17–18 states: “it is God who has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance [τὴν κληρονομίαν] to all, and the kingship and the priesthood and the consecration, as he promised through the law [καθὼς ἐπηγγέλματο διὰ τοῦ νόμου]” (NRSV). (CC)

Whether Paul was aware of the Maccabees text or not, the clause which opens 4:13 marks a striking contrast: “indeed, *not* through the Law was the promise” (οὐ γὰρ διὰ νόμου ἡ ἐπαγγελία). Paul then affirms the positive alternative at the end of the verse: the promise is, rather, “through the righteousness of faith” (διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως). This expression has, of course, been expounded in regard to Abraham throughout the first half of Romans 4. But the “Law versus faith” dichotomy reaches back to 3:19–22, 27, 31. In all cases, righteousness is related to faith and apart from works of the Law. (CC)

Now this is also shown to be true in regard to the promise to Abraham. The addition “and to his seed” is rooted in numerous OT expressions of the promise.<sup>c</sup> Here it opens the door to all those for whom Abraham is father as just articulated in 4:11–12, and also hints toward the “our/us” (ἡμᾶς) of 4:24. Paul expands on this idea in Gal 3:16, where he points out that Abraham’s seed is ultimately one, Christ, which points ahead to Rom 4:24–25. But here in Romans 4 the more expansive application, which Paul proceeds to make in Gal 3:29, is more pronounced. This is particularly true in light of 4:16, where the promise is “to every seed” and Abraham is “father of *all* of us.” (CC)

The specific element associated with the promise in 4:13 is that Abraham is “the heir of the world.” While that exact phrase may not be used in the OT, Cranfield goes too far when he asserts that “nowhere in the OT is the promise to Abraham couched in terms at all close to τὸ κληρονόμιον αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμου.” The notion of inheritance (usually expressed with a verb for “inherit” or “possess” rather than a noun such as “heir”) is pervasive in regard to those who would receive the promises to Abraham (e.g., Gen 15:3, 4, 7, 8; 21:10) and in reference to the promised land of Canaan (e.g., Num 26:53–56; 32:18–19; 33:53–54; Deut 1:8, 21, 38–39). Furthermore, the notion that Abraham, and his seed, would inherit the world: (CC)

succinctly summarizes the three key provisions of the promise as it unfolds in Genesis: that Abraham would have an immense number of descendants, embracing “many nations” (Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:4–6, 16–20; 22:17), that he would possess “the land” (Gen. 13:15–17; 15:12–21; 17:8), and that he would be the medium of blessing to “all the peoples of the earth” (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). Particularly noteworthy is the promise in Gen. 22:17b that Abraham’s seed would “possess the gates of their enemies.” (CC)

Thus, rather than being an illegitimate expansion, Paul’s phrasing encompasses the implications of the overall promise. Indeed, the OT itself speaks repeatedly of God’s people inheriting the “land/world” (יְרֵאָה, e.g., Pss 25:13; 37:9, 11, 22; Is 57:13; 60:21). Sirach 44:21 similarly extends the implications of the promise: (CC)

Therefore with an oath he [the Lord] assured him [Abraham] that the nations would be blessed in his offspring, that he would multiply him as the dust of the earth, and that as the stars he would exalt his offspring, and that he would give them an inheritance from sea to sea and from the River to the end of the earth. (CC)

The initial point Paul makes in Rom 4:13 is that the Abrahamic promise was not received “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου). The referent of νόμος must surely be the revealed Torah, and not merely a “principle” or “system.” It is interesting to notice that Paul just utilized a chronological argument in rejecting a relationship between Abraham’s righteousness and circumcision in 4:9–11. It is interesting to ponder why he does not employ the same type of temporal argument regarding the Law here, especially since he does utilize it in Gal 3:15–18. The most plausible reason is that whereas Galatians was focused more narrowly upon the Mosaic Law, in Romans Paul expands the reach of νόμος beyond those who have received it in revealed form. Despite Jewish assertions to the contrary (see the commentary on 4:2), there is no scriptural warrant for presuming Abraham knew the commands of the revealed Law. He fits among those between Adam and Moses who lived apart from the revealed Law (2:12; 5:13–14). Thus the description of Rom 2:15, where Paul asserts that “the work of the Law [is] written in their hearts,” more appropriately characterizes Abraham’s awareness of the Law, both when uncircumcised and circumcised. If the point, then, is not temporal, on what basis does Paul exclude one’s receiving of the promise “through the Law” (4:13)? (CC)

*not come through law.* Not on the condition that the promise be merited by works of the law. (CSB)

Paul is thoroughly Jewish in his language, and yet his thought is worlds apart from that of Judaism. He describes the promise given to Abraham and his descendants in a phrase that the Jewish rabbis used: “That they should inherit the world,” and at the same time he brushes aside the Judaic interpretation which made the promise given to Abraham God’s reward to Abraham for his keeping of the Law, his good works. (Franzmann)

The way of salvation through faith in Christ is suited to all classes and conditions of men. None are so good that they can be saved in any other way; and none are so bad that they cannot be saved in this. (CB)

*his offspring.* All those of whom Abraham is said to be father (vv. 11–12). – This means all believers throughout history. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2) (CSB)

*heir of the world.*† “World” here refers to the creation, as in 1:20. No express mention of this heirship is made in the Genesis account of Abraham. He is promised “offspring like the dust of the earth” (Ge 13:16) and possession of the land of Canaan (Ge 12:7; 13:14–15; 15:7, 18–21; 17:8), and that all the peoples on earth will be blessed through him (Ge 12:3; 18:18) or his offspring (Ge 22:18). But since, as Genesis already makes clear, God purposed through Abraham and his offspring to work out the destiny of the whole world, it was implicit in the promises to Abraham that he and his offspring would “inherit the earth” (see Ps 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34; Mt 5:5). (CSB)

As Abraham became the father of many nations, the world would, in a sense, belong to him. (TLSB)

The point he’s making is that an heir doesn’t have to do anything for the stipulation of the will to go into effect. (PBC)

**4:14** The form of the conditional in 4:14 is again non-committal (see 4:2). For the sake of argument, Paul proposes, “For if those from the Law [οἱ ἐκ νόμου] are heirs, ...” Dunn suggests the phrase “those from the Law” might describe “those who quite naturally saw their participation in the inheritance promised to Abraham as identical with their membership [in] the covenant people, the people of the law.” However, the presence of “from” (ἐκ) brings out a more specific possibility, which Dunn also acknowledges, that “the phrase is thus also an abbreviated form of the fuller phrase οἱ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου [‘those from works of the Law’].” This is more consistent with Paul’s use of variations of that formula, particularly in 3:20 and 4:2 (see also Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10 and the excursus “The Background of ‘Works of the Law’ ” following the commentary on 3:9–20). Cranfield suggests that the phrase depicts those who contend that they “have a claim to the inheritance on the basis of their fulfilment of the law.” He concludes this is “confirmed by the parallel protasis in Gal 3:18 (εἰ ... ἐκ νόμου ἢ κληρονομία [‘if the inheritance (comes) from the Law’]).” If so, “the apostle shows that there is something wicked in hoping for an inheritance by the law.”<sup>28</sup> However, in light of the identical phrase stated in the singular in 4:16, Moo’s paraphrase is likely the best understanding: “If those who have only the law are heirs ...” The point is that the definition of who is an heir is not simply equivalent with one’s ethnicity or possession of the revealed Law. As 4:16 reveals, the referent of Paul’s supposition encompasses those who are “from the Law *only*” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου μόνον), but who are *not also* “from the faith of Abraham” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ). (CC)

If, for the sake of argument, those from the Law are heirs, then, 4:14 contends that faith is like a cup which has been poured out and remains empty (κεκένωται); God’s promise is similarly rendered null and void (κατήργηται). These are probably not divine passives. Instead, those who are of the Law alone, that is, who pursue righteousness from works and apart from faith, have themselves emptied what comes “through the righteousness of faith” (διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως), as expressed in 4:13. The promise is similarly made ineffective, not because humans can nullify God’s promise, but because they can seek to attain it “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου), an avenue which Paul has just excluded (4:13; see also 3:27; 9:30–10:5). (CC)

Here Paul does not explicitly state why the promise is not through the Law, but it is certainly evident from his previous statements (e.g., 2:21–27; 3:9–20), as well as in what follows. Here in Romans 4 the case of Abraham simply illustrates that “from the Law” (ἐκ νόμου, 4:14) is not the way it is with the promise of God. It is not about anything which proceeds from Abraham, or us, toward God “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου, 4:13). The promise comes by God crediting it to Abraham and his offspring through the righteousness of faith. “Hence to ask more than the faith of Gen 15:6 is to nullify the promise of Gen 15:5.” Why this is so is expressed in Rom 4:16. (CC)

*the adherents of the law.* Those whose claim to the inheritance is based on the fulfillment of the law. (CSB)

*promise – oi ek nomou* means “those who base their relationship on works.” The best example is that found in John 8:39 where the Jews claim Abraham as father but Jesus immediately denies it. They were not children of Abraham because they based everything on physical descent and on human works and worthiness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

The promise is God at work. (Franzmann)

*the heirs.* Those receiving the blessings promised to Abraham. (TLSB)

**4:15** But first, yet another “for” (γάρ) explains that, instead of being a vehicle for receiving the promised inheritance, “the Law brings about wrath” (4:15). Earlier, Paul summarizes how the Law’s continued speaking leaves every mouth silent, holds all the world accountable, and is a means by which humans become fully cognizant of sin (3:19–20). There the phrase “from works of the Law” (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, 3:20) depicts human works done in accordance with the Law with an aim toward righteousness. Now, instead of merely silencing or giving awareness, “the Law” (νόμος) also actively accomplishes something: it works “wrath” (ὀργή). The reappearance of “wrath” recalls 1:18, where the “wrath of God is being revealed from heaven upon every ungodliness and unrighteousness of people” (see also 2:5, 8). But to contend that “the Law” itself accomplishes “wrath” is shocking, particularly to those who “rely upon the Law and ... boast in God” (2:17). Thus this brief thought regarding the Law, as well as those in 5:20 and 6:14, must be explained further. And so they will be, particularly in Romans 7. At this point, Ambrosiaster makes an important distinction: “The law itself is not wrath, but it brings wrath, i.e., punishment, to the sinner, for wrath is born from sin.” (CC)

Before returning to the faith side of the equation, Paul shoots off one more seemingly tangential phrase: “but where the Law is not, neither is there transgression [of the Law]” (4:15). For Paul the absence of transgression does not equate to the absence of sin. Rom 2:12 has already asserted that one can sin, and perish as a result, apart from transgressing the revealed Law. Thus “while every ‘transgression’ is also a ‘sin,’ not every ‘sin’ is a ‘transgression.’” Paul will elaborate further in 5:13–14. At this point, Rom 4:15 hearkens back to 2:23, where those who boast in the Law are charged with dishonoring God “through the transgression of the Law” (διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως τοῦ νόμου). “Transgression” (παράβασις) describes “sin in its relation to law, i.e., to a requirement or obligation which is legally valid or has legal force.” Paul now implies that the Law brings about wrath by the judgment it pronounces upon those who transgress its commands. The Law thereby turns “their sin into conscious transgression and so render[s] it more exceeding sinful.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, rather than leading to the promised inheritance, the Law actually makes things worse (see 5:20; 7:7–13). (CC)

Humans inevitably violate God’s Law and are condemned by it. “The Law always accuses and terrifies consciences” (Ap IV 38). (TLSB)

*law brings wrath.* The law, because it reveals sin and even stimulates it (see 7:7–11), produces wrath, not promise. (CSB)

It does so not because the Law is evil, but because the nature of man is fallen. Apology IV, 38, Tappert: “Paul does not say that by the law men merit the forgiveness of sins. For the law always accuses and terrifies consciences. It does not justify, because a conscience terrified by the law flees before God’s judgment.” Apology IV, 270, Tappert 147: “But without Christ this law is not kept. It always accuses the conscience, which does not satisfy the law and therefore flees in terror before the judgment and punishment of the law.” Apology XII, 88 Tappert 195: “The law will always accuse us because we never satisfy the law of God.” God dealt with Abraham not through law, not on the basis of the law, but on the

basis of a promise. Abraham, of course, was sinful. But that did not destroy God's promise. The promise was not conditioned by fulfillment of the law, it was altogether independent of the law. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

*transgression.* Overstepping a clearly defined line. Where there is no law there is still sin, but it does not have the character of transgression. (CSB)

The Law stands as a boundary. Without such a boundary, there can be no violation. (TLSB)

But where the promise of God, the grace of God, the Christ of God determine that relationship, there is no transgression either. There the promise given to God's people through Micah is fulfilled for all people. (Franzmann)

<sup>18</sup> Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. <sup>19</sup> You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19)

There will be men who, believing in the God who justifies the ungodly, will in the beggary of faith turn to God their gracious King (Matthew 5:3) and in meek dependence of faith will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5) (Franzmann)

**4:16** The reason(s) why the promise is “through the righteousness of faith” (διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως) and not “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου, 4:13) is a question which has been lingering. Paul profoundly articulates his answer in 4:16. This verse also introduces the thoughts he runs with all the way to the climactic end of the chapter. However, Cranfield observes: “The first part of the verse is strikingly elliptic.” The expression “on account of this” (διὰ τοῦτο) usually draws a conclusion from what precedes. But here it primarily points ahead (see the textual note), as Paul goes on to express the reason why the promise is “from faith” (ἐκ πίστεως). This shorthand prepositional phrase occurs twice in the thematic verse 1:17, as well as in 3:26 and, specifically in reference to the circumcised, in 3:30. Additionally, the same thought is encapsulated by “through faith” (διὰ πίστεως) repeatedly (3:22, 25, 30, 31) and “by faith” (πίστει) in 3:28. In essence, Paul “says that only faith can accept the promise. He therefore correlates and connects promise and faith” (Ap IV 50, after citing Rom 4:16). (CC)

In the middle portion of 4:16, Paul specifies two reasons why the promise is received “from faith.” The first expresses purpose: “in order that [it is] in accordance with grace” (ἵνα κατὰ χάριν). Based upon the clause to follow, where “the promise” is the subject, one is intended to assume that “the promise” is the subject (“it”) here as well. Thus “the promise” is “from faith” in order that “the promise” be “in accordance with grace.” In 4:4, “in accordance with grace” (κατὰ χάριν) was excluded when a worker simply received what was owed. Instead, 4:5, by implication, expresses what is “in accordance with grace”: “not working, but believing” is grace. Believing upon a God who declares the ungodly righteous (τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ) is a further expression of grace, for “his faith is being credited for righteousness” (λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην, 4:5). On the basis of 4:4–5, Dunn concludes: (CC)

The interlocking correlatives are ἐκ πίστεως [“from faith”] and κατὰ χάριν [“in accordance with grace”]: God's gracious outreach to man is of such a character that it can only be received in unconditional openness. Whatever restricts or obscures that openness, and the character of faith as sheer receptivity and dependence on God, denies and restricts that grace. (CC)

The force of the second reason, “so that the promise is certain to every seed” (εἰς τὸ εἶναι βεβαίαν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν παντὶ τῷ σπέρματι, 4:16), is debated. Käsemann contends that “it is consecutive, offering the

conclusion.” Dunn suggests that, as with the previous phrase, “the construction is again final and not merely consecutive.”<sup>40</sup> His use of “merely” brings up an important point in regard to such categories. Moule points out that “the Semitic mind was notoriously unwilling to draw a sharp dividing-line between purpose and consequence.” Wallace expounds: “In other words, the NT writers employ the language to reflect their theology: what God purposes is what happens and, consequently, ἵνα [‘so that’] is used to express both the divine purpose and the result” (cf. 3:8). Thus this clause, utilizing the comparable “so that ... is” (εἰς τὸ εἶναι), expresses *both why* God does it all “in accordance with grace” (κατὰ χάριν), as well as *his intended result*. Thereby it is God’s gracious intention that his promise be “certain” (βεβαίαν), that is, solid, certain, and guaranteed to every one of Abraham’s offspring. As with Abraham (4:2–3), the fact that the action all goes from God toward us excludes any notion of our works. “If the promise were conditional on our works, it would not be guaranteed” (Ap XX 10, after citing Rom 4:16). (CC)

Paul refers to Abraham’s “seed” in 4:13 and here in 4:16. He now provides his definition of “every seed” (παντὶ τῷ σπέρματι). In so doing, he uses the exact same phrasing “not only, but also” (οὐ ... μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ) as he did in 4:12 when expressing a similar thought. It is, therefore, most likely that the combination is to be understood in the same manner here, as well as in 4:23–24. In 4:12 Paul speaks of one and the same group; Abraham is the father of “not ... only, but ... also ...” He does so here as well, though in singular or individual terms. The promise is secure to “every seed, not to the one from the Law only, but to the one who is also from the faith of Abraham, who is father of all of us” (4:16). This definition both expands and narrows what was the prevalent Jewish understanding of those to whom the phrase in 4:1, “Abraham, our forefather,” applies. (CC)

Moo speaks of Paul’s definition as “a ‘qualified’ universalism.” The universal aspect is encompassed by the expression that he “is father of all of us” at the end of 4:16. But it is also present in “every [παντί] seed” earlier in the verse; the promise is certain to *every offspring*. The narrowing or qualification is that the promise is not simply or automatically to the seed who are “from the Law” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου). In 4:12, the phrase was “to those not from circumcision only” (τοῖς οὐκ ἐκ περιτομῆς μόνον). Here it is “not to the one from the Law only” (οὐ τῷ ἐκ τοῦ νόμου μόνον). In both places, “not only” (οὐ ... μόνον) is immediately followed by “but also” (ἀλλὰ καὶ). Being “from circumcision” (4:12) and/or “from the Law” (4:16) are not, in and of themselves, determinative of membership in Abraham’s family. This was explained in regard to circumcision in 2:25–29. Now there is a “but also” for “from the Law” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου) as well. It is “*but* to the one who is *also* from the faith of Abraham” (ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ, 4:16). Being his seed does not depend on being circumcised (4:9–12); neither does it “rely upon the Law” (2:17). As 4:14 similarly asserts, the promised inheritance is not in any sense “from the Law” (ἐκ νόμου). Indeed, “the Law” (νόμος) works wrath instead (4:15). As a result, as Paul proceeds to speak of faith in the promise, “the Law” (νόμος) disappears from sight through the end of the chapter and all the way until 5:13. (CC)

At the same time, Paul’s phrasing also means that being circumcised and/or of the Law are not exclusionary. The definitive element, in both places, is being of the faith of Abraham. In 4:12 the “but also” was expressed as “*but* to those who *also* follow [in] the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham which [he had while he was] in [the state of] uncircumcision.” Here, Paul simply writes, “But to the one who is also from the faith of Abraham” (ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ). Abraham had this faith while uncircumcised, *and* he had this faith while circumcised. Thus one can have this faith while being “from the Law” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου, 4:16). And one can have this faith while being “without the Law” (ἀνόμος, 2:12). The definitive element for all is being “from the faith of Abraham” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ, 4:16). (CC)

*it.* Salvation. “If the promise were to depend upon our works, it would not be sure.... When would we know that we had received it?” (Ap XX 87) (TLSB)



*depends on faith* – The grace of God is the efficient cause. Faith is the receiving cause. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

Faith, promise, grace – these three constitute an indivisible trinity. (Franzmann)

Ephesians 2:8-9, “<sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast.”

A summary of the thought of vv. 11–12. For the close correlation between faith and grace see 3:24–25; Eph 2:8–9. (CSB)

*not only to the adherent of the law.* Jewish Christians. (CSB)

*who shares the faith of Abraham.*† Gentile Christians who share Abraham’s faith but who do not possess the law. (CSB)

All who share Abraham’s faith. (TLSB)

**4:17** Rom 4:17 points out how Abraham’s faith was in God’s Word of promise. The promise stated that he would not be father of one nation only. Instead, “just as it stands written: ‘I have placed you, and so you are, father of many nations’ ” (4:17). Paul does not quote the first part of Gen 17:5 in which God alters his original name, Abram (“exalted father”), to Abraham (“father of multitudes”), since Paul always refers to the patriarch as Abraham. (CC)

But what does “from the faith of Abraham” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ) mean? The remainder of 4:17 introduces Paul’s exposition of that all-important phrase. Thus 4:17 functions as a hinge which “not only” wraps up 4:13–16, “but also” drives ahead to define Abraham’s faith. (CC)

In the remainder of Romans 4, numerous references to God’s Word and his spoken promise convey the basis or grounding of Abraham’s faith. These include “just as it stands written” (καθὼς γέγραπται, 4:17), “according to that which was spoken and now stands in effect” (κατὰ τὸ εἰρημένον, 4:18), “the promise of God” (τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:20), “what was promised [by God] and still in effect, he [God] is powerful also to do” (ὃ ἐπήγγελται δυνατός ἐστὶν καὶ ποιῆσαι, 4:21), and “written on his account” (ἐγγράφη δὲ δι’ αὐτόν, 4:23). Yet, as in 4:5, Abraham’s faith was not only in *what* God spoke, but also in the God *who* spoke. This emphasis begins immediately after the quotation of Gen 17:5 in the second half of 4:17: “before whom he believed God, the one who makes the dead alive and calls the things not being so that [they] are being.” (CC)

Earlier, Paul described the faith which is being credited for righteousness as “on the One who declares the ungodly righteous” (4:5). In 4:17 Abraham “believed God,” and the content of his faith is also expressed. God is further defined with two phrases connected by one distributive article, “the one” (τοῦ). The first phrase, “the one who makes the dead alive” (τοῦ ζῳοποιούντος τοὺς νεκρούς), is affirmed elsewhere. For example, in LXX Deut 32:39 God declares, “I will kill and I will make alive” (ἐγὼ ἀποκτενῶ καὶ ζῆν ποιήσω). LXX Ps 70:20 (MT/ET 71:20) has the psalmist affirming to God, “You have made me alive” (ἐζῳοποίησάς με). Similar is 1 Sam 2:6. At the end of this chapter, Paul will assert that this life-giving characteristic of God is exemplified by the resurrection of Jesus (4:24–25). He also extends God’s power over death to give life to all believers; see further the commentary on 8:11 (see also, e.g., 1 Cor 15:22, 36, 45). Here, however, Paul is speaking of what Abraham believed, and he applies this reference specifically to God’s life-giving power over the deadness. (CC)

*as it is written* – Paul quotes Genesis 17:5 to affirm the universality of grace. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

*I have made you.* God's promise, spoken before Abraham's son Isaac was born, was so certain that it is in the past tense: I have done this. (TLSB)

*in the presence of God.* God considers Abraham the father of Jews and believing Gentiles alike, no matter how others (especially the Jews) may see him. (CSB)

God personally spoke this promise to Abraham. It did not come through another person. (TLSB)

Paul gives a sort of case history of faith, which is more vivid and more revealing than a definition. (Franzmann)

*the God who gives life to the dead.* The main reference is to the birth of Isaac through Abraham and Sarah, both of whom were far past the age of childbearing (see Ge 18:11). Secondly Paul alludes also to the resurrection of Christ (see vv. 24–25). (CSB)

God's power is seen in His gift of life and in creation. (TLSB)

*calls into existence the things that are not.* God has the ability to create out of nothing, as he demonstrated in the birth of Isaac. (CSB)

**4:18** *Against all hope ... in hope believed.* When all hope, as a human possibility, failed, Abraham placed his hope in God. (CSB)

Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. (TLSB)

For most people hope may be considered wishful thinking: "I hope things work out," "I hope the weather is nice tomorrow." Hope in this sense is limited to what can reasonably be expected. In contrast, biblical hope is the certain expectation of the fulfillment of God's promises, even when such hope is directly contrary to human reason and experience. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 3)

**4:19** *not weaken in faith.* Abraham had some anxious moments (see Ge 17:17–18), but God did not count these against him. (CSB)

Abraham did not doubt. Faith may vary in strength, but even weak faith justifies because of Christ's work. (TLSB)

Faith looks at God with open eyes, faith does not "suppress the truth." Faith is open-eyed toward man's impotence. (Franzmann)

*considered.* Faith does not refuse to face reality but looks beyond all difficulties to God and his promises. (CSB)

*a hundred years old.* Considered too old to father a child. (TLSB)

*body...good as dead* – Paul uses the same root nekro-, to describe both Abraham and Sarah's dead condition. In the first instance it refers to Abraham's possible impotence because of age, and in the second it refers to the barrenness of Sarah's womb. This deadness left them in a helpless and hopeless situation, humanly speaking. In addition to their physical weakness God had rejected Abraham's efforts to beget his heir by taking Hagar as his wife (Genesis 16). There was only one thing Abraham could do: hope that God could and would give life to the dead. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 3)

*barrenness of Sarah's womb.* Sarah was ten years younger than Abraham (see Ge 17:17) but well past the age of bearing children. (CSB)

Sarah was 90 (Gn 17:17), past childbearing age. (TLSB)

**4:20–21** These things can only be truly said of Abraham as a forgiven sinner. His actions demonstrate some doubts (cf Gn 16). When sins are forgiven, only the fruit of faith remains. (TLSB)

**4:20** *strong.* Abraham drew strength and confidence from his faith. (TLSB)

He lived by the word that proceeded from the mouth of God and grew strong on it. (Franzmann)

We should never doubt the truth of what God has declared, on account of any difficulties in the way of its fulfillment; but should expect its fulfillment as certainly as if there were not obstacles in its way. Is. 40:8; 46:10; Luke 21:33 (CB)

*gave glory to God.* Because Abraham had faith to believe that God would do what he promised. Whereas works are man's attempt to establish a claim on God, faith brings glory to him. (CSB)

**4:22** *That is why.* Abraham's faith was "credited to him as righteousness" because it was true faith, i.e., complete confidence in God's promise. (CSB)

*was counted to him* – *logizo* is used three times in our text (vv 22, 23, 24). It often is used in extra-biblical Greek as a technical term in business and commerce, meaning "credit to someone's account. In our text the usage conveys the idea of "being credited with something for which one has not paid. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 3)

**4:23** *not... for his sake alone.*† Abraham's experience was not private or individual but had broad implications. If justification through faith was true for him, it is universally true. (CSB)

God's dealings with Abraham exemplify how God credits to us the righteousness Christ earned. Abraham's faith serves as a prototype for our own faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 3)

This record of Abraham's faith, Paul says, was written for our instruction (cf. 15:4); his faith is a prototype and exemplar of our own. (Franzmann)

What is written in the Scriptures was written for the instruction of men, not only of that age, but of all ages. They are given by inspiration, and are all profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. They should therefore be studied by all who have them; and should be sent to all the destitute that they may be led to believe on Christ, and thus obtain eternal life. (CB)

**4:24** *counted to us.* As Abraham was justified because he believed in a God who brought life from the dead, so we will be justified by believing "in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." (CSB)

A faith that can be reckoned to us as righteousness will have in it the three impulses that lived in Abraham's faith: an open-eyed and overawed recognition of the Godhead of God, and open-eyed appraisal of the desperation of man, and a desperate lay-hold of the proffered redeeming Word of God, His promise. (Franzmann)

*Him who he raised.* The Father, working through the Holy Spirit (cf 8:11). The entire Trinity was involved in the resurrection. (TLSB)

**4:25** † These words, which reflect the Septuagint (Greek) translation of Isa 53:11–12, are probably quoted from a Christian confessional formula. (CSB)

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are, essentially, one act. Jesus was crucified to pay the penalty for our sins. His resurrection demonstrates His power, assures us that God approves of His work, and is a promise of our resurrection (1Co 15:17). (TLSB)

**4:13–25** Abraham trusted that God was able to do what He promised. Trials and challenges may tempt us to doubt God’s promises. As He did with Abraham, God will strengthen our faith, assure us of His promises, help us to trust, and fulfill all He said He would do. • Lord, I believe. Assure me when I doubt, and strengthen my faith. Amen. (TLSB)

## GOSPEL – Matthew 9:9-13

*he Calling of Matthew*

**9** As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, **“Follow me.”** And he rose and followed him. **10** And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. **11** And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, **“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”** **12** But when he heard it, he said, **“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

**9:9** *Matthew* – Also called Levi. One of the 12 apostles. (TLSB)

*tax booth* – Possibly on the border between the territories of Philip and Herod Antipas, where commercial tolls were levied. Matthew’s administrative occupation likely helped prepare him for writing his Gospel. (TLSB)

*follow me* – akoloothēh - to *accompany* (specifically as a disciple). A disciple was a follower. People in Jesus’ day would listen to a number of teachers and then follow the one whose ideas they liked the best. This is not how Jesus does things. He does the choosing. In this case he found Matthew and asked him to bring his friends. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 4)

John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

Romans 8:29-30 “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

Ephesians 1:11 “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

*He (Matthew) got up and followed* – In contrast to those who only volunteered to follow Jesus (8:19–22), Matthew responded immediately to Jesus’ call (cf 4:18–22). (TLSB)

**9:10 tax collectors** – It is important to begin any discussion of the character and activities of “tax gatherers” with a caveat about the extent of our knowledge. (T. E. Schmidt, “Taxes,” *DJG*, 804, reminds us: “Jews in the time of Jesus were subject to a complex system of religious and secular taxation, the extent and burden of which is difficult to determine.” Much of what scholars specifically conclude about taxation and tax gatherers is limited to “reasonable” conclusions drawn from limited evidence. A good illustration of our dependence on inferences is provided by two different scholarly conclusions about the significance of John’s exhortation to tax gatherers not to collect more than is appointed for them (Lk 3:12–13). S. R. Llewelyn, “Tax Collection,” *NewDocs* 8:74, concludes that these tax gatherers were the actual bidders on tax-farming contracts, but that the *system* imposed limits on how much they could collect. By contrast, J. R. Donahue, “Tax Collector,” *ABD* 6:337, concludes that Lk 3:12–13 implies that these men were mere employees who were limited by their overseers. Both deductions are reasonable; there is no way of telling which is correct.) Specialists in this area work with the assumption that taxation in Roman-controlled Egypt (about which we have more firsthand knowledge through the discovery of various papyri) offers close parallels with taxation in Roman-controlled Palestine. However, even within Palestine, an important distinction existed during the ministry of Jesus. Taxation and tax farming in Judea and Samaria would have been carried out under more direct Roman supervision, since the Roman procurator (who was Pontius Pilate from AD 26/27 to 36/37) had direct power over these regions. In Galilee, by contrast, Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, ruled from 4 BC to AD 39, and any “tax gatherers” would have been operating under his aegis and authority. The Herods were Idumean, not Roman, and tended to be more favorable to the Jewish people than the Roman rulers were. Although we cannot be sure of common perceptions among the Jewish populace in Galilee, there is at least the possibility that animosity toward tax gatherers as collaborators and quislings may have been more muted in Galilee. An entire generation of the populace will have known no other ruler than Herod Antipas, and we cannot be sure that the Romans were uppermost in the minds of Galilean Jews, even though Antipas served only at the good will of Rome. (Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 266, notes the possible need to nuance our understandings at this point. He acknowledges: “This may not make too much of a difference, since Herod was scarcely a popular monarch: kept in power by Rome as a client king, his Jewish orthodoxy was widely suspect.” Many scholars do not even consider the possibility of such a difference in context between Judea and Galilee (e.g., Keener, *Matthew*, 293; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:238). The magisterial study of Herod Antipas is by Harold W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). (CC)

The “tax gatherers” (τελώναι) mentioned in the Gospels were probably engaged in the collection of indirect taxes, that is, customs and sales taxes on commerce as it changed hands and as it passed by toll booths in towns such as Capernaum. Direct taxes on persons and land were collected by government officials, and it is possible that Matthew was one such individual. The fact that he was sitting at the tax office when Jesus called him, however, leads at least some scholars to suppose that he is a minor official, as opposed to a chief tax gatherer (ἀρχιτελώνης) such as Zacchaeus of Jericho (Lk 19:2). Donahue, *ABD* 6:337, notes that τελώνης, “tax gatherer,” could refer to several different levels of those involved in the taxation industry. He thinks that the tax gatherers with whom Jesus associates are most often the employees of supervisory officials, since “they appear at transport and commercial centers (Jericho and Capernaum) and when John preaches to them (Luke 3:12–13), he tells them to collect no more than is ‘appointed’ (*diatetagmenon*, which suggests minor functionaries fulfilling the orders of higher officials).” Under the overall Roman system, individuals would bid on the right to collect indirect taxes in a certain region or town, and the Romans (or the local ruler, such as Herod Antipas) would award the contract to the highest bidder, who then would seek to recover the money that he had already paid as best he could. Such a system obviously would tempt tax gatherers to abuse their office and indulge in greed, and we should probably ground our understanding of why these men were despised in the natural human

tendency toward greed and dishonesty. (Schmidt, *DJG*, 805–6; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 266. Schmidt offers a deduction that may be correct when he writes: “The fact that the tax farmer advanced the money meant that he had excessive wealth to begin with, and in an agrarian subsistence economy, usury was the most common source of such portable wealth” (p. 806). In Galilee, pious Jews may or may not have associated tax gatherers with the Roman order and so regarded them as traitors and unclean by virtue of such associations. (CC)

*sinners* – Disreputable people. (TLSB)

The Pharisees complain to Jesus’ disciples that their teacher is eating with “tax gatherers and sinners” (9:10–11). An ongoing debate in NT scholarship has tried to clarify, insofar as that is possible, what the term “sinners” might have meant in the first-century context of Jesus’ ministry. There are two extreme positions, neither of which is likely to be completely correct. Older scholars (e.g., K. H. Rengstorf) have at times concluded that the Pharisees despised as “sinners” essentially *all who were not themselves Pharisees*, including the general Jewish population or “the people of the land.” Others, led especially by the work of E. P. Sanders, believe that the “sinners” with whom Jesus associated at table were a much more limited group of “traitors” who were despised because they had all severely and unrepentantly broken God’s Torah, and perhaps had collaborated with the Romans as well. The former view also tends to see the Pharisees as harsh and exclusive, while the latter view regards them as more gracious and inclusive. (CC)

One of the keys to understanding the significance of “sinners” lies with the person or group employing the term. Significantly here in the text at hand, it is not only the Pharisees who speak of Jesus eating with “tax gatherers and sinners” (9:11). The evangelist himself describes the scene: “Look, many tax gatherers *and sinners* came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples” (9:10). Now, Matthew surely knew that all Israelites—indeed, all people—were sinners and all were in need of the saving work of Jesus, who had come, and who was to be named Jesus, because “he himself will save his people [all, not just some of them!] from their sins” (1:21). Nevertheless, even the evangelist himself can use the term “sinners” (ἁμαρτωλοὶ) in a narrow, more parochial sense. (CC)

Most scholars no longer think that the Pharisees regarded the general population as “sinners” in the sense of those who were especially depraved or alienated from God. The Pharisees seem to have been an admired and influential group among the people; why would the general populace admire those who despised them? (Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:238, describes “sinners” as “disreputable figures in their own right who had abandoned the law,” and Keener, *Matthew*, 295, speaks about “blatant violators of the law.”) (CC)

Perhaps a commonsense approach to the problem is best. There were surely those people in first-century Judaism who more flagrantly and publicly violated the Law of God. Dishonest or extorting tax gatherers would be among that group of “sinners,” but others would be there as well, likely including prostitutes. This would be the sense in which the evangelist himself uses the term “sinners.” In the mouth of the Pharisees, the term “sinners” would probably have taken on additional meaning, depending on the context. The Pharisees’ own devotion to the practice of ritual purity and to the Oral Torah would, it seems, inevitably have led them to include in the category of “sinners” at least some of the people who despised the Pharisees’ interpretations and applications of Scripture. However, it would be too strong to claim that the Pharisees always would have regarded “the people of the land” as “sinners” in the sense of being gross transgressors of the Torah or unredeemed and outside God’s covenant. (Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 266, suggests that we think in terms of a sliding scale when he writes:

It is very unlikely that anyone in the first century drew a sharp distinction between “people of the land” and “sinners”; we are dealing with shadings, not clear and obvious demarcations. Perhaps a Shammaite

Pharisee would have been happy with a coloured scale: Shammaites—red; Hillelites—pink; “people of the land”—grey; “sinners”—black. There might well have been some disagreement when it came to voting on who came into which of the latter two groups; some ultra-zealous Shammaites might have elided the middle two as well.) (CC)

The Pharisees in our text are concerned about the fact that Jesus is participating in a banquet in the home of Matthew the tax gatherer, and that he is *eating* with “tax gatherers and sinners” (9:11). (Lk 5:29 makes explicit what is only implicit in Mt 9:10, namely, that the house in which Jesus was dining belonged to Matthew himself, whom Luke calls “Levi” (Lk 5:27, 29, but “Matthew” in Lk 6:15). Double names are well-attested in the first century AD as we know from Simon/Cephas (Jn 1:42) and Thomas/Didymus (e.g., Jn 11:16). See the references in Gundry, *Matthew*, 166. We do not know why Matthew chose to call himself “Matthew” in his Gospel (Mt 9:9; 10:3) and never “Levi.”) This brings us to the third important question, namely, the social and religious significance of table fellowship in first-century Judaism. (CC)

**ATE WITH HIM** – To eat with someone was a powerful message of acceptance, trust and the partnership of fellowship which also included a sense of intimacy and familiarity. Jesus took a huge risk here because it indicated that he was someone who hung around with a rough and wicked crowd. In the Lord’s Supper we experience the acceptance Christ has for us. The faith he gave us brings about this acceptance. The Lord’s Supper is also a reminder of the feast that is to come when we join him in heaven

Luke 15:2 “But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Acts 11:2-3 “So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him <sup>3</sup> and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

**9:11 Pharisees** – The intent behind their question was to find fault with Jesus, something they did increasingly (cf v 34; 12:2). (TLSB)

*why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners* – Tax Collectors and sinners were despised and thrown out of the synagogues by the church leaders of their time. They were also not permitted to associate on a plane of equality with Jews in good standing. Tax collectors worked for the hated Roman government and often collected more than the actual tax bill and thereby were getting rich off of their fellow countrymen. Sinners were notorious sinners. In Jesus’ day there was a ranking of people in this order:

- Priests and Sadducees were in class one
- Scribes and Pharisees were in class two
- Rural people were in class three
- Tax Collectors and Sinners were in class four
- Slaves (often Gentiles) were in class five

As to the meaning of table fellowship in general, there seems to be broad agreement among students of the NT and its cultural context. Generally in Mediterranean culture, meals functioned as important ceremonies that reinforced the stability of society and the interrelationships that existed between the members of a given group. Joint participation in festive meals *could* signal the strongest possible bonds of intimacy and mutual affirmation, to the extent that betrayal by a comrade who had shared such fellowship would be experienced as the most bitter of all betrayals (Ps 41:10 [ET 41:9]; Mt 26:23). Given the specific and focused Pharisaic commitments to purity with regard to food and meals, the meaning of a

shared meal *could* be intensified so as to indicate the closest possible fellowship and mutual approval imaginable. (CC)

However, it is necessary to hold a nuanced understanding of what mutual participation at or an invitation to a banquet might mean, and what it might not mean. Two texts from the Gospel of Luke lead in this direction and provide a window into *possible* meanings that could attach to an invitation to a meal. In Lk 7:36–50 we read of Jesus’ invitation to the home of Simon the Pharisee, where a woman who was a “sinner” (Lk 7:39; cf. 7:47) anointed Jesus’ feet. The pertinent aspect of this text occurs in Jesus’ words to Simon in Lk 7:44–46. There Jesus accuses Simon, who had invited him to eat (Lk 7:36), of offering him no appropriate greeting, no customary foot-washing, and no honored head-anointing. In other words, Simon invited Jesus to share a meal, but he did so in such a way that he made it very clear that Jesus was on a lower, or at least provisional, standing in relation to Simon himself. Not everyone invited to dine was being offered full acceptance and approval! (CC)

The other text is Lk 14:7–11. Here Jesus comments on customary practices of table fellowship among some (if not many) of his contemporaries in Judaism. He rebukes them because at the meal to which they are called they struggle to obtain a higher status in relation to others who are also invited. In other words, an invitation to dine can still entail some degree of judgment, inequality, or criticism. Therefore, while sharing a meal in the ancient world could communicate something very intimate and positive, such an invitation could also signal an attempt to reinforce existing barriers and positions of relative status and shame. Not all meals in Jesus’ first-century context served the same functions, and not all the guests invited to those meals were deemed equal. (CC)

Accordingly, when trying to discern why the Pharisees objected to Jesus’ presence at the meal in Matthew’s house, we cannot simply say, “Because Jesus was eating with them, he was signaling his acceptance of and full fellowship with ‘the tax gatherers and sinners.’” Attendance at a meal did not necessarily indicate that at all, as the data from the texts in Luke 7 and 14 indicate. Jesus was not just present at the same meal with tax gatherers and sinners; there was something *different* about how he ate with them. What was it, then, about Jesus’ meal in the home of Matthew, with “many tax gatherers and sinners” (9:10), that gave offence to the Pharisees? (CC)

I can offer four suggestions. The first is that there were those flagrant sinners (such as Matthew) who, from the moment of Jesus’ authoritative call to faith and discipleship, had begun to be transformed. To such people Jesus offered an instantaneous and full acceptance and fellowship. There was no trial period, no probationary activities during which Matthew or another like him would prove himself worthy of full and free acceptance by Jesus. (We cannot know for certain whether the traditions of Pharisaic theology and piety required a probationary period during which a person would have to prove himself before being regarded as a full-fledged participant. Our sources do not reveal that much about the organization of the Pharisees. One possible indication that such a period existed is Josephus’ own brief description of how, as a teenager, he set out to examine each of the major sects in Judaism. By his own account, this process took three years, and when it was over, at age nineteen he began to live in accordance with the rules of the Pharisees (*Life*, 9–12). Reicke, *New Testament Era*, 159, suggests that in this era the school of Hillel required a month-long trial period, while the Shammaites expected up to a year. We do know that the Essenes practiced a kind of “novitiate” that a candidate had to go through before being a full member of the community. According to Charlesworth, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Historical Jesus,” 28, one of the distinct differences between the Essenes and Jesus was that he required no trial period:

For Jesus “initiation” was not prolonged; rapidly one could leave all behind and “follow him,” by repenting and perhaps by being baptized. To join the *haberim* [here referring to members of the Pharisaic community] required at least one month (t.Dem [Tosefta, *Demai*] 2.10–12); but to join



the Essene group took at least two years of preparation and examination, after which all personal items were irretrievably given to the community (1QS 6.13–23).

Even as Jesus' miracles of healing were instantaneous and effective, so is his call to those who are "sick" in spirit (9:12) and in need of a spiritual physician. Only those who refuse to see themselves as needing such a physician will have no place at Jesus' table fellowship, for, he says, "I did not come to call righteous people, but sinners" (9:13). (It is perhaps best to view Jesus' words in 9:13 as ironic: he did not come to call "the righteous," but sinners. Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:240, suggests:

"From the standpoint of the kingdom and the ministry of Jesus, culminating in his death, all are unworthy and in need of forgiveness—the 'righteous,' the Pharisees included." Luz, *Matthew*, 2:35, n. 44, observes that the Protestant reformers tended to join with many interpreters from the ancient church in this ironic understanding of Jesus' word about "the righteous." See Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 30.3 (NPNF 10:201), who says that Jesus spoke these words "in irony." By contrast, according to Luz, Catholic authors more often tend to read Jesus' words about the "righteous" as a straightforward statement.

Another option, in light of the force of Hos 6:6a as dialectical negation, is to understand Jesus' words in 9:13b similarly: "I did not come *only* to call the righteous, but *even more* to call sinners." In this last instance, "righteous" could be a synonym for "believers," as the singular is in 1:19.) (CC)

Second, Jesus' teaching in Lk 14:7–11 indicates that when he was either the host or the guest of a meal, he eschewed completely all notions of relative standing among the guests, holding all to be of equal status in his sight. In that sense, Jesus' table fellowship was radically inclusive and filled with grace. Just as Jesus declared that all in Israel were equally in need of repentance (4:17), so also all were equally the objects of Jesus' own mission to gather Israel's lost sheep (9:36; 10:6; 15:24) back to their God in his own person and ministry. In that sense, to eat at table with Jesus was *always* an invitation to receive through him forgiveness, acceptance, and restoration into full fellowship with God and with those others around Jesus' table. Since Jesus thus proffered such fare at table, no matter who owned the home, every table at which Jesus reclined was *Jesus' table*, with he the true host. (CC)

In the third place and in an interesting contrast with the point just made, Jesus' table fellowship was radically *exclusive*. Everything depended on his own person. Jesus did not call people to do anything other than to follow him and him alone. This always entailed a call to responsive obedience to the will of God; Jesus did not, after all, come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (5:17). However, it was what one made of Jesus and his call that made all the difference in the here and now and that would make all the difference on the Last Day (8:11–13, 18–22, 34; 9:2). (Allison, "Jesus and the Covenant," 80, states this in a provocative manner. In response to the common view that Jesus' opponents thought that his table fellowship was too inclusive, he writes:

I am inclined to think this turns everything upside down. What offended was Jesus' *exclusivity*. Jesus did not assume the salvation of pious Israelites and then go on to add the "wicked" to the redemption rolls. Starting instead with a Christocentric view of things, from the assumption that he himself was the destined king of Israel, Jesus redefined salvation with reference to his own person. And what he required of all Israelites, including the "sinners," was acceptance of God's eschatological representative.) Jesus was not calling sinners of any kind into anything other than a saving fellowship with himself—and through himself, with God the Father. (CC)

Fourth, the meals with Jesus were events at which *transformation* and *conversion* could and did take place; at these experiences of meal fellowship, Jesus was actually *calling* the "tax gatherers and sinners" (9:10–11) to leave their old way of life and to follow him in faith. According to Jesus' own explicit

statement, this is why he had come and why he ate with disreputable, flagrant transgressors: “to *call* ... sinners,” and not the “righteous” (9:13). The meals were, to use modern terminology, evangelistic and missional. (CC)

This too was completely gracious and also radically different from the customary way that table fellowship would normally function in first-century Palestinian society. As the important essay by S. Scott Bartchy reminds us, meals were normally experiences in which the status quo of mutual relationship was reinforced and solidified, not changed. (S. S. Bartchy, “Table Fellowship,” *DJG*, 796, writes about that cultural context: “Even everyday mealtimes were highly complex events in which social values, boundaries, statuses and hierarchies were reinforced.” Again, he emphasizes: “Jesus challenged the central role played by table fellowship in reinforcing boundaries and statuses widely believed to be sanctioned by God. His use of table fellowship as a divine tool for undermining boundaries and hierarchies made him an enemy of social stability in the eyes of leading contemporaries” (p. 797). Jesus, however, sat at table with those who had already begun to trust in him, even with only dim and uncertain faith, and with those who had not yet believed in him and also with those who would reject him. Through that meal and the conversation at it, Jesus reached out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. More than anything else, this shows the gracious character of the meals that Jesus practiced during his earthly ministry. They were an embodiment of grace reaching out “while we were still God’s enemies” (Rom 5:10). (CC)

To be sure, not all to whom Jesus called out at table received his call and responded; many were called, but few were chosen (22:14). To be offered a place at table did not mean that you were already his disciple, a found sheep. The offer was to come and be found, to come and be fed and let the physician make you well. (CC)

The theme of eating with the Lord and with his provision is prominent in the OT, of course, and Jesus’ meal-ministry should be seen as the extension and fulfillment of that gracious provision. Just as Yahweh had fed his people with meals in his presence, now those feedings find fulfillment in the ministry of Jesus who brings to completion the Scriptures of Israel. At the same time that Jesus’ table fellowship looks back to God’s grace in the OT, it also looks forward as an anticipation of the day when many from east and west will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the reign of God (8:11; cf. Is 25:6–8; 43:5; Ps 107:2–3). In his own teaching, the Lord Jesus made the connection between the *present* enjoyment of the wedding banquet with him (Mt 9:15; 22:1–14) and the final, *future* consummation of that banquet when he would return in glory (25:1–13). (CC)

**9:12 NOT HEALTHY WHO NEED A DOCTOR** – The Pharisees erroneously declared themselves healthy (righteous) by observing the Law (mostly what they had created). Therefore they did not see their sin or their need for Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 4)

Jesus is the sinners’ “doctor.” (TLSB)

**9:13** Jesus told the Pharisees, who were proud of their knowledge of Scripture, to go back to school. They failed to see that mercy was the point of God’s work. (TLSB)

*I desire mercy and not sacrifice* – Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 to stress that even in the old covenant empty formalism does not please God. Recognizing one’s sins and having faith in the mercy of Christ is active in showing mercy toward others. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 4)

Hosea condemned Israel for supposing that God desired obedience to ritual laws (sacrifice) more than the practice of mercy. The Pharisees were equally guilty of this sin. (TLSB)

Galatians 5:6 “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

*righteous, but sinners* Those proud of their own righteousness will not respond positively when Jesus calls sinners. (TLSB)

Psalm 14:3 “All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Psalm 53:3 “Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Romans 3:10 “As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one;”

**9:9–13** That Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners may not shock Bible readers today. We think of Him as the friend of sinners. But it was shocking to many first-century Jews that Jesus would practice table fellowship with such people (cf 11:19). Jesus is unlike any other Jewish rabbi. This festive banquet is His opportunity to call to faith people who are conscious of their unrighteousness. Jesus sits with them, not because they are worthy, but because He is merciful. He wants sinners included in His kingdom. • Dear Jesus, thank You for inviting me, a sinner, to Your marriage supper. Amen. (TLSB)