Of course, Paul’s discussion of Abraham is primarily a basis to remind his Christian readers that they can only receive resurrection by believing in the God who raised Jesus. Paul’s discussion of Abraham is a reminder that Christians cannot earn salvation by their own power. Instead, salvation must begin with the merciful action of the God who sent his Son to be crucified and then raised him from the dead.

It is noteworthy that Paul sees salvation as resurrection. For him, salvation is primarily freedom from death in all its dimensions, whether physical, psychological, or spiritual.

Because salvation is freedom from death, salvation is primarily in the future. In this present era Christians, like Abraham and everyone else, face spiritual temptation, physical weakness, and bodily mortality.

What we have now is unconquerable hope inspired by God’s promise. Paul stresses that even when things were hopeless Abraham believed that he might have hope. By implication, Christians must do the same. Inspired by the resurrection, Christians must have hope that despite the presence of suffering and death and evil all around us and even within us, God will give new life both to us and to all creation.

Questions for reflection:

Is Abraham important for Christians today? Why? Must salvation begin with trusting in God’s undeserved promises? Is salvation primarily escaping physical, psychological, and spiritual death and rising to a new life in God? Does praise strengthen faith? How?

16. Romans 5:1–11

Therefore, since we have been set right by trust, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have access by our trust to this gift. By it we can stand tall and boast in our
hope of sharing in God’s glory. Not only this, but we also boast in our sufferings, since we know that suffering produces endurance; and endurance, character; and character, hope. This hope is not going to lead to disappointment, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. While we were still powerless, Christ at the appointed time died for the wicked. One will scarcely die for a good person, though possibly for a virtuous person one would even be brave enough to die. But God demonstrates his love for us because while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Therefore, since we have now been set right by his blood, we can be much more certain that through him we will be saved from punishment. For if when we were his enemies we were reconciled to God through his Son’s death, we can be much more certain now that we have been reconciled that we will be saved by his life. And not only that. We even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (5:1–11)

Christians live in hope. At least from Paul’s perspective, non-Christians have no sure basis for believing that they will ultimately be delivered from the power of death. Hence, they cannot face the future with ultimate confidence and must live with debilitating anxiety. By contrast, Christians have the certain hope of final resurrection and sharing in God’s glory and, therefore, live in peace.

The death of Jesus provides one basis for this hope because it proves that God loves us regardless and will deliver us from final rejection. For Paul, the cross saves us primarily by revealing God’s unchanging and unfathomable love. The primary way we know who God is is by looking at Jesus. Through Jesus we see that even when we were alienated from God he loved us enough to send his Son to die for us. Hence, now that we have come to know how vast God’s love for us is, we can be utterly confident that God will not condemn us at the final judgment. Instead, he will bring us to enduring salvation.

A second basis for Christian hope is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Later we will discuss Paul’s under-
standing of the Spirit in detail. Here we merely note that for Paul the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the risen Christ and, as such, is an overwhelming force, a hidden divine energy which enables human beings to do things which otherwise would be impossible. Consequently, the presence of the Spirit bears witness to the power of God—the very power that raised Jesus from the dead—and thus the presence of the Spirit assures Christians that God is able to give us eternal life. To use a metaphor Paul employs elsewhere, the Spirit is the first installment on the resurrection (2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5).

Significantly, for Paul the primary role of the Spirit is to assure us of God’s love for us and enable us to become loving. Here Paul stresses that the Holy Spirit mediates the experience that God loves us. Through the Spirit God pours his love into our hearts. Elsewhere (especially, 1 Cor. 12-14) Paul stresses the Spirit empowers us to love others.

The certainty of God’s love and the power of the Spirit especially enable us to endure suffering. Of course, as Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 12, God’s love and the Holy Spirit inspire a variety of gifts and ministries. Nevertheless, perhaps the most remarkable fruit of God’s love and the presence of the Spirit is the ability to endure pain and disappointment. Paul is probably especially thinking of the suffering that Christians experience as a result of persecution. Thanks to God’s grace, such setbacks do not lead to disillusionment. In the midst of our pain we feel a deeper sense of God’s empowering love, and that love inspires new confidence.

Indeed, the presence of God’s love mediated by the Holy Spirit makes us boast. Here we should note that despite his frequent condemnations of certain types of boasting, Paul is by no means opposed to boasting in general. What Paul is opposed to is boasting in achievements that are accomplished solely by our own power. Such boasting focuses on us and necessarily alienates us from God. By contrast, Paul endorses boasting in achievements that are accomplished by God’s power at work in us. Boasting in what God is doing through us, of course, focuses on him and deepens our relationship to him. Hence,
we should boast when God's power enables us to endure suffering. Such boasting also invites others to turn to God and receive his transforming power. Hence, boasting in God is part of Paul's missionary strategy.

Consequently, the death of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit reconcile us to God. Earlier Paul argued that without Christ both the Jews and the Gentiles were alienated from God. The Gentiles refused to glorify God, forgot who he was, became lost in sin, and afraid of divine judgment. The Jews claimed that they were keeping God's Law but in fact were not. Consequently, although they boasted, they did so hypocritically. Now Paul shows how both groups can be reconciled to God. Since the cross manifests God's love for sinners, both sinful Gentiles and Jews can love God, and this love makes us receptive to God's Spirit, and through the Spirit we become righteous and boast no longer in our achievements but in what God has achieved through us. Hence, we are reconciled to God.

Questions for reflection:

Do you know anyone who has no hope? What would it be like for us to have no hope? Do we base our hope on the cross of Jesus and the presence of the Spirit in our individual lives and in the Church, or does our hope primarily come from elsewhere? Do we normally feel like we have been reconciled to God? Can we boast in God?

17. Romans 5:12–14

Through one human being sin entered into the world and through sin, death, and thus death came to all human beings, in that all sinned. Before there was the Law, sin was in the world, but sin does not count when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses even over those who did not violate a command as Adam did. He is a pattern of the human being to come. (5:12–14)
Paul now reminds us how, according to the Bible, the estrangement between God and human beings originated. Initially, the first human beings, Adam and Eve, were not alienated from God. Then the first couple sinned, and God punished them by banishing them from his presence and making them subject to death. The devastating consequences of that sin and punishment passed to all humanity.

Paul assumes that sin is not primarily a set of unethical choices but a superhuman force at work in history. Only the first human beings began with a clean slate. All other humans, by contrast, inherit the terrible consequences of the sin that occurred before they were even born. This previous sin and its fatal consequences inevitably lead to new sin and new destruction.

Paul notes that before there was any law sin was at least relatively undestructive. Before people have learned to distinguish right from wrong, they cannot be held morally accountable for their actions. If we do not know what God demands, our failure to perform it does not defile our own consciences or any covenant with him. Hence, to use Paul’s own image, “sin does not count when there is no law.” Later Paul will explain in detail how knowing that something is wrong will make doing it even more catastrophic.

Nevertheless, even when sin does not “count,” it remains destructive. Sinful actions are not always culpable, but they still always produce death. We do not have to realize that what we are doing is harmful for it to be harmful.

By emphasizing that sin always produces death, Paul guards himself against the charge that he is encouraging immorality. His proclamation that Christians are not subject to the law and his celebration of God’s infinite mercy could easily lead to the mistaken conclusion that Paul was advocating libertine behavior. Indeed, earlier in the letter Paul himself noted that “some” accused him of promoting vice (Rom 3:8). It is unlikely that Paul would have brought up this explosive allegation if he did not believe that his readers were already aware of it and suspected it might be at least partially true. Hence, by insisting that sin leads to death even when there is no law, Paul...
makes it clear that he is in no way suggesting that we can sin without there being grave consequences.

Because sin is a superhuman power at work in history, God needs to send us a new superhuman power into history. Moral exhortation based on legal requirements is utterly insufficient. Instead, God must inaugurate a saving power within the human realm where sin and death previously held sway. This saving power must pass from one person to the next and from one generation to the next, just as sin and death have.

Consequently, Paul insists that Jesus is a new Adam. Just as the sin of the first human beings conditioned further sinfulness and led to death, so the righteousness of Jesus conditions further righteousness in all who are open to its power and brings them to life. When Paul himself preaches the Christian message, he invites his hearers to allow the power of the second Adam to deliver them from the grip of sin and death.

Paul presupposes that the reason that Jesus can be the new Adam is that he came down from heaven. Of course, all Adam's natural descendants unavoidably inherited the terrible consequences of his primordial sin. Consequently, as Paul notes here, they all sinned. Jesus, however, came from God and, hence, was not conditioned by Adam's transgression.

Of course, by insisting that Jesus is a new Adam, Paul is suggesting that there is a single salvation for all people whether Jew or Gentile. According to the Bible, all people are descended from Adam, and all became subject to death through his sin. Hence, if Jesus is the new Adam, all people must find salvation through him.

**Question for reflection:**

If we do not believe that the story of Adam and Eve is literally true, can we still agree with Paul that sin is a superhuman force at work in history? If we are victims of the sins of the past, where do we find the strength and direction to move forward? Do some people you know have destructive lifestyles without realizing it? What are the special dangers and benefits of such “innocent” folly?
18. Romans 5:15–21

But it is not as if the misdeed is comparable to the gift. If many died by the misdeed of the one, much more have God’s grace and gift by the grace of the one human being Jesus Christ increased for many. The gift is not similar to what resulted when the one sinned, because the judgment following the one misdeed led to ruin, but the gift, following many misdeeds, led to righteousness. For, if by the misdeed of one person, death reigned through the one, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign alive through the one human being, Jesus Christ. So, therefore, as ruin came to all human beings through one misdeed, thus also the righteousness that leads to life came to all people through one righteous deed. For just as many were made sinners through the disobedience of one human being, thus also through the obedience of the one many will be made righteous. Law sneaked in so that wrongdoing might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased more, so that just as sin had reigned producing death, thus also grace might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (5:15–21)

Here Paul takes care to emphasize that in the final analysis it is inappropriate to say that Christ is a second Adam. Since in the previous section Paul compared Jesus to Adam and suggested that Christ overcame the terrible consequences of Adam’s sin, it would be easy for the reader to assume that Paul believes that Jesus is merely a second Adam. Hence, in these verses Paul emphatically insists that Jesus is more. For sentence after sentence Paul declares that the grace which comes through Jesus is far greater than the harm which came from Adam. Yes, of course, Jesus overcame the consequences of Adam’s fall, but Jesus did far more.

Although Paul does not here explain why he believes that Jesus is more than a second Adam, there seem to be three
reasons. First, whereas Adam was only a human being, Jesus is God’s Son. Elsewhere Paul makes it clear that God’s Son existed from eternity, chose to become a human being, and then returned to the Father (Phil. 2:6–11, Rom. 10:5–7, 1 Cor. 8:6, 2 Cor. 8:9, Gal. 4:4, Col. 1:15–20). Second, through believing in Jesus, people receive God’s own Spirit. Adam did not possess the Holy Spirit. Jesus did and, as Paul will make clear subsequently, Jesus bestows her on all who call on him. Later in the letter Paul will dwell on the blessings that the Spirit of Jesus gives. Third, the salvation that Jesus gives is infinitely greater than the glory that Adam lost. Adam knew only the joy of an earthly paradise. Jesus offers more. We can readily imagine the blessedness of Eden. By contrast, Paul wrote to the Corinthians that no human heart can conceive of the blessings that God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor. 2:9). Later in Romans Paul will insist that no matter how great our present sufferings may be, they do not merit even a comparison with the glory that will one day be ours (Rom. 8:18).

In the midst of his discussion about the superiority of Jesus, Paul makes the astounding comment that prior to the coming of Jesus Law slipped in and caused sin to increase. Of course, this comment fits the context by showing how much Jesus did for us, since it was he who delivered us from this increased sin. Nevertheless, the statement that the Law facilitated sin certainly is not obviously true at first glance, and it certainly would have made conservative Jewish readers anxious. They had surely been taught that the Law was the remedy to sin. Consequently, later in the letter Paul will have to explain in more detail his understanding of the relationship between sin, law, and salvation.

Questions for reflection:

In what ways is it appropriate to compare Jesus to some other archetypal human being (e.g., Gandhi)? In what ways is it inappropriate? What do you think heaven is like and why? Do many popular conceptions of heaven reduce it to a mere paradise of luxury and laziness? Would people actually be happy in such a place?