

# COMPARING SENECA'S ETHICS IN *EPISTULAE MORALES* TO THOSE OF PAUL IN ROMANS

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Although Stoicism-New Testament questions are recently a “weaker draw” for scholars than in the past,<sup>1</sup> a rich history of investigation exists surrounding the exposition of Paul’s thought alongside that of the Stoics.<sup>2</sup> Quite a few years have passed since the last full treatment in 1961 of Paul’s ideas and those of the most prolific Stoic writer, the statesman Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 4 B.C.–A.D. 64).<sup>3</sup> This article proposes to take another look at a comparison of one area of Paul’s thought alongside Seneca’s, that of moral transformation. Since the age in which Christianity first made its appeal was also an age in which the ethical consciousness of the philosopher had been aroused, a comparison of the ethics of the pagan moralists to the ethics of Paul’s writing is almost mandatory for an understanding of Pauline ethics. As Malherbe states: “There can no longer be any doubt that Paul was thoroughly familiar with the teaching . . . of the philosophers of the period . . . which he adapted and adopted to his own purposes.”<sup>4</sup>

Since Sevenster’s study, NT scholarship has largely recognized that the “ethical section” of Romans (12:1–15:13) is more than a separate unit that details the ethical life of the Christian, but is part of a tightly knit argument that runs throughout Romans<sup>5</sup> and even part of the core point towards which Paul has been

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<sup>1</sup> Marcia L. Colish, “Stoicism and the New Testament,” *ANRW* 2.26.1, 377.

<sup>2</sup> Some bibliography is provided by Malherbe and Colish. Abraham Malherbe, “Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament,” *ANRW* 2.26.1, 267–333; Colish, 334–79.

<sup>3</sup> Sevenster completed the primary twentieth-century exposition of Paul’s and Seneca’s beliefs as he compared and contrasted the ideas of the two men within such categories as God, man, social relations, eschatology. J. N. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca* (Leiden: Brill, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> Malherbe, “Paul: Hellenistic Philosopher or Christian Pastor?” in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 68.

<sup>5</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 595; James Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1988), 705; Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, SP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press,

advancing in the earlier chapters.<sup>6</sup> Understood in this way, the entire book of Romans sketches the broad contours of a Pauline ethic as the natural culmination of the gospel presented in chapters 1–8 and presents this teaching in light of a particular state of affairs concerning the church at Rome.<sup>7</sup> Thus this study assumes that the ethics found in Romans, particularly 12:1–15:13, are not general paraenesis in light of the gospel presented in chapters 1–8. Rather, the gospel presented early in the letter undergirds the ethical admonitions given for the Roman situation. This rings true for a number of reasons, including that Paul’s other letters were also written to specific occasions and that Romans is structured in such a way as to place Jews and Gentiles on equal footing before reaching the seminal point of the epistle in 12:1–15:13 that is addressed to the two groups at Rome—one that aligned with Judaistic practices and one that did not. Pointers toward 12:1–15:13 are present throughout the epistle and indicate that Paul’s interest in ethics actually extends from the beginning of the epistle to 12:1ff., which is part of the core point toward which Paul has been advancing in earlier chapters.

Whether Paul adapted elements from the Greco-Roman philosophical moral tradition, or from Seneca himself, some parallels are undeniable; and one parallel in particular, that of cognitive language, may give insight into Paul’s theory of moral transformation. In comparing Paul’s view of moral transformation to Seneca’s (as found in his final work, the *Epistulae Morales*), this study will follow the ethical argument that runs through Romans by surveying the flow of thought in the letter as it leads up to the primary ethical section in 12:1–15:13.

#### Romans 1:1–5:21

At the beginning of Romans, there are immediate indications that Paul is leading toward the primary paraenetic/ethical section of the book and that 12:1 begins the material that is the very crux of this epistle.<sup>8</sup> As early as 1:5, during the

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1996), 361; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 324.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. by Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 185–86.

<sup>7</sup> A. J. M. Wedderburn states that the Roman church had evolved into a type of Christianity called “Judaizing,” or “a form of Christianity which treats Christianity as simply part of Judaism and, more important, requires of all its adherents, whether they are Jews or not, that they observe the Jewish Law as the Jewish Law either in whole or in part” (Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 50). This implies, therefore, that those who embraced a Judaizing Christianity, whether Jew or Gentile, lived by the patterns of thought and behavior of Judaism, an argument supported by Paul’s concern directed toward the division of believers into the weak and the strong in 14:1–15:3.

<sup>8</sup> Giving credence to the theory that the whole of Romans is designed to lead to the paraenesis of 12:1–15:13 is that the situation of chapter 1 turns out to be a mirror image

greeting, Paul declares his purpose “to bring about the *obedience* of faith” among all the Gentiles. After a prayer of thanksgiving for his Roman readers, Paul reveals the thesis statement of the epistle in 1:16–17: the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, and *the one who is righteous will live by faith*.<sup>9</sup> As opposed to some modern readings of this verse, which interpret Paul as saying “the one who is made righteous by faith will live,” Paul opens his letter by implying that he will discuss the power of salvation for both Jews and Greeks and then discuss how the righteousness of God is revealed in this gospel from faith (the faith that gains salvation) *to* faith (the faith that will be needed to live the new life, that is, perhaps the obedience of faith from 1:5). Then 1:17 reveals that faith is not only a conviction but also a way of living rather than a once for all declaration.<sup>10</sup>

After the thesis statement, 1:18–2:11 comprises the first part of the epistle and declares all humans to be sinners while leading up to the declaration “For there is no partiality with God.” In this initial section, Paul reveals his understanding of sin’s nature, origin, and unfortunate results, which is similar in some ways to Seneca’s take on the human condition. The sinful state of humanity includes both Gentiles (1:18–32) and Jews (2:1–29), but the guilt of the Gentiles cannot be based, like that of the Jews, upon observance of the Mosaic Law (2:13).<sup>11</sup> Instead, Paul convicts the Gentiles on the basis of breaking the law God

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of chapter 12, the exact opposite of the life in Christ described in 12–13; chapter 12 is what the situation of chapter 1 *should* be like. In 1:28, Paul says that God has given over the unbelieving Gentiles to an understanding that is incapable of perceiving the will of God. Those who are transformed by the renewing of their minds (*ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς*, 12:1) are restored from the depraved mind (*ἁδόκιμον νοῦν*) of 1:28 that placed them at the mercy of the desires of their hearts (1:24). Only the spiritually renewed mind can have the ability to test and approve the will of God that sets free from wrongful desires. In 12:1–2, Paul calls the readers to present their bodies rather than to degrade them (1:24), and no longer to worship (*λατρεύειν*) the creature (1:25) but to offer rational worship (*λογικὴν λατρείαν*) to God. The worship of sacrifice that is in the spirit reverses the pattern of idolatry. The *ἁδόκιμον νοῦν* leads to disobedience (1:29–31), and the *ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς* leads to fruitful obedience (12:9–21) and the discernment of God’s will (12:2); as one reads the fruits of 12:9–21, they resemble a virtue list that is the exact opposite of the vice list in 1:28–31.

<sup>9</sup> Paul quotes here from Hab 2:4, where the prophet is talking about how to live life, and is contrasting the righteous with the proud. As will become more evident, a primary emphasis of Paul is to take away all pride and boasting from the church. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Dallas: Word, 1988), 44–45.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, “Romans, Pastoral Counseling, and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *RevExp* 83 (winter 1986), 84.

<sup>11</sup> An argument can be made that 1:18–32 speaks about all people, not just Gentiles, because the allusions from Gen 3 here indicate that Paul speaks about all who are descended from Adam. Morna Hooker, “Adam in Romans 1,” *NTS* 6 (1959–60), 297–306. Adam possessed the knowledge of God plainly revealed to him (1:19, 21), and had access to the truth of God before sin darkened his faculties (1:25); yet, he did not honor

had given to them, namely, that of using their reason to know God. Paul traces sin's beginning to the human will (1:23, 28); the nature of sin is confusion, and humans did not notice what was evident about God (1:19). For Seneca, the origins of sin are similar to Paul's ideas, because neither recognizes sin as an inborn personal defect, but the philosopher places greater emphasis on sin as a state brought upon by the external force of vice in the world (*Ep. Mor.* 94.55–56). While Paul also acknowledges sin as a cosmic force later in Romans (3:9; 7:7–25), he begins his discussion of the human condition in chapter 1 with the assertion that sin is human willful disobedience. At this point in his argument, he simply asserts humankind's inclination to sin as a fact because he is concerned with proving that each is responsible for his or her own sin. In chapter 5, Paul will further discuss the sin of every individual as stemming from the sin of Adam, the first man.<sup>12</sup> Seneca, however, cannot afford to stress humankind's internal sinful condition over the external power of sin, because all Stoic moral transformation must be worked from within each individual (and there is no source of outside divine help, as with Paul).

In Rom 1, humans think they are wise, but they are not (1:22); they think they know God (1:21), but they do not. Paul claims that “what can be known about God is evident” to humans (1:19), and Dunn states that this reflects the common ancient belief that there was direct continuity between human rationality and the rationality of the cosmos.<sup>13</sup> This sounds much like Seneca's natural theology, that God is revealed through the cosmos to humankind as a whole (*Ep. Mor.* 90.34). Paul argues that through the rational power of the mind (νοού-μενα), there is a way that all human beings can know God (1:20).<sup>14</sup> Seneca would agree, but would also assert that this is only so because every person was born with a part of the divine in their souls, the rational part (*Ep. Mor.* 41.8). Paul simply believes that God planted rationality within every person, but not that every person was born with the divine already within. Both, however, agree that there is an invisible realm of reality that can only be known through the rational power of the mind.<sup>15</sup> Both Paul and Seneca refer to a previous time when the intellect of humankind was intact and functioned correctly. Paul's renewal of the

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God as God (1:21), he did not acknowledge God (1:28), and he exchanged the truth of God for a lie (1:25). Second Baruch 48:46 appears to link the people of Rom 1 with Adam in an explicit way: “For you commanded the dust one day to produce Adam; and you knew the number of those who are born from him and how they sinned before you, those who existed and did not recognize you are their creator.”

<sup>12</sup> If the text explicitly mentioned Adam here in chapter 1, his presence might introduce the danger of misreading Paul as holding Adam responsible for everyone's sin; and if so, guilt could be laid on Adam rather than on individuals.

<sup>13</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 57.

<sup>14</sup> The second edition of BAGD states that *noe,w* refers to “rational reflection” in this verse (540).

<sup>15</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 58.

mind in 12:1 seems to assume that rationality will return the intellect to what it once was, originally intact (1:20), before being rendered ineffective as a consequence of God's wrath (1:28).<sup>16</sup> Seneca likewise describes a time when everyone automatically did what was right by virtue of their reason without the need for reflection (*Ep. Mor.* 90.38).

Thus for Paul, as for Seneca, the result of humankind's turning from the knowledge that they knew to be correct leads to a perversion of nature.<sup>17</sup> Paul clearly says that the human mind is capable of attaining some knowledge of God prior to the revelation given in Christ. The perversion of this law of nature, however, led to the evil practices of 1:26–27, which are called *παρὰ φύσιν*, casting the argument in technical Stoic terms (for Seneca, *contra naturam*, *Ep. Mor.* 122.5). Paul further names these “against nature” deeds in 1:28 as *τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα*, literally “the things that are not fitting/acceptable”; this phrase recalls the Stoic notion of two types of duty, the ‘suitable’ or ‘fitting’ (*καθήκον*, or for Seneca, *officia*, *Ep. Mor.* 94.33) and the ‘right’ (*κατόρθωμα*). Some argue that because the Stoic technical term for ‘the fitting’ is actually *παρὰ τὸ καθήκον* that Paul has no undercurrent of Stoic thought here,<sup>18</sup> but others claim that the variance in the phrases comes simply because Paul is not an expert in Stoicism.<sup>19</sup> The latter view is more likely, because the use of *τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα* does give credence amidst the rest of the Stoic undertones in chapter one that Paul here refers to the Stoic theory of natural law; but his use of the phrase is not in keeping with its technical Stoic meaning, suggesting his confusion with the intricacies of moral philosophy (*παρα το καθηκον* are “indifferent” things to the Stoics, common things of life that have no ethical relevance because they are outside of the realm of human rationality; this is not in keeping with Paul's argument that the *τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα* are evil deeds that rational humans chose to engage in against God).

For both authors, humankind's corrupted faculty of reason led to a deteriorated life (Rom 1:21–22, 28; *Ep. Mor.* 90.24) and false wisdom (Rom 1:22; *Ep. Mor.* 90.27–31).<sup>20</sup> Seneca's assertion that “they even love their own ills

<sup>16</sup> H. D. Betz, “The Foundations of Christian Ethics According to Romans 12:1–2,” in *Witness and Existence: Essays in Honor of Schubert M. Ogden* (eds. P. E. Devenish and G. L. Goodwin; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 64.

<sup>17</sup> Against the idea that Paul had a natural theology are Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 39–41, Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1949), 106–7, and C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 35.

<sup>18</sup> Rudolf Schnackenberg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 304.

<sup>19</sup> John W. Martens, “Romans 2.14–16: A Stoic Reading,” *NTS* 40 (1994), 57.

<sup>20</sup> Rom 1:22 is likely an allusion to Stoic thought; “claiming to be wise, they became fools” (the idea is implicit in the *Epistulae Morales*, but the juxtaposition of terms is not used). The Stoics divided humankind into the wise and the foolish, and there was no

... the height of unhappiness is reached when men are not only attracted, but even pleased, by shameful things" (*Ep. Mor.* 39.6) sounds much like Paul's "although they have known the just decree of God, that those who practice such things deserve death, they not only do the same but approve of those who practice them" (Rom 1:32). Both authors are saying that humankind has fallen victim to the passions, ἐπιθυμῖα (which Seneca would term the "emotions"). For Paul, however, God has actually abandoned the sinner (vv. 24, 26, 28) to a number of specific transgressions, solidifying a breach in the God-human relationship. Paul states that the Gentiles placed the glory of the creator in the things created by him (1:25), into images of birds, beasts, and reptiles (1:23); with a certain element of self-centeredness, they understood God in their own image or even below.<sup>21</sup> This self-sufficient orientation is branded as idolatry and Paul locates it at the heart of all moral wrong (1:21–25). The god in the shape of mortal man in 1:23 recalls Seneca's description of the wise man, who was considered to be equal to the gods; his soul is proper for the gods (*Ep. Mor.* 92.3) and he is happy as a god (*Ep. Mor.* 73.14).<sup>22</sup> Like Seneca, the ancient world in general considered the epitome of growth to be achieving likeness to God,<sup>23</sup> and Paul here might be playing off of that notion as he describes the Gentiles who think they are wise and who have subsequently created a 'god' idol in their own image. Stowers claims that Paul here is explaining that God has punished the Gentiles by afflicting them with a loss of self-mastery (due to the type of things they are handed over to);<sup>24</sup> certainly, given the Stoic undertones in this chapter, it is possible that Paul is playing off of the philosophical desire to strive for virtue. In any case, Seneca's view of the human condition accords with Paul insofar that humankind's ability to pursue virtue has been compromised by minds that have become distorted by the baser instinct in the soul, and that their God-given reason has become irrational and unable to judge right from wrong.

The difference, however, between Seneca and Paul is that the moral problem for Paul is not rooted in an error of judgment but in disobedience (although later chapters will confirm that the solution lies in correcting an error of reason). The problem of idolatry is not in the mind, but in the will.<sup>25</sup> The Gentiles defiantly fail to acknowledge God as creator (1:19–21) and turn to idols (1:22, 23, 25) even

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intermediary state; there was simply the immediate jump from one state to the other.

<sup>21</sup> Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2000), 209.

<sup>22</sup> Martens, 58.

<sup>23</sup> J. Ann Jervis, "Becoming like God through Christ: Discipleship in Romans," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 144.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 94.

<sup>25</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 33.

though they know by nature the things they should do (1:26–27). The various offenses that God has given the Gentiles over to due to their disobedience (homosexuality in 1:26–27 and various antisocial behaviors in 1:28–31) shows that God has allowed the Gentiles to be enslaved to their own passions and inability to control the emotions, particularly desire. For Seneca, the average human being is also enslaved to the emotions, but this is because the emotions emerge from a state of faulty reasoning and judgmental error (*Ep. Mor.* 31.9–11; 74.21). Clearly, however, Paul is also asserting that the Gentiles lie in a state of faulty reasoning, becoming “futile in their thinking” as a result of not honoring God (1:21).

In 2:1–11, Paul goes on to subvert those who judge anyone for the deeds mentioned in 1:18–32.<sup>26</sup> A vital realization here is that Paul is speaking about all people; this section begins to place everyone on the same playing field as equal in the sight of God. This theme will recur again and again before 12:1, because there will be no chance of living in community and living by faith if Paul cannot establish everyone as equal; humility and equality are fundamental principles needed to create both community and ethics. In 2:6, Paul makes the interesting assertion that God will repay everyone for their deeds; those who patiently do good (2:7) will reap eternal life. At first glance, this may seem to oppose Paul's gospel of salvation by grace, but instead this reinforces that for Paul there is no grace without the good works that are spurred on as a response to the mercies of God. Paul demands good deeds in 2:6–7, stemming from the obedience of faith (1:5, 17) and in chapters 12–13 he will spell out exactly what these are. The primary difference between 2:1–11 and chapter 12, however, is that empowerment has entered the picture in the latter;<sup>27</sup> Paul has not made such a statement as 2:6–7 without explaining in depth as his letter goes on.

In 2:12–3:20, which completes the first major section of the letter (1:18–3:20), Paul continues toward placing Jews and Gentiles on the same level of need, and he explains that being a person of God is a matter of the heart and not of external deeds (2:29);<sup>28</sup> yet even so, 2:13 continues the call for virtuous works put forward in 2:6–7 as Paul admonishes that the doers of the Law rather than the hearers will be justified. Tension arises in Paul's argument in 2:14–16 when, amidst the discussion about the Jew who boasts in the Law even while not being able to keep the Law, Paul presents the surprising assertion that there are

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<sup>26</sup> Stowers believes that 2:1 does not change to the second person as a turn from Jewish polemic against the Gentiles to Paul's address of the Jew directly; rather, the abruptness of the change is typical in diatribe and serves for 2:1ff. to heighten the indictment of all men in 1:18–32. Stanley K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans*, SBLDS 57 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 103–10.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, 177.

<sup>28</sup> The statement from 2:6 that God will repay all according to their deeds does not hinder this in light of the argument of the book as a whole; those in Christ are still expected to choose to enslave themselves to the Spirit rather than to sin.

in fact Gentiles who keep the Law instinctively and are therefore a law unto themselves. Commentators have long held that Paul is holding here the possibility of Gentiles keeping the law of nature (that these Gentiles do exist) similar to the manner in which Jews are given moral assistance from possession of the Mosaic Law.<sup>29</sup> These Gentiles would have their conscience as their natural guide (2:15) and in fact would be acquitted on God's day of judgment (2:16). As Martens asks, however, if the Mosaic Law cannot lead Jews to righteousness, how can nature (φύσις) lead the Gentiles to the same?<sup>30</sup> The argument does not exactly cohere with Paul's indictment of the Gentiles in chapter one on the basis that they have not followed natural law. If Paul is still using Stoic terminology when he uses φύσις here, as he was in chapter 1, then Martens likely has the key to interpreting this passage. Seneca explained that the wise man is the only one who ever performed virtue and lived according to nature, yet there have been few if any men who have been able to actualize their virtue to this degree (*Ep. Mor.* 42.1); most (if not all) are simply somewhere on the road toward progress. Paul, whose argument contains Stoic overtones, knows that the existence of the wise man is theoretically possible but hardly likely; hence, he does not know any Gentiles who keep the law of nature.<sup>31</sup> No one, then, is a doer of God's Law.

In the midst of this argument, Paul continues to use cognitive language (i.e., talk of the human faculty of reason), namely that of συνειδήσεως in 2:15. He writes of the conscience in two other places in Romans (9:1, 13:5). For Paul, the conscience appears to be the place where individuals conduct self-examination and judge their actions,<sup>32</sup> and this is true also for Seneca (*Ep. Mor.* 43.5; 97.15–16). Thus, self-recognition takes place through the faculty of reflection by the conscience. Both Paul and Seneca assert that there are universal standards of right and wrong, and that a healthy conscience discerns these; although for Paul, the conscience is subject to God's will and commandment (13:5). This use of cognitive language adds to the talk of rationality in chapter one as Paul builds a case toward how to morally transform in Rom 6 and 12:1–2, the most important component of which will involve a new self-recognition for the believer.

By 3:21–26, Paul has removed all distinctions between persons, and explicitly states that justification is the grace of God, offered as a gift to all who have faith through redemption in Christ Jesus. Paul's description here of God's intervention in the human problem is very different from Seneca's view of divine involvement in individual lives. For Seneca, the divine lies within the human soul from birth, waiting to be actualized by willpower and desire to change; for Paul, the universal problem of sin is matched by a divine gift of righteousness, God's

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<sup>29</sup> Byrne, *Romans*, 93; Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 98; J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 309; Stuhlmacher, 43.

<sup>30</sup> Martens, 61.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>32</sup> Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (trans. David E. Green; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 195.

verdict of acquittal, on a similarly universal scope.<sup>33</sup> So, because all are offered God's gift, boasting is excluded (3:27) as is being justified by works of the Law (3:28), although the Law is *not* overthrown but is still upheld (3:31). Paul wants to ensure that even amidst his teaching on justification by faith, and his reaffirmation of the revelation of the righteousness of God throughout 3:21–4:25, that his readers still regard the Law as the basis for an ethical guideline, so that those with transformed minds will have a system of checks and balances as they discern the will of God.

More references to boasting appear in the next few chapters (4:2; 5:2, 3, 11) as Paul begins speaking directly to the church in Rom 5–8. The content of chapter 5 transitions from the portrait of the human condition and God's intervention in chs. 1–4 and leads toward the more ethical material that begins in chapter 6; 5:1–11 declares the peace that the Christian now has with God after being justified by faith, and 5:12–21 makes clear that the obedience of Christ has undone the sin of Adam. Indeed, after God handed over sinful humanity to degrading behavior in chapter 1, 5:6–11 now reveals that God has reestablished the grounds of human relationship with himself. Human action apparently can do nothing to establish or to actualize relationship with God, but can only maintain this ascribed status, which Paul discusses in chapters 6–8.<sup>34</sup> In 5:12–21, Paul returns briefly to the explanation of the human condition as he once again discusses the character of sin. Sin itself is an enslaving force in Romans and not an inborn personal defect (3:9; 7:7–25),<sup>35</sup> the first man Adam brought sin into the world and one of the consequences of his sin was death; thereafter, every person has sinned and consequently died (5:12).<sup>36</sup> Seneca also believes that humans are

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<sup>33</sup> Byrne, *Romans*, 125.

<sup>34</sup> William M. Longworth, "Ethics in Paul: The Shape of Christian Life and a Method of Moral Reasoning," in *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (Dallas: Society of Christian Ethics, 1981), 34.

<sup>35</sup> Vincent P. Branick, "Apocalyptic Paul?" *CBQ* 47 (1985): 667.

<sup>36</sup> Paul does not speculate in 5:12 on the origin of sin or on what initially caused Adam to sin; instead he discusses sin's origin in chapters 1 and 2 when asserting the universal sinfulness and guilt of all people: sin in some sense originates through the self-will of individuals. For this reason, 5:12 contains no doctrine of hereditary sin. If Paul had been interested in establishing hereditary sin, he surely would have mentioned Adam in chapter 1. Instead, chapter 1 asserted individual responsibility for sin at the stage in his argument when he wanted to elucidate the plight of humankind without the gospel. Paul again attests to individual guilt in 5:12d ("because all sinned"; see end of this paragraph); yet, he also mentions in v. 12 that sin came through Adam. He is able now to mention Adam because he is past the point in his argument that requires an emphasis on individual guilt in order to establish individual need for justification. Wedderburn explains that Paul insists on Adam's guilt in affecting people because he wants further to insist on the universality of sin: all people are in its clutches, from the first of human history. A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Adam in Paul's Letter to the Romans," in *StudBib* 1978, vol. 3: Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors, *JSNT* 3 (ed. E. A. Livingston; Sheffield: JSOT

born without sin and only fall into a state of sin when vices infiltrate from without. This state of sin keeps human beings from mastering their emotions and achieving happiness, which is also true for Paul, but Paul adds the dimension that not only did sin itself engender the process of physical death, but that remaining in one's state of sin will lead to an eternal death without God (6:23).

Romans 6:1–8:39

Chapters 6–8 are the real beginning of Paul's ethics in Romans as he now addresses the issue of the human response to the righteousness of God. As Schlatter notes, 6–8 tell us what to do to prepare our bodies for the coming sacrifice in 12:1.<sup>37</sup> Chapter 6 even contains three imperatives of *παρίστημι* just as in 12:1 where Paul will use this word to call for sacrifice. In 6:1, Paul begins by again mentioning the allegations of antinomianism that are against him when he asks "should we continue in sin so that grace may abound," reminding that his defense is not complete. Chapter 6 goes on to direct the Christian not to enslave himself or herself to sin because Christ has already died to sin, and the Christian has identified with this death through baptism;<sup>38</sup> the baptism of 6:1–4 begins the discussion of the Christian residing in the new aeon of 12:1–2.<sup>39</sup> In chapter 7, the Christian will find out that the Law cannot help with this task, but chapter 8 will advise that when the Christian lives according to the Spirit, he or she receives life and peace (8:6).

Death is the metaphor in chapter 6 that Paul uses as motivation for the transformed life; in 6:2, he declares that we have died to sin, and derives this reflection from the experience of baptism, which is "understood as a vicarious ritual experience of the death . . . of Christ."<sup>40</sup> Somehow, Christians have experienced in baptism a liberation from the bondage of sin (6:7).<sup>41</sup> What does

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Press, 1980), 423.

<sup>37</sup> Adolf Schlatter, *Romans and the Righteousness of God* (trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 228.

<sup>38</sup> Moxnes even believes that the renewal of the mind represents such a dramatic change, and motifs and vocabulary are so similar between chapters 12 and 6, that the sacrifice of 12:1 refers to baptism and that chapter 12 actually relates to the consequences of baptism. Halvor Moxnes, "The Quest for Honor and the Unity of the Community in Romans 12 and in the Orations of Dio Chrysostom," in *Paul and His Hellenistic Context*, (ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 217.

<sup>39</sup> Fitzmyer, 637.

<sup>40</sup> David E. Aune, "Human Nature and Ethics in Hellenistic Philosophical Traditions and Paul: Some Issues and Problems," in *Paul and His Hellenistic Context* (ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 311.

<sup>41</sup> Murphy-O'Connor states that because we are no longer enslaved to sin, yet sin still exists, simply means that Christians now live in an environment that has an authentic orientation; the pressure to sin is not there because they are not with sinners. The believer is inspired and encouraged by surrounding examples in the community. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Becoming Human Together* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1977), 170.

this mean?<sup>42</sup> The answer will not be fully clear until chapter 12. Verse 6:4b refers to the new aeon (ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς) and makes it clear that with baptism the *conditions* have been created that the believer may walk in newness of life, but this situation is by no means yet guaranteed, or enacted (“if we have died with Christ, we *believe* that we *shall* also live with him,” 6:8). This tension, known as “already-not yet” in Paul’s ethics, is manifest in the very flow of the argument: 5:1–5 has triumphantly declared peace with God and justification for the one who has faith, yet 6:5 makes clear that even though the baptized believer has shared in Christ’s death, there is a process of salvation to be worked through before he or she can participate in Christ’s resurrection.<sup>43</sup> Human life in its entirety is essentially a process of this salvation. The indicatives in 6:1–11 may suggest that sin will no longer master the believer (6:14), but the use of imperatives in 6:12–23 to repeatedly exhort believers not to hand themselves over to sin indicate that they are still held by the passions described in 1:18–32 (cf. 6:17–19).<sup>44</sup>

Thankfully, although God handed them over to their desires/emotions (1:24), God now hands them over to a type of teaching that frees them from this bondage (6:17).<sup>45</sup> Paul’s frequent use of cognitive language throughout chapters 6–8 to explain this teaching provides the comparison between this section of Romans and Seneca’s view of moral transformation. We recall that Seneca’s view of overcoming the passions/emotions depends on an argument from cognition: the faculty of reason must be enacted so that the seed of virtue in the soul can grow, which happens first through a new mind orientation. The *proficiens* must have above all a willingness to pursue virtue; he or she must mentally place himself or herself in a position where the realization commences that only through tenacity and hard work can the seed of virtue prosper. Once the new mindset is fixed, then there are various exercises to perform, and human examples to emulate, and nurturing advice and friendship to be had from someone who is farther along the path. All through this (lifelong) training period, the most important component is simply not to give up (*Ep. Mor.* 71.30). Paul, particularly in chapter 6, uses cognitive language that calls for a reversal of the situation of chapter 1 (“they became futile in their thinking”; 1:21) and chapter 2 (those Jews who have all

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Whether Paul intended this assertion when he claimed that we have died to sin, reality and human experience have shown that temptation to sin may be lessened in a supportive environment, but certainly not eradicated.

<sup>42</sup> It cannot mean that Christians are immune from temptation because “the man who believes himself immune from temptation knows that he is no longer responsible [for his actions].” Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 3.

<sup>43</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 470–71.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

<sup>45</sup> Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 256.

knowledge from the Law are unable to teach themselves; 2:17–21). Paul says that *knowing* (γινώσκοντες; 6:6) our old self was crucified . . . we *believe* (πιστεύομεν; 6:8) we will live with him, *knowing* (εἰδότες; 6:9) that Christ being raised from the dead will never again die . . . [so] *think/consider* (λογίζεσθε; 6:11) yourselves dead to sin but alive to God.

Paul asks believers, then, to *imagine* making a break from the fleshly life and living obedient to God; 6:11 in particular presents the cognitive element of baptism with its admonition to *think* of yourself as dead to sin and therefore come to see yourself as a “Christ person.”<sup>46</sup> Christ is not a model in chapter 6 for ethical behavior (although he will be presented as such in chapter 15), but Christ’s death is portrayed as a voluntary forfeiture of a whole way of life that was replaced with life on a new plane; his life was lifted up and constituted without the old liabilities.<sup>47</sup> Baptism identifies with his death and engenders self-identification, or how one sees oneself. Since new conditions have been brought about by Christ’s death, this signals that God has brought a new creation into being (6:4; cf. 2 Cor 5:17), to be fully realized at the bodily resurrection (8:18–23); the Christian’s self-identity must always be determined by this.<sup>48</sup> The Christian must decide to take part rationally in the new conditions that were made possible at baptism, knowing that the new self will not be fully attained until the eschatological resurrection (6:5). In this life, however, only the possibility of wholeness exists for the baptized Christian, and he or she is required to leave behind the self-deception of the human condition (1:21, 22, 28) and grasp the basic perspective that he or she belongs now to Christ.<sup>49</sup> Both Paul and Seneca, then, require a new perception where moral transformation is enacted by thinking of oneself differently. Seneca always takes opportunity to express that both willingness and persistence are required components of this new cognition; Paul may not explicitly say the same, but suggests his agreement by reminding his readers over and over to think in a new way (cf. “on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder”; 15:15).

Change is not only cognitive, though, because with their admonition to “present your bodies as instruments of righteousness,” Rom 6:19, 22 point forward to 12:1 and reveal that there is a relationship between sacrifice and behavior. Moral responsibility is realized in bodily existence and confirmed with deeds (6:12–13) as also in Seneca (*Ep. Mor.* 90.3). Paul’s use of the ethical imperative *παρίστημι* throughout chapter 6 (including twice in 6:13, and once in 6:16, 19) implies that the believer should acknowledge God by submissive and

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<sup>46</sup> Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 229.

<sup>47</sup> Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 257.

<sup>48</sup> Eduard Lohse, *Theological Ethics of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991), 107.

<sup>49</sup> Dan O. Via Jr., *Self-Deception and Wholeness in Paul and Matthew* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 52.

obedient actions.<sup>50</sup> These imperatives that are placed within the discussion of the new life do, however, show that ethical obedience is only a possibility and must be enacted. And this enactment begins only through the rational power of the mind; right deeds stem from right thinking.

Rom 7 begins with the analogy from marriage in 7:1–6, which is designed to make the point again that the Christian is called to present himself or herself to God in obedience, and to participate in the new aeon of 12:1–2. Freedom from the old (former husband, the Law on monogamy) involves the responsibility to effect a new relationship, and to belong to another (Jesus Christ, 7:4ff.).<sup>51</sup> The rest of the chapter then presents a portrait of the unempowered person under the Law, and Paul goes on to reveal that empowerment for ethics comes from the Spirit rather than the Law (8:1–8). Subduing the passions can now be achieved through obedience without a Law-centered regimen of practices.<sup>52</sup> Once again, Paul represents with 7:22ff. (“the Law of my mind”) the cognitive state of affairs parallel to 1:28 (“the depraved mind”) that he will overturn in 12:1 and issue a call for believers to yield to Christ in thinking. The law, then, contributes to the self-deception that is the human condition. Stowers has shown that statements in 7:15 and 19 particularly echo the lack of self-mastery of the person under the Law:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate (7:15).

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do (7:19).

The speaker, as someone enslaved to sin and the passions who is unable to choose the good, is analogous to the ancient tradition of the person who has weakness of will due to a lack of self-mastery, or being able to achieve virtue.<sup>53</sup> Seneca's play *Medea* (based on the original by Euripides) parallels the situation of the person under the Law as Medea reflects that she has no control over her emotions; her will to do good has been overcome by anger, and then abruptly changes to sorrow and then joy:

Why does thou delay now, O soul? Why hesitate, though thou canst do it? Now has my wrath died within me. I am sorry for my act, ashamed. What, wretched woman, have I done—wretched, say I? Though I repent, yet have I done it! Great joy steals on me against my will, and lo, it is increasing.<sup>54</sup>

For Seneca, this weakness of will that kept one from becoming wise stemmed from ignorance and false beliefs, which were a result of debased reason (*Ep. Mor.*

<sup>50</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 337.

<sup>51</sup> V. P. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 105.

<sup>52</sup> Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 257.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>54</sup> Seneca, *Tragedies* (trans. Frank J. Miller; LCL 62; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), 310.

76.16). The emotions are engendered by false beliefs; once reason is perfected, the person is harmonized and has no strong emotions that cannot be controlled. In Rom 7, Paul is characterizing those who try to live under the Law by a set regimen of practices, and who are unable to achieve this. The Law does not give the necessary ingredient to release bondage from the passions. The difference between this person and the people of chapter one is that now, he or she has correct perception about right and wrong; the Law reveals that the passions are sin, but these passions are still a fundamental aspect of human character. What he or she does not have, however, is the correct perception about his or her new self-identity.

The problem of chapter 7 is one of inability to do correct action in the face of correct perception of what is right.<sup>55</sup> Since the believer cannot act, God acted through Christ. 7:7–25 is also more evidence that the believer lives in an already-not yet tension, partially in the new creation effected at baptism and partially in the realm of being enslaved to the passions.<sup>56</sup> This believer, although perceiving the good, does not yet have all the tools necessary to think of himself or herself differently and to be able to affect change, but this means is given in chapter 8. Chapter 8 is, for Paul, the solution to the problem of the human condition. The human reason that was thwarted in chapters 1 and 7 will be restored in 12:1; but first the depraved mind of 1:28 and the law of the mind in 7:23 must be set free from the law of sin (7:23) by the Spirit (8:2). Without the Spirit, a believer cannot live out and fulfill the just requirement of the Law (8:4), which still constitutes a grounding for ethics. As Byrne states, 8:1–13 again spells out the ethical possibility for the believer; there is now the opportunity to live according to the Spirit, but as 8:5–11 makes clear, the possibility also still exists to live according to the flesh.<sup>57</sup>

Paul presents the solution to the human inability to live free from sin as the gift of the Spirit, which came about by God's action in Christ. The Spirit is, in fact, a force that counters the cosmic force of sin and enables human beings to live in accordance with the requirements of the Law (8:9–11).<sup>58</sup> Seneca believes that humans come to a true understanding of themselves by means of the 'spirit,' or the divine part of the soul. He even characterizes this spirit as our 'guardian' who marks our good and bad deeds (*Ep. Mor.* 41.1), much in the same language as Paul (8:5). Once the *proficiens* actualizes this divinity, in which lies the seed of virtue, he or she is set upon a path toward moral transformation and wisdom. Paul also defines the Spirit as bringing self-understanding; people learn about

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<sup>55</sup> Borchert, 86.

<sup>56</sup> Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 474.

<sup>57</sup> Byrne, *Romans*, 238.

<sup>58</sup> Brendan Byrne, "Interpreting Romans Theologically in a Post-'New Perspective' Perspective," *HTR* 94.3 (2001): 233.

themselves through divine enlightenment.<sup>59</sup> The difference in Paul's and Seneca's ideas of 'spirit' and self-understanding, however, are distinct: Seneca believes that humans can understand the way to happiness through their internal divine spirit, but the Spirit for Paul is an external power that can continually keep the Christian grounded in his or her new identity.

Using more cognitive language in chapter 8, Paul says that those who live according to the flesh *set their minds* (φρονοῦσιν; 8:5) on concerns of the flesh, and those who live according to the Spirit *set their minds* (φρονοῦσιν; 8:5) on concerns of the Spirit; for to *set the mind* (τὸ φρόνημα; 8:6) on the flesh is death, but to *set the mind* (τὸ φρόνημα; 8:6) on the Spirit is life and peace. Again, change is not an automatic transformation, but cognition appears to actualize behavior. The Spirit will set the Christian free (8:3), but only after the Christian has "set the mind" on doing what is right, i.e., the things of the Spirit. Cognition somehow allows the believer to identify with the Spirit of Christ. So, 8:5–6 appeals to the Christian to *think* of himself or herself in the Spirit; people with that self-understanding have been removed from the constant risk of sin. This is still only a conditional situation, however, because 8:9 reveals that "you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, *if* the Spirit of God dwells in you." The εἴπερ is conditional here because Paul proceeds in the next verse with another conditional εἰ ("but if Christ is in you . . . the Spirit is life," 8:10).<sup>60</sup> Chapter 8 may describe the nature of the believers' ascribed status, but then exhorts them to maintain it. The goal of the Christian is a process (8:11) of making alive aspects that were dead to sin, and the gift of the Spirit is the beginning of this process. In the Spirit, the Christian is still responsible for the just requirement of the Law (8:4), but the obedience and service required by the Spirit are not so much a motivation to keep the Law but an orientation, a guiding principle for behavior (which will be confirmed in chapter 12).<sup>61</sup> The Christian does not have to learn this new orientation under his or her own power, however, as the *proficiens* does, because the believer can now rely on the power of the Spirit that resides within.

#### Romans 9:1–11:36

Chapters 9–11 begin to speak to those who are not in the church and discuss ethnic Israel's place in God's redemption because she did not accept the justification outlined in chapters 1–8. Here, Paul takes one more opportunity, this time stated directly to Gentiles, that there are no special privileges and no grounds for boasting, lest the Gentiles glory because they have accepted God in Christ while Israel has not (11:18–25). Because Gentile believers are now

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<sup>59</sup> Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, 14.

<sup>60</sup> Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 251. Also Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 428; Johnson, 245; Stuhlmacher, 116.

<sup>61</sup> Schrage, 178.

enjoying the former status that Israel enjoyed as God's people, they need to be kept from the boasting and arrogance that Paul sees as characteristic of sin, and that hinders community from forming.

Romans 12:1–15:13

Paul now “grounds his moral imperative in the indicative of salvation” by admonishing the Romans to live ethical lives because God has acted on their behalf through his saving justice.<sup>62</sup> The apostle claims in 12:1 that the people of God must now present their own bodies as living sacrifices in lieu of the previous sacrificial system. Judaism asserts the concept of human moral actions being comparable to or a substitute for the animal and produce sacrifices in the temple, which paved the way for Paul's teaching.<sup>63</sup> Paul, however, preached his gospel message while the daily offerings continued unabated in the Temple as the central act of worship among the Jews – in fact, we have no reason to believe that Paul repudiated these offerings.<sup>64</sup> The ancients who first heard this text knew that the sacrifice functions to place the patron in contact with the world beyond; a nexus forms between two worlds and the human has union with the divine.<sup>65</sup> Paul calls upon and reappropriates these images, urging the church to not only be the patron involved in sacrifice, but also to be the victim; the Christian now will reach union with God by surrendering his or her life as a gift upon the altar of daily living.<sup>66</sup> The Christian's central act of worship, the living sacrifice, is now an inner attitude of surrender from which external actions will stem. Seneca's view of sacrifice as worship has some similarity to Paul's view; according to the philosopher, humankind has no need of prayer or worship because God dwells in human hearts (*Ep. Mor.* 41.1), in the rational part of the soul, and therefore has no need of “slaughtering fattened bulls, or in hanging up offerings of gold or silver, or in pouring coins into a temple treasury” (*Ep. Mor.* 115.5). Worship of God consists of rationally knowing and trying to imitate divine virtue (*Ep. Mor.* 115.5). The difference, of course, is that the Christian worships the supreme

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<sup>62</sup> Frank Matera, *New Testament Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), 192. The term ‘indicative’ refers to the believer's new life as a work of God, whereas ‘imperative’ refers to Paul's references to the Christian life as one that needs to be continually manifested and worked out in an ethical fashion. Michael Parsons, “Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul's Writing,” in *Understanding Paul's Ethics* (ed. Brian S. Rosner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 217.

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, 178.

<sup>64</sup> Calvin Roetzel, “Sacrifice in Romans 12–15,” *Word and World* 6 (fall 1986): 415.

<sup>65</sup> For discussion of this concept, read Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

<sup>66</sup> Surrendering your “bodies” is the same as surrendering the whole self and entire person. Cranfield, 598–99, and D. Edmond Hiebert, “Presentation and Transformation: An Exposition of Romans 12:1–2,” *BSac* 151 (July–Sep 1994): 309–24.

being and creator of the universe, while the *proficiens* pays homage to his or her internal 'god' by enacting the divine seed of reasoning in the soul.

The basis for the Christian's sacrifice in chapter 12 is none other than "the mercies of God" (12:1a). Most commentators regard these 'mercies' to refer either to the epistle as a whole,<sup>67</sup> or particularly to chapters 9–11.<sup>68</sup> Barrett is likely on the right track when he declares of 12:1a, "Because God is what he is, and has done what he has done, certain things follow; or rather ought to follow"; the Christian's sacrifice is motivated by the universal grace of God that has overturned the universal sinfulness of humankind.<sup>69</sup>

The presentation of the believer's body as a living sacrifice is characterized as τὴν λογικὴν λαατρεῖαν ὑμῶν. While many commentators do translate this phrase as "your spiritual worship,"<sup>70</sup> a more likely translation along the lines of Paul's Stoic overtones throughout Romans is either "your logical/rational worship," or possibly, "your logical/rational service." That the first term, λογικῆ, should be read as 'logical' or 'rational' is all but guaranteed by the cognitive language used by Paul throughout the epistle, and this is further confirmed by the use of νοῦς in 12:2.<sup>71</sup> The sacrifice that creates transformation in the believer is only possible τῆ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός (12:2), because the moral life requires a new, rational, way of thinking that derives from a renewed

<sup>67</sup> Cranfield, 596; Furnish, 102; Horace E. Stoessel, "Notes on Rom 12:1–2: The Renewal of the Mind and Internalizing the Truth," *Int* 17.2 (1963): 162.

<sup>68</sup> Fitzmyer, 639. Some assert that the 'mercies' refer only to 11:30–32; Byrne, *Romans*, 362; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 709.

<sup>69</sup> C. K. Barrett, *Reading through Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 65. Paul also regards the mercies of 12:1 to be the same mercies of the God of the Jews (as in 2 Sam 24:14 and 1 Chron 21:13, Isa 63:15, Hos 2:19, etc.); thus while Paul is calling for the church to remember the merciful actions of God, the merciful actions that God performed for his people Israel lie in the shadows. Fitzmyer (*Romans*, 639) notes that the plural form 'mercies' suggests these Hebrew overtones; οἰκτιρμοί, is often found in the LXX. Now, however, the righteous and merciful action of God in Christ has laid the foundation for the people of God to lay down their lives as both the victims and the beneficiaries in the sacrifice of daily worship. Just as God called the Israelites in Exod 19:3–6 (cf. Deut 10:14–22) to be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation as response to his actions in releasing them from Egypt, Paul in much the same way calls the church to present herself as a sacrifice in response to the mercies of God; only then will the church come together as the new Israel.

<sup>70</sup> Johnson, 178; Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 328.

<sup>71</sup> Further evidence that λογικὴν refers to rational (rather than spiritual) worship derives from Philo, where the word is often used as an adjective qualifying πνεῦμα. In Philo's context, then, the word must translate as 'rational.' Evans suggests that unless there is a strong reason to the contrary, this lone use of λογικὴν by Paul should be translated along the lines of Philo's philosophy. C. Evans, "Romans 12:1–2; The True Worship," in *Dimensions de la Vie Chrétienne*, ed. by C. K. Barrett (Rome, 1979), 19; as quoted in Parsons, 237.

mind. Paul is once again using logical categories of understanding, and his main concern is where the believer envisions himself or herself belonging.<sup>72</sup> Because Paul speaks of turning the mind in a direction toward a logos-type worship, similar to Seneca's descriptions of worship as a rational faculty, this gives credence to the notion that Paul is still speaking from Stoic overtones. Indeed, Paul has used the intellectual aspect of the transformed life (rather than talk of the Spirit) to provide transition into his section on right conduct (12:3–15:13)<sup>73</sup> Obviously, the rational power of the mind must be the human ingredient used to actualize the work of the Spirit in a Christian's life; rather than the famous phrase "be what you already are" that is so often used to describe Paul's ethics, a better understanding of Paul's moral transformation in Romans would be to "see what you already are."<sup>74</sup>

The second term in the phrase λογικὴν λατρείαν could either translate as 'service' and refer back to the admonition to 'present' your bodies, emphasizing the action involved in yielding the whole self to God's service, or translate as 'worship,' referring back to the 'sacrifice' and the notion that the new type of sacrifice is an internal surrender of the mind. Whether worship or service, this λατρείαν is offered by those who are turning the νοῦς in the direction of a rationally-based action. Not only does the believer have a new understanding of his or her situation and to whom he or she belongs, but 'renewal' apparently comprises the faculties of perception, understanding, judging, and determining. The renewed mind is necessary so that the Christian can discern God's will (12:2), which will be spelled out as an action in community in 12:3–15:13. Therefore, as an individual, the believer's rational reflection will determine his or her new self-identity; and in community, rational reflection will awaken the ability for his or her reason to weigh critically and to examine. The abruptness of Paul's talk about the mind's transformation recalls Seneca's teaching about the sudden transformation of the proficiens into the wise man (*Ep. Mor.* 6.1–2; 94.48). The difference in their beliefs, of course, is that for Seneca, this transformation is the end of the long journey toward virtue, while Paul presents the mind's metamorphosis as the beginning of the person's path toward ultimate salvation (8:23). The initial presentation of the Christian, however sudden, must be renewed on a regular basis; the present imperative of both συσχηματίζεσθε

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<sup>72</sup> Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 262.

<sup>73</sup> Moxnes, 217.

<sup>74</sup> Such an understanding is often used in psychology and clinical therapy. For example, people who have endured a loveless or perhaps an abused childhood may continue to see themselves as unlovable or as a victim long into adulthood, even in the presence of a successful career and family life. Such people must be encouraged to see that they are a different person now with a new set of circumstances and that the old feelings do not coincide with the facts of their present life situation. This is not to say in any way that Paul had a twenty-first century mindset or knew of the psychology of today, but it simply shows that there are no new solutions under the sun.

("be conformed") and μεταμορφουσθε ("be transformed") suggests that the process of change requires a commitment of obedience and an ongoing responsibility to create moral transformation.<sup>75</sup> Believers must offer themselves daily in a whole person commitment.

The transformation of the self that Paul has discussed cognitively is now made practical in 12:3–13:7 with one's reorientation made manifest in a change from self-centeredness toward concern for others. Since all are instilled with humility rather than the arrogance of sin, conditions are created whereby community can form (12:3). A community of like-minded people develops; once the bounds for human boasting are gone, all are able to appreciate the talents and achievements of others, recognizing them as gifts from God that were given to help the community grow.<sup>76</sup> Paul reappropriates the body imagery of both the first man, Adam,<sup>77</sup> and of the Greek polis<sup>78</sup> by depicting the church as the body of Christ; a single body with many constituent parts that do not all have the same function. Christ is present in the world in a bodily manner through the people of God, who are now the church instead of Israel. The church becomes the earthly sphere of power for the exalted Christ,<sup>79</sup> and Paul calls her to work together in unity. The objective of this new community is to be able to discern the will of God (12:2) as it becomes clear that in 12:1–2 Paul was not only speaking to individuals but also to this body of Christ. This body must be motivated by constant inward renewal (12:2) in order to be able to discern God's will, must be made up of people who consider themselves equal to one another (12:3–5), and must execute a variety of functions in its unity, as given in 12:6–21.

Seneca also likens humankind to a great body that possesses all things in common as a motivation for treating others with kindness (*Ep. Mor.* 95.53).

<sup>75</sup> David Peterson, "Worship and Ethics in Romans 12," *TynBul* 44.2 (1993), 282.

<sup>76</sup> Longworth, 40.

<sup>77</sup> Legend about Adam, the first man created by Yahweh, held a primary place in Jewish oral and written tradition. Paul, as a Pharisee and possibly a student of Gamaliel in Jerusalem, was certainly familiar with the Adamic themes woven throughout Jewish literature, one of which was the fanciful and often bizarre speculation about Adam's body. Later Rabbinic literature depicted Adam as physically containing the whole world in a most literal way; God created Adam using soil from each country of the earth: "Adam's trunk came from Babylon, his head from Eretz Israel, his limbs from other lands, and his private parts according to R. Aha from Akra di Agma" (*Pirke de Rabbi Eliezar*, 11.38a–b). The reason for such legend was to relate that all people are one in Adam: "Therefore but a single man was created in the world to teach that if any man has caused a single soul to perish, Scripture imputes it to him as though he had caused a whole world to perish (Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4.5, Danby)." Thus in Jewish thought, the people of God, and often all people, came forth from the one man Adam, and Adam's body is regarded to be as large as all humanity.

<sup>78</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 646, notes that the phrase "one body" also likely refers to the body politic in the same fashion that it does in 1 Cor 12:12–31.

<sup>79</sup> Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 336.

Philosophy teaches all humans how to love each other and how to live in community (*Ep. Mor.* 90.3). For Paul, a number of character traits and good works are representative of the community (12:9–21; foreseen in 5:1,23; 6:4–19; 8:31–39), including admonitions to live at peace with those who are not a part of the community (12:14, 17–21; 13:1–7). Seneca’s values in this regard are very similar, as he continually encourages humanitarian actions and reminds that there is an obligation to live for others rather than for ourselves (*Ep. Mor.* 48.2). The goal of both the philosopher and the apostle is to create a community of people who live together in peace while exemplifying the values of love. Paul, however, emphasizes the community much more than does Seneca, because he is interested in presenting Christ to the world in a bodily manner; the love of Christ is embodied in the obedience of Christians who perform the actions of 12:3–13:7.<sup>80</sup> Seneca’s ethics and his pursuit of happiness are much more individually oriented, and have the by-product of forming community and attending to the needs of others; but for Paul, ethics are more about first adapting to the needs of others, and the by-product is that Christians will find their happiness in the midst of that. Both Seneca and Paul realize that even while the heart is being transformed, there are rules and precepts that must be kept at the forefront of the community by continual reminder. Although empowered by the Spirit through a daily surrender of the innate disobedience that is the human condition, Paul’s community still relies on the Law and its instruction as the basis for an ethical guideline to halt any slide into confusion about what constitutes right living (13:8–10; and foreseen in 3:31; 8:4). Indeed, when making decisions, the first place the community should turn its new rational reflection is toward the traditional ethical instruction of the Law.<sup>81</sup> For Seneca, even though the seed of virtue is planted within, virtue’s growth must be guided by universal precepts of right and wrong (*Ep. Mor.* 94.33–34; 95.4). The ethical road for the Christian, however, is not quite as stringent as for the *proficiens*. Seneca appears to advocate that a strict adherence to the precepts is necessary, but for Paul, the Spirit leads the Christian with the Law as only a guiding principle; in some matters, the decision of one believer can be different than another, and they both stand or fall before the Lord (14:4).<sup>82</sup> Paul concludes chapter 13 with a final motivation for moral transformation, as the community keeps at the forefront of her mind the glorious future that awaits her at the resurrection (5:10; 8:18–23; 13:11–14) and remembers that the charge to “live honorably” will gain the benefits that will last for eternity. Seneca has nothing like this in his ethics; the most he can promise his

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<sup>80</sup> Stuhlmacher, 191.

<sup>81</sup> Eduard Lohse, “The Church in Everyday Life: Considerations of the Theological Basis of Ethics in the New Testament,” in *Understanding Paul’s Ethics* (ed. Brian S. Rosner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 260.

<sup>82</sup> Willi Marxsen, *New Testament Foundations for Christian Ethics* (trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 218.

readers is that if they use their brief time in this life wisely, they will enjoy more years of virtuous characters and communities before their death.

In the final part of Paul's exhortation, he finally leaves generalities behind and addresses the specific situation in the Roman church, the circumstance of the 'weak' (those who only eat vegetables and observe certain days) and the 'strong' (those who eat anything and view all days the same). The underlying issue involves how the community can regulate itself when its members are at variance over issues that are not essential to faith and salvation. Paul gives counsel based on the moral teaching throughout the epistle and encourages both parties not to despise or to judge each other (14:1–12), the strong not to become a stumbling block to the weak (14:13–23) or to please themselves (15:1–6), and for both parties to welcome each other as Christ welcomed them (15:7–13).<sup>83</sup> One final difference between Paul and Seneca surfaces in these final chapters regarding imitation as a tool for transformation. Seneca believes that no one can change without positive examples of virtue as a guide, and a teacher would exemplify the precepts that he taught while adapting to the needs of his particular trainees (*Ep. Mor.* 6.5ff.). For Paul, however, imitating a virtuous life may be instigated by human examples, but this is ultimately an imitation of Christ (15:1–3). After suffering abuse and misunderstanding to the point that they ended his own life, Christ's actions are a model for the Christian who is called to control his or her conduct in accordance with what is best for others. Perhaps Christ's example also extends to the believer not only living out his actions, but also internalizing his mindset of submission; Christians must rationally view themselves as being 'in Christ' before they are able to submit their bodies as a daily sacrifice for God. Paul ends the paraenetic section of Romans with a brief prayer wish where he asks that God grant them to live in harmony so that they may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (15:5). The ultimate purpose, then, of living the moral life is to give praise to God; and the ultimate expression of this praise comes when the community can extol God with one harmonious voice.

#### Conclusion

Both Paul and Seneca teach as the very heart of their ethical admonition that reason must be restored and/or activated in order to procure change. Paul's use of cognitive language throughout Romans does not imply a dependency on Stoicism, but presents an interesting parallel to the system of moral transformation in the primary philosophy of his day. To restore the faulty of reason, Seneca's *proficiens* can utilize various mental exercises to change thinking and awaken the seed of virtue through rationality. Paul, however, binds the believer's very self-identity with the restoration of reason. The baptized Christian must imagine and must think of himself or herself as part of the new aeon instigated at Christ's death. In Romans, cognition makes possible a new self-image which in

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<sup>83</sup> Matera, 203.

turn actualizes behavior. Paul does not detail any disciplines that would be helpful for this sort of task, but the ongoing nature of the believer's presentation of the sacrifice of his or her life means that there is continual work involved. A constant inner attitude of surrender and acceptance of his or her new situation in Christ is necessary. The continual nature of Paul's moral transformation also means that the ethical life is only presented as a possibility for the Christian; the definitive moment of change occurs at the beginning of the process with baptism and the procurement of the Spirit, and the ultimate goal is not attainable until after death. Therefore, the believer must keep working diligently at thinking, and consequently acting, differently all through this life.