Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy:  
Reading the Scriptures   
through the Jubilee Year of Mercy

An exchange with

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Paul and Mercy

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The letters of Paul:   
some generalisations

* They are occasional
  + They respond to the particular needs of the communities that he founded
* They are pastoral
  + They are intended to help people see the pattern of divine activity in the concrete circumstances of their lives
* They are rhetorical
  + They are meant to persuade their original recipients

The Pauline *Homologoumena*:  
the Letters Paul actually wrote

* Thirteen letters in the New Testament are ascribed to Paul
* Only seven of those were written by Paul of Tarsus, between *ca*. 53 and *ca*. 64
* In canonical order: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon
* In chronological order: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Romans, Philemon

Paul and the mercy of God: Initial observations

* When Paul mentions the mercy of God, he does so within the context of his pastoral efforts
* God’s mercy in Paul’s thought is primarily directed toward the salvation of the Gentiles
* Paul’s thoughts on mercy are thus designed to help his (primarily Gentile) correspondents to understand their place in the divine scheme

The Letter to the Romans

* Probably Paul’s last major letter
* The only letter Paul wrote to a community he did not found
* Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome in advance of his planned arrival there
* The Letter to the Romans is thus a kind of letter of introduction

Romans 9 – 11

* One of the major sections of Romans
  + Romans 1-4: *Humanity’s need for faith in Christ*
  + Romans 5-8: *Hope in the Lord*
  + Romans 9-11: *Christ and the Children of Abraham*
  + Romans 12-15: *How will our lives be transformed?*
* In Romans 9 – 11, he addresses the place of the children of Abraham in the divine plan
* For Paul, both Gentile and Jew find a place in the divine plan, thanks to the mercy of God

Romans 9:14-18

“What shall we say, then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion’. So it does not depend on human will or exertion, but upon God’s mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth’. So, then, he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills.”

* Paul recognises divine sovereignty here in the operations of divine mercy
* The election of Israel is a sign of divine mercy
* The inclusion of the Gentiles is likewise a sign of divine mercy

Romans 11:30-32

“Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you, they also may receive mercy. For God has consigned all people to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.”

* Israel’s estrangement is temporary
* Israel’s estrangement means reconciliation for the Gentiles
* Israel’s estrangement will end in its reconciliation
* The mercy of God brings about reconciliation

Romans 15:8-9

“For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.”

* The reconciliation of the Gentiles is again evidence of God’s mercy
* Paul’s ecclesiology and his soteriology are grounded in his Christology

2 Corinthians 4:1

“Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every person’s conscience in the sight of God”

* This is probably a self-presentation statement
* The “we” may be an instance of the *plurale maiestatis*
* The “we” might also refer to all the members of the Pauline mission
* Paul’s ministry is itself evidence of divine mercy – probably because it is aimed at reconciling the Gentiles to God

After Paul’s death

* Paul was martyred in Rome *ca*. 64
* After his death, his (otherwise anonymous) disciples wrote letters in his name
* Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians
* 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus (the Pastoral Epistles)

The Pastoral Epistles

* 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus were probably written in the early to mid-90’s
* They depict a Paul who is on the verge of being martyred
* They outline the desirable character attributes for leaders of the Christian community

1 Timothy 1:12-16

“I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners; but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life”

* Paul becomes the exemplar of mercy received
* The mercy of God transforms the one who receives it
* The mercy of God brings about eternal salvation

Titus 3:3-7

“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by people, and hating one another; but when the goodness and loving kindness of our God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not by deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.”

* The pattern of Paul’s life is replicated in that of the community
* The community has been transformed by the mercy of God
* The mercy of God gives the community of faith its hope

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