

Romans 8:3–4 and God’s resolution of the threefold problems of sin, the incapability of the law and the weakness of the flesh

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Ensuuing from the argument of Romans 7:7–25, 8:3–4 presents ‘the incapability of the law’ as a significant part of the greater problem of sin that needed resolution. This is brought to the fore best when the opening clause of Romans 8:3 (τὸ ... ἀδύνατον) is seen as an accusative of respect with dependant clauses and not as an anacoluthon as is often supposed. This opening clause points out sin’s two concomitant problems as (within this context) the primary points of reference in regard to which the claims of Romans 8:3–4 are made. Consequently, in Romans 8:3–4 Paul addresses the resolution of this threefold problem. In Romans 8:3 in particular, he argues that, through the mission of God’s Son, the problems of sin and the weakness of the flesh are resolved by the condemnation of sin in the flesh (of Christ). This has the purpose-result of also resolving the problem of the incapability of the law through Christ’s fulfilment of the requirement of the law (Rm 8:4).

Romeine 8:3–4 en God se oplossing van die drievoudige probleem van sonde, die onvermoë van die wet en die swakheid van die vlees. In die lig van Romeine 7:7–25 impliseer 8:3–4 dat die ‘onvermoë van die wet’ ‘n noemenswaardige deel van die groter probleem van die sonde was wat opgelos moes word. Hierdie insig tree veral duidelik na vore wanneer die sinsnede waarmee Romeine 8:3 begin (τὸ ... ἀδύνατον) geïdentifiseer word as ‘n akkusatief van opsig (met bysinne) en nie, soos dikwels veronderstel word, ‘n anakoluthon nie. Die twee probleme wat met sonde gepaard gaan (die onvermoë van die wet en die swakheid van die vlees), word dus deur Paulus uitgelig as die primêre verwysingspunte ten opsigte waarvan die stellings in Romeine 8:3–4 gemaak word. In Romeine 8:3 wys Paulus dat God, deur sy Seun te stuur, die probleme van die sonde en die vlees aangespreek het deurdat die sonde in die vlees (van Christus) veroordeel is. Dit het die doel-gevolg gehad dat die meegaande probleem van die onvermoë van die wet ook opgelos is, aangesien Christus die vereiste van die wet vervul het (Rom 8:4).

Introduction¹

Many have commented on the ‘awkwardness’ of the syntactic structure of Romans 8:3 (e.g. Jewett 2006:482). Zeller (1985:152), in addition, remarked that the accusative in the first syntactic unit in the verse (τὸ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός)² ‘hängt allerdings in der Luft’. Consequently, expositors have sought to explain this ‘awkwardness’ in different ways, including that it is an anacoluthon and/or that it is due to the incorporation of a Christological formula (Schweizer 1966:199–210). This apparent awkwardness can be better explained, however, by τὸ ἀδύνατον being an accusative of respect³ (with dependant clauses τοῦ νόμου// ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός). Once this is recognised, it becomes clearer that, with Romans 8:3–4, Paul actually addresses the resolution of a threefold problem that stems from his argument in 7:7–25. The function of the accusative of respect is precisely to evoke this particular background context in order to argue that, through the mission of God’s Son, not only the problem of (a) sin, but also the concomitant problems of (b) the weakness of the flesh and (c) the incapability of the law are resolved.

1.This article contains edited and reworked material from a paper read at the North-West University’s (Potchefstroom, South Africa) ‘God and cosmology’ Conference in August 2012. Recognition is due to Jan van der Watt for his support and input in the preparation of the article and to Cilliers Breytenbach, Michael Wolter, Udo Schnelle, Fika Janse van Rensburg and Hermut Löhr for their comments and suggestions towards the improvement of the article.

2.The appropriate translation of this phrase will be provided in the conclusion of the first section below. All excerpts in Greek are from Black *et al.* (1997).

3.This is a recognised use of the accusative, even if not very common in Koine Greek (Blass & Debrunner 1961:87–88). It is sometimes also called ‘accusative of reference’, ‘frame of reference accusative’ or ‘limiting accusative’ (Wallace 1995:203–204). Haacker (1999:152) also identified it as such, but without providing motivation.

Is the syntactic structure of Romans 8:3 'awkward' or only exceptional?

A popular explanation for the apparent 'awkwardness' of Romans 8:3 is that Paul incorporated the traditional Christological pattern of 'God sending his Son' into the sentence (Jewett 2006:482).⁴ Another explanation for the syntax, however, is that the verse opens with a (rather exceptional) accusative (τὸ ἀδύνατον) of respect (cf. Blass & Debrunner 1961:87–88)⁵ with dependant clauses (τοῦ νόμου//ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός), which 'indicates with reference to what the verbal action is represented as true' (Wallace 1995:203).

Given the syntactic exceptionality of Romans 8:3, it may be helpful to identify the primary clause explicitly (consisting of only the introductory conjunction, subject, verb and object): 'for ... God ... condemned sin' (γὰρ ... ὁ θεὸς ... κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν).

The syntax of the sentence can be illustrated by means of a diagram of the syntactic structure (Figure 1).

Thus, by providing an explanation, the conjunctive clause, γὰρ ... ὁ θεὸς ... κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ..., sustains the claim of Romans 8:2 regarding those in Christ Jesus see Wolter (2011:237) being set free from sin and death.

One needs to go back a little further to get the whole picture, however. With Romans 7:7–25,⁶ Paul indicted personified sin (cf. Dodson 2008:123–139) as the main culprit in the epoch before the Spirit that kept the subject from obeying God's law as she or he actually wanted to (cf. 7:19–20).⁷ This was the subject's problem: she or he was dominated by that terrible 'authority', sin. However, sin did not act alone. It coerced the subject's flesh and even God's law into being its collaborators in the oppression of humanity. From Romans 7:7–25, it is clear that the problem of sin is related to the two concomitant problems of the weakness of the subject's flesh and the incapability of the law. With Romans 8:3–4 Paul indicates that God has now addressed this threefold problem decisively. In order to do so, however, Paul needed to remind his readers of sin's two concomitant problems before indicating the means by which the threefold problem was resolved (in the primary clause). He achieved this by opening his sentence with an

4. Jewett (2006:482) credits Leander Keck with providing this 'plausible reason for the lack of syntactic coherence' and mentions that Keck based his case on an article by Eduard Schweizer. In accord with Jewett and Keck, it should be noted that Paul uses a 'pattern' (consisting of God as subject, sending language and the Son as agent) or traditional theological motif rather than a developed Christological formula as the precise wording differs between occurrences (see also Gal 4:4; Jn 3:17; 1 Jn 4:9).

5. Also see Wallace (1995:203–204), who identifies Romans 10:5 as an example of this in Paul.

6. Romans 7:7–25 itself has of course been a topic of considerable scholarly debate into which it is not possible to venture here. I proffer only brief remarks that serve the purpose of sketching the background against which 8:3–4 is set (see Kümmel 1974:74–138, Lichtenberger 2004:13–105 and Packer 1999:70–81).

7. Cf. *vūn*, the 'eschatological now' (Dunn 2002:415; 1998:179–181) in Romans 8:1. Further, Romans 7:25a should be taken as a proleptic exclamation which has eschatological force (Banks 1978:34–42), after which Paul returns to the subject matter of 7:7–23 by means of a summation in 7:25b. In Romans 8:4–13, Paul characterises and describes the epoch antithetical to that of the Spirit as (the epoch of) the flesh.

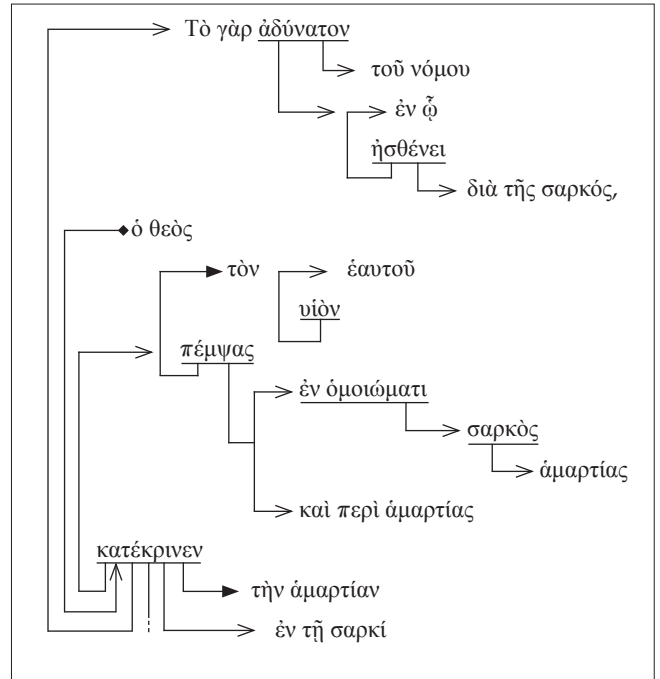


FIGURE 1: Syntactic exceptionality of Romans 8:3.

accusative of respect (with dependant clauses τοῦ νόμου//ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός).

Understanding ἀδύνατον as such makes sense of the 'awkwardly' constructed sentence unlike Jewett's (2006) attempt to explain it as a nominative absolute in apposition to the rest of the sentence:

... because it brings the clause in apposition to God's action of condemning the flesh and thus providing a substitute for the absent main verb, to which the participle πέμψας ('sent') can be subordinate. (p. 482)

The main verb is in fact not absent – it is κατέκρινεν. Jewett's (2006) translation results in an awkward sentence indeed:

For the law [being] powerless, in that it was weak on account of the flesh, 'God, having sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh' and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh. (p. 474)

This translation seems to regard τοῦ νόμου as the subject of a verbless clause, the bearing of which on the rest of the sentence is uncertain. What Jewett means by the law (or its 'incapability') being in apposition to God's condemnation of (sin in) the flesh remains unclear.⁸

To posit an anacoluthon has been another common exposition of the syntax as in Moo (1996:477; also see e.g. Wilckens 1980:124; Käsemann 1980:216; and recently Hultgren 2011:298) who theorises that '... as he began his sentence, Paul intended to use as his main verb ἐποίησεν (he did,') or something equivalent to it', but in the end, he did not complete the thought this way. Although I agree that the meaning of the sentence within its context ultimately boils down to God having done what the law could not do,

8. Cf. Granfield (1975:378) whose exposition is actually practically identical to explaining the syntax as an accusative of respect.

positing an absent verb is syntactically unnecessary given the plausibility of ἀδύνατον being an accusative of respect (thus not needing an additional verb) and therefore to be avoided.⁹ The Greek should be rendered as follows: ‘For, with reference to the incapability of the law in which¹⁰ it was weak through the flesh, God – by sending his own son in likeness to sinful flesh, and concerning sin¹¹ – condemned sin in the flesh.’

Since the law proved incapable of enabling man in his fleshly weakness to overcome sin, God had to effect not only the victory over sin, but also over sin’s coercion of the flesh and the law. It was precisely with respect to the incapability of the law, weakened by the flesh, that God acted.

Before we turn to how Paul describes this action taken by God, we can conclude this section by summarising the answer to our initial question. The syntactic structure of Romans 8:3 is neither awkward nor does it require an anacoluthon to be posited when one realises that the opening clause (τὸ ... ἀδύνατον) is an accusative of respect (with dependant clauses). This uncommon use of the accusative does make the verse’s syntactic structure exceptional.

‘God condemned sin’ at first glance

Paul employs the familiar forensic image (see Du Toit 2007:249–280)¹² to indicate that God has decisively addressed the threefold problem of sin, the incapability of the law and the weakness of the flesh. The primary clause of Romans 8:3 pertains to the primary problem: sin. It has been (judged, pronounced guilty and) condemned by God. Since sin was condemned its rule over humanity was broken. Consequently, those who are in Christ Jesus, who live within the Spirit’s sphere of authority (Rm 8:2), no longer experience or expect condemnation (8:1) since they are no longer subjects of sin (and death).

Instead, they experience freedom comparable to that of a prisoner of war and/or slave that has been manumitted.¹³ Their previous slave master (personified sin) was after all taken out of the picture, because God condemned it. Since the real culprit has already been identified (cf. Rm 7:20; Byrne 1996:237), tried and condemned through the mediation of Christ (8:3), those who are in him cannot be condemned any longer (8:1). The sentence has been passed, and the case is closed.

9.Cf. Cranfield (1975:378) who finds ‘no justification here for pronouncing Paul’s sentence incomplete and suggesting supplements’.

10.The literal translation has been retained here although ἐν ᾧ can also be appropriately translated as ‘because’ (Blass & Debrunner 1961:118).

11.περὶ ἁμαρτίας is commonly also rendered: ‘as a sin offering’ (see the exposition below).

12.Aspects of the forensic image in Romans 8:3 include (a) that God acts as judge delivering a judgment and also effecting punishment (the force of κατακρίνω); (b) that sin, whilst expected to constitute the indictment, surprisingly ends up as the one indicted and consequently condemned (this reminds one of the way in which sin was personified in 7:7–25 and in effect already indicted; cf. especially 7:13 and 17). As Haacker (1999:152) puts it: ‘Anstatt die sündigen Menschen zu verdammen, hat Gott die Sünde (als überpersonliche Macht vorgestellt) verdammt.’

13.The force of ἐλευθερώω in Romans 8:2 against the background of the war and slavery imagery in 7:14–25.

Three additional clauses qualify this assertion. They need to be examined closer before a picture of the meaning of ‘God condemned sin’ can be complete.

Firstly, the clause introduced by the accusative of respect (τὸ ... ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου ἐν ᾧ ἠσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός [with reference to the incapability of the law in which it was weak through the flesh] indicates that the two previously mentioned and related factors of the ‘incapability of the law’ and the fact that it was ‘weak through the flesh’ are, in this particular context, the primary reference points regarding which the assertion is made that ‘God condemned sin’.

Secondly, the participial clause (τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν πέμψας ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας [by sending his own Son in likeness to sinful flesh and regarding sin] indicates that the means (cf. Black 1989:109–110) through which God achieved sin’s condemnation was by sending his Son ‘in likeness’ to sin’s collaborator, namely (sinful) flesh.

The third qualifying clause (ἵνα τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου πληρωθῇ ἐν ἡμῖν τοῖς μὴ κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦσιν ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα [so that the requirement of the law would be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit] provides the purpose-result of the primary clause (why God condemned sin in the flesh). It also constitutes the resolution of the last part of the threefold problem with which Romans 8:3–4 opens. Due to the limitations of an article such as this, the implications of only the first two qualifying clauses will be discussed below whilst an exposition of Romans 8:4 (more detailed than the brief remarks already offered above) will be left for another occasion.

The incapability of the law in which it was weak through the flesh

In Paul’s preceding descriptions (Rm 7:7–25), sin’s terrible power to keep even those who want to obey God’s law under its dominance has been related to at least two concomitant factors: the law’s inability to overpower sin and to empower those who want to obey God to actually do so (7:15–23), together with man’s own flesh, which had proven to be the law’s Achilles heel (7:14, 18, 26). Consequently, it would not have been enough to address the problem of sin alone – these two related problems needed to be addressed together with sin itself. By positing the clause introduced by the accusative of respect in the beginning of his sentence, Paul is saying that God did exactly that: He addressed sin with explicit reference to its two concomitant problems – the incapability of the law and the weakness of the flesh.

In Romans 7:7–25, the law was clearly unable to effect the subject’s freedom to obey God (cf. Käsemann 1980:218; Barrett 1962:153; Löhr 2007:179–180) – a freedom now experienced in the epoch of the Spirit (8:4). Personified sin has consistently proven to be too terrible and too strong. It is to this powerlessness in the face of sin that Paul refers

when he writes of ‘the incapability of the law’ (ἀδύνατον¹⁴ τοῦ νόμου; Rm 8:3). In the internal conflict that raged within the subject, between the antithetical authorities of Torah and sin, Torah proved to be incapable¹⁵ of empowering¹⁶ the subject to overcome sin and thus to obey God. Consequently, the law also proved incapable of giving life (for which it was actually intended, cf. Rm 7:10; Cottrell 1996:459; cf. Haacker 1999:152).

Sin also has an ally in the form of humanity’s own ‘flesh’ (σάρξ; Rm 7:14, 18, 26),¹⁷ exploiting this significant weakness in the accoutrement of man under the old epoch. Thus the law’s weakness (τοῦ νόμου ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει¹⁸ διὰ τῆς σαρκός; Rm 8:3) is actually Adamic humanity’s weakness (cf. Wilckens 1980:124). Fleshly humanity is unable to resist the power and allure of sin (cf. Rm 7:5, 11, 13–14). Humanity is first and foremost prone to covetousness (ἐπιθυμία; Rm 7:7) – in disobedience of the 10th commandment and thus also disobeying the whole law (cf. Dunn 1998:98–100). Humanity’s flesh is not aligned with good since ‘nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh’ (Rm 7:18). Instead, fleshliness results in humanity doing evil, even against their will (Rm 7:19). Given this weakness of the fleshly material it had to work with, it is no wonder that Torah proved incapable of effecting humanity’s actual obedience to God.¹⁹

It is important to note the epochal quality of Paul’s use of σάρξ, intertwined with the concepts of weakness and being under the dominion of sin. Another aspect of Paul’s concept of σάρξ is its ‘spatiality’. It not only denotes existence in a particular epoch, but also in a particular sphere, that is the sphere of human weakness (Byrne 1996:243). This sphere of existence will be one into which Christ will step from outside (Haacker 1999:152) whilst actually belonging to another sphere of existence himself and ultimately returning to this other sphere.

14. ἀδύνατον can be taken (Bauer *et al.* 2000:22) in a more passive sense: an object is *impossible* (to achieve); or in a more active sense: a subject is *incapable* (of achieving an object). Although concurring with Dunn (2002:419), amongst others, that the effective distinction between these two senses is not great, an active translation does the Greek syntax more justice than a passive one, which would need a passive verb to be supplied (Jewett 2006:482). τοῦ νόμου should thus be taken as a subjective genitive, the phrase signifying that the law is incapable (to achieve an object that is not spelled out here by Paul but needs to be inferred) and translated simply as ‘the incapability of the law’.

15. As Paul had been at pains to emphasise in Romans 7:7–25 this does not, however, mean that Torah itself is to blame for sin or is to be equated with sin (7:7). Sin is to blame (7:13).

16. Cf. Johnson (1996:119): ‘... the difficulty with the law was not that it was wrong in what it prescribed but that it was powerless to enable humans to do what was right, because they were “weakened by the flesh”’. Byrne (1996:235) contrasts Romans 7:7–25 to 8:1–13, depicting the former as ethical “impossibility” under the law’, and the latter as ‘ethical “possibility” in the Spirit’. Consequently, he (Byrne 1996:236) describes the law as ‘impotent to create the righteousness it demanded’ (see also Witherington & Hyatt 2004:212; Kruse 2006:125).

17. In the sense it is used here, σάρξ refers to the ‘this worldly’ and self-centred orientation (Moo 1996:478; Schnelle 2005:498–499) of humanity in its Adamic state – humanity prone to sin, to living out sinful passions (Rm 7:5), humanity sold as a slave under the dominion of sin (7:14) serving this slave master’s decrees (7:25). It is this aspect of humanity that is always ‘up to no good’ (7:18). Since Adam has sinned, all his ancestors share this common proneness to sin (see Dunn 1998:62–70, 79–101; Bauer *et al.* 2000:914–916; Schweizer 2000:125–135).

18. Bauer *et al.* (2000:142) lists the possible meanings of ἡσθένεω as (a) to suffer a debilitating illness, *be sick*; (b) to experience some personal incapacity or limitation, *be weak*; (c) to experience lack of material necessities, *be in need*. In Romans 8:3, it should be taken to refer not to sickness or need but to weakness.

19. Robinson (1979:94) puts it this way: ‘The law was impotent because it could only be as strong as the flesh through which it had to be implemented, and the flesh was hopelessly under the power of sin.’

Importantly, Christ’s boundary-crossing soteriological mission would make it possible for those freed by him to also enter into a new sphere of existence – one no longer characterised by weakness and domination under sin, but now characterised by the filial-bond-creating rule of the indwelling Spirit (Rm 8:4, 9, 14). Although this new sphere of existence will still include Adamic bodilyness that can never be completely disengaged from the possibility to give in to fleshliness (cf. Rm 8:10, 13), the *inevitable* dominion of sin is no longer applicable (cf. Byrne 1996:243). Thus, σάρξ can also be described as the sphere of existence presided over by sin and the opposite of existing in the sphere of freedom effected by Christ and presided over by the Spirit.

Humanity’s will to obey God’s law is not powerful enough to overcome the alliance of the terrible power of sin with the weakness of its own flesh (Rm 7:21–23). This has left the law incapable of fulfilling its purposes described above. Consequently, ‘Christ’s mission and task [*would be*] to accomplish what the law could not do’ (Fitzmyer 1993:485).

The mission of the Son as the means through which God acted

Having shown that the powerlessness of the law, weakened by man’s fleshliness, was the context for God’s divine intervention (Byrne 1996:236) against the dominance of sin, let us now turn to this divine intervention itself – God condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son.

The motif of God sending an emissary is widely attested in early Christian as well as Greco-Roman and Jewish sources (Jewett 2006:483; see Schweizer 1966:199–200). Whether its use in Romans 8:3 points to an actual pre-Pauline *formula* as such, as has often been argued since Schweizer’s (1966:199–210) article, is debatable. For example, Moo (1996:479) considers it possible, but maintains that ‘the evidence is inconclusive’. However, expositors’ identification of a pre-existing formula here often coincides with them viewing τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός as an anacoluthon (Käsemann 1980:216), in order to explain the apparent awkwardness of the syntax. If an accusative of respect indeed explains the apparent awkwardness as this article proposes, the formula-theory in Romans 8:3 becomes largely redundant.

πέμψας is an aorist participle acting as the verb in the adverbial (participial) clause τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν πέμψας ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας [by sending his own Son in likeness to sinful flesh and regarding sin], which is related to κατέκρινεν [condemned] (the primary verb in the sentence) describing the means (cf. Black 1989:109–110; Fitzmyer 1993:484) by which God condemned sin – he did it by sending his Son. To fully comprehend how the Son’s mission became the means through which God condemned sin, the two additional phrases qualifying πέμψας need to be taken into account.

When expositors consider ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας [in likeness to sinful flesh], the discussion often revolves

around the dogmatic issue of Christ's sinlessness in spite of his complete incarnation (cf. Jewett 2006:483–484). For our purpose, it is enough to note that ὁμοιώματι [likeness] simultaneously denotes similarity as well as difference (Bauer *et al.* 2000:707; Schneider 2000:195–197; also see e.g. Wolter 2011:147; Cottrell 1996:460; Fee 1994:532) – it is 'used because of its ambivalence' (Käsemann 1980:217). A 'likeness' of someone may be a very close representation, but it still is not identical to the person him- or herself. Christ did become human²⁰ in order to associate himself closely with and indeed represent mankind, which exhibits sinful flesh.²¹ However, Paul's use of ὁμοιώματι precludes the possibility of this being a complete identification to the point of Christ himself sinning.²² This being the case, the association of Christ with fleshly humankind was still sufficient for him to be effective in taking upon himself the condemnation that humankind's sin warranted. Thus Christ, by taking on humankind's flesh, that is by entering into humankind's sphere of existence in the flesh, effectively addressed the problem of sin's grasp on humankind's flesh 'from within' (Moo 1996:480). Although the redemptive effect of Christ's mission (especially his death and resurrection) potentially includes all of mankind, ultimately it is to the benefit of only those who appropriate it (participate in it) through faith (Wolter 2011:109–110).

Expositors are divided on the question whether *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* denotes merely 'regarding sin' (e.g. Barrett 1962:156; Cranfield 1975:382; Zeller 1985:153; Fitzmyer 1993:486) or whether it is used in the technical (sacrificial) sense of a 'sin offering' (e.g. Wilckens 1980:126–127; Käsemann 1980:216; Wright 1992:220–225; Fee 1994:533; Byrne 1996:236–237, 243; Moo 1996:480),²³ though traditionally, more expositors seemed to prefer the latter. This exposition is often based on the assumption that the Septuagint uses *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* to render the Hebrew for 'as a sin offering'.²⁴ Although Dunn (2002:422) discerns 'a strong antipathy to linking Paul's thought to sacrificial categories' on the part of some scholars, he maintains that such sacrificial allusions would be natural and unremarkable to people living within a 1st-century context. Dunn also expounds the basic theology behind the phrase (interpreted sacrificially). Since 'the only remedy for flesh's incorrigible weakness in the hands of sin is its death',

20. Paul's description is not docetic, implying that the Son only appeared to be in a form like that of sinful flesh, but was actually born as a human' (Fitzmyer 1993:485; cf. Gl 4:4).

21. *σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας* is used 'as an effective summary statement of Paul's view of the fallen human condition', denoting the 'epochal reality' of mankind in its unredeemed state (Dunn 2002:421). This relates to Paul's Adam Christology (see Schnelle 2005:437).

22. 2 Corinthians 5:21 is a clear example of Paul pointing out Christ's own sinlessness within the context of his substitutionary role. Thus this question should not too easily be relegated to being a post-Pauline dogmatic concern since it is in fact already present in Paul's theology (if germinally at least; cf. Käsemann 1980:217; also cf. Bauer *et al.* 2000:707).

23. Wolter (2011:106–107) mentions *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* (Rm 8:3) under a paragraph that discusses the sacrificial background to the redemptive effect (*Heilswirkung*) of Christ's death but concludes that, in the context of 8:3, it must remain open whether it denotes 'as a sin offering' or 'as a consequence of sin' (*wegen der Sünde*).

24. For example Leviticus 5:6–7, 11; 16:3, 5, 9; Numbers 6:16; 7:16; 2 Chronicles 29:23–24; Nehemiah 10:33; Ezekiel 42:13; 43:19 (Dunn 2002:422; cf. Wolter 2011:106). Moo (1996:480) indicates that 44 of the 54 Septuagint occurrences of *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* pertain to sacrifice. See, however, the critique of Breytenbach (1993:73–74).

the sin offering, a substitute being of flesh itself, effects God's condemnation of sin through the destruction of its flesh (i.e. its death). This is applied metaphorically to the death of Christ, which, similar to a sin offering, effects freedom from sin and its dire consequences.

Breytenbach (1993:73–75), however, states a few reasons why 'sin offering' is not the appropriate rendering in Romans 8:3 nor in 2 Corinthians 5:21. In the immediate context, *ἁμαρτία* consistently refers to 'sin', making it unnatural to read it as 'sin offering' in this one instance only. Breytenbach also finds it doubtful that, even in the LXX rendition of Leviticus, *ἁμαρτία* refers to anything else than simply 'sin'. He substantiates this with the fact that *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* does not fixedly refer to 'sin offering' in the Greek pseudepigrapha, Philo or Josephus either. With Breytenbach, Schnelle (2005:445) is also of the opinion that the connotation here is probably 'a general image of atonement, not the specific sacrificial cult of the Old Testament'. He (Schnelle 2005:446) continues by pointing out that '... it is much more likely that the Greek idea of the substitutionary death of the righteous, whose death effects the expiation/taking away of sin, is the starting point for the formation of this tradition'.²⁵ Thus, at this stage, the question still seems to be undecided though Breytenbach's point of view seems to be gaining ground.

Is there any significance to Paul's use of *ἑαυτοῦ* in the motif of God sending his Son? Might there be a reason for him to emphasise that God sent his *own* Son? Cottrell (1996:460) and others have stated that the description of Jesus' mission as *τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν* 'indicates not only the pre-existence of Christ but his divine nature as well'. Though both these concerns, together with the concept of incarnation, may logically be inferred from the phrase,²⁶ none of these seem to be foremost in Paul's argument (cf. Fee 1994:530). Two other purposes for using *τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν* seem contextually more appropriate.

Firstly, the phrase emphasises the extent to which God involved himself personally in the once and for all resolution of the problem of sin. No longer would a regular substitute suffice. God now took personal initiative and became intimately involved by sending *his own Son*. As Fitzmyer (1993) puts it:

The emphatic phrase ... highlights the divine relationship of Jesus to the Father and the divine origin of the task to be accomplished by one in close filial relationship with God. (p. 484)

A result of this emphasis is that the emotional impact of the statement is increased (cf. Dunn 2002:421): It was not some abstract third party who would become the substitute but God's very own beloved Son.

25. *Diese Tendenz, Sühne vom Kult abzukoppeln, wird durch die Hellenisierung des Judentums verstärkt, zumal der Gedanke eines Todes "für" in der Kaiserzeit verbreitet war, ohne an Tempelriten gebunden zu sein*' (Breytenbach 1993:75). Early Jewish-Christianity read particularly Isaiah 53 in the light of the Greek concept of the substitutionary death of a righteous person, and according to Breytenbach (1993:77–78), this is the more likely 'hintergrund' of Paul's theology of Christ's atonement as opposed to a sacrificial allusion.

26. Cf. Fossum (1992:133, 135), Schnelle (2005:442) and also Byrne (1996:243), who bases his inference on the parallels of Gl 4:4–5, Philippians 2:6 and 2 Corinthians 8:9. See, however, Dunn's (2002:420–421) critique.

Secondly, the emphasis here anticipates a point that Paul will soon make in the context of Romans 8:14–30. Ultimately, God will have many (adopted) ‘sons’ (υἱός; Rm 8:14, 19) and ‘children’ (τέκνον; 8:16, 17, 20), those ‘predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son so that he should be the firstborn (πρωτότοκον) amongst many brothers’ (8:29). The unique and foundational role of Jesus Christ, the original and archetypal Son, thus seems to be anticipated here through the emphasis that He is τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν – the one who would, by becoming the ultimate sin offering or righteous substitute, not only make possible our adoption (Rm 8:14–16) but also our ‘walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit’ (8:4).

It should be clear that Paul’s Adam Christology (particularly Rm 5:12–21) underpins this whole motif. Adam has by his transgression begun an epoch in which sin and death dominate humankind. As such, he is the originator and representative of this epoch in which humankind corporately exists and participates, transgresses and ultimately dies. However, in this way, Adam also paved the way for an antithetical prototype whereby Christ’s salvific work expunges the culpability of those who are ‘in him’. Christ has become the ‘new Adam’, the originator and representative of a new epoch for mankind, based upon his death and resurrection, in which those who believe in him now corporately exist.

From Romans 5:16–18 it is clear that, whereas existence within the paradigm of Adam means corporately participating in his sin (ἁμαρτάνω, παράπτωμα), condemnation (κατάκριμα), and death (θάνατος), existence within the paradigm of Christ means corporately participating in the acquittal (δικαίωμα) and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) effected by him. To become the new Adam (originator and representative of mankind in a new epoch), Christ has taken on the likeness of the first Adam, closely associating himself with sinful humankind, being ‘in the flesh’ himself in order to effectively deal with the problem of sin right where it resided (Schnelle 2005:499). Whilst in most New Testament references to God sending his Son, the point is primarily the incarnation (Moo 1996:479), in Romans 8:3 substitutionary (possibly sacrificially) and participatory aspects are added to the incarnational. Since Christ (the new Adam) collectively carried the just punishment for mankind’s sin, it is as if those who ‘are in him’ were actually there themselves and have (in him) already been punished, making unmerited any subsequent punishment for sins already condemned (cf. Rm 8:1).

A more complete picture of ‘God condemned sin’

That finally brings us back to the primary clause of Romans 8:3–4 ὁ θεὸς ... κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί [God ... condemned sin in the flesh]. Paul’s meaning should be clear by now. Through an image that is not only forensic, but also substitutionary, Paul asserts that God has

effectively addressed the problems of humankind’s weak flesh that is dominated by sin by means of the mission of his Son into the sphere of ‘sinful flesh’. As the first Adam initiated an epoch of sin dominated flesh, Jesus, the second Adam, was sent to conclude it (cf. Rm 5:12–21; cf. Fitzmyer 1993:487). By becoming the Godsend representative of mankind-under-the-sway-of-sin (without actually bowing before sin himself) and by bringing the ultimate sacrifice (at least proverbially),²⁷ Christ bore the condemnation of humankind’s sin in his body when he died on the cross. Thus, all sin was collectively condemned by God in the flesh of Jesus Christ, and he bore that condemnation out in the destruction of his flesh (his death). Those who partake of this reality through their participation or inclusion ‘in Christ’ by faith (cf. Rm 1:16–17; 3:22–24, 26) can boldly proclaim with Paul that ‘there is now no condemnation’ for me (cf. 8:1)!

Conclusion

Ensuing from the argument of Romans 7:7–25, 8:3–4 presents ‘the incapability of the law’ as a significant part of the greater problem of sin that needed resolution. This is brought to the fore best when the opening clause of Romans 8:3 (τὸ ἀδύνατον) is seen to be an accusative of respect with dependant clauses (τοῦ νόμου // ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός), which points out sin’s two concomitant problems as (within this context) the primary points of reference in regard to which the claims of 8:3–4 are made.

Overpowering *sin* (personified as slave master in the background context of Romans 7:7–25), through the weakness of humanity’s *fleshliness*, coerced even the *law* of God into serving its own purposes. In the face of terrible sin, the law proved incapable of dealing with sin decisively and effectively, of empowering those who wished to obey it to actually do so and of nullifying death as sin’s inevitable outcome. Put positively: The law proved incapable of bringing life to those who would obey the law.

However, through the mission of his Son, God decisively and effectively addressed the threefold problems of sin, the weakness of the flesh and the incapability of the law. Sin and flesh were addressed through the condemnation of sin in the flesh of Christ with the result that those ‘in Christ’ are assured that they are freed from the prospect of condemnation (Rm 8:1–2). The incapability of the law was also addressed in that the mission of the Son fulfilled the requirement of the law with reference to those who walk according to the Spirit (Rm 8:4).

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²⁷ See above the debate regarding the exposition of περί ἁμαρτίας (Rm 8:3) between, for example, Dunn (2002:422) and Breytenbach (1993:73–75).

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