CHAPTER SEVEN

ROMANS 5: JESUS AS THE CENTER OF GOD’S SALVIFIC PROCESS AND ITS RESULT

In Romans 4, Paul deals with justification by faith through the exemplary case of Abraham, and bridges the case of Abraham’s faith to his readers. In the course of bridging, he restates Jesus’ death and resurrection as the central event in God’s salvation (Rom 4:24–25). Then, in Romans 5, Paul explains the meaning and implication of the centrality of Jesus.

The position of Romans 5 in Paul’s argument is a debated problem. In general, there are four options concerning this issue: (1) as a conclusion, Romans 5 is attached to Romans 1–4;¹ (2) as a beginning, Romans 5 is connected to Romans 6–8;² (3) Rom 5:1–11 and 12–21 are linked to Romans 1–4 and Romans 6–8 respectively;³ and (4) Romans 5 is a transition between Romans 1–4 and 6–8.⁴ Regarding this issue, however, it would be better to delay the determination of the position of Romans 5 for the present until we have finished discussing Romans 5.

¹ Sanday and Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, xlvi–xlix; Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, 211; M. Wolter, Rechtfertigung und zukünftiges Heil: Untersuchungen zu Röm 5:1–11 (BZNW 43; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978), 214–16; Bruce, Romans, 64–65; Dunn, Romans 1–8, 242–44; Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, 217; Stuhlmacher, Paul’s Letter to the Romans, 14–15 (he views Rom 3:21–5:21 as one discourse unit); Fee, God’s Empowering Presence, 492–93; etc.

² Nygren, Commentary on Romans, 187–89; Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, 1:253–54; Beker, Paul, the Apostle, 83–86; Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, 290–95; Byrne, Romans, 162–64; Schreiner, Romans, 245–49; R.N. Longenecker, “The Focus of Romans,” in S.K. Soderlund and N.T. Wright (eds.), Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the occasion of His 65th Birthday (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 57–69; Jewett, Romans, 347; etc.

³ Leenhardt, The Epistle to the Romans, 131, 139–40; M.C. de Boer, The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5 (JSNTSup 22; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 148–49; etc.

As far as the inner structure is concerned, Romans 5 can be divided into two sub-units, Rom 5:1–11 and 12–21, according to their content and characteristics. Rom 5:1–11 introduces a relational aspect as another facet of salvation by means of first person plural references. It also shows a parallel structure between vv. 1–2 and 9–11 through the co-occurrence of several concepts, such as, justification, peace and reconciliation, boasting, and the mediatorial role of Jesus. Rom 5:12–21 is distinguished from Rom 5:1–11 by the shift of person reference from the first person plural to the third person singular, and by the use of comparison as the main argumentative method. Yet, in spite of the above divisions, there is enough reason to think of Romans 5 as a unity. The major reason is the topical interest in Jesus. Throughout Romans 5, Jesus appears as a key topical participant, who has a mediatorial role in the process of salvation. Particularly, this role of Jesus is expressed by the repetitive use of διὰ + genitive construction. Ten out of seventeen occurrences are related to Jesus (vv. 1, 2, 9, 10, 11 (x2), 17, 18, 19, and 21). Hence, although Romans 5 consists of Rom 5:1–11 and 12–21, the overall unity is established by the topical interest in the role of Jesus.

1. Rom 5:1–11: Jesus and the overall salvific interactive paradigm between God and humans

A. Text analysis of Rom 5:1–11