

**Romans 5 and 13 as Lenses into the Similarities and Differences of
Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin's Romans Commentaries**

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I. Introduction

Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon and John Calvin unanimously esteemed Paul's Epistle to the Romans as providing the clearest teachings of the central messages of the Gospel, namely justification by faith alone and correct understandings of grace, faith, sin, Law, and good works. In Luther's 1522 preface to Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he writes, "This epistle is in truth the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest expression ... it is a brilliant light, almost enough to illumine the whole Bible."¹ Melancthon wrote in a letter to a colleague that Romans is "by far the deepest of all the letters and [serves] as the *scopus* in the entire Holy Scripture."² Similarly, Calvin proclaimed concerning Paul's Epistle to the Romans: "If we have gained a true understanding of this epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture."³

After having begun his career at Wittenberg University with a set of lectures on the Psalms (1513-1515), Luther turned to lecture on Romans in 1515-1516. Thus, one must note that Luther's lectures on Romans came very early in his career and were central to the shaping

¹ Martin Luther, *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (1522) in John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 19.

² H. Scheible, ed, *Melancthons Breifwechsel: Kritische und Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1977-) 68 (T1.159, 7-9), dated 11 December 1519. Heretofore, *Melancthons Breifwechsel* will be referred to by *MBW*. See also a similar statement by Melancthon in *MBW* 47 (T1.112, 32-33), dated 27 March 1519.

³ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans by Ross Mackenzie, ed by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1960), 5.

of his emerging reformation concerns.⁴ While Romans remained a crucial touchstone for much of his theological writing to come, he never returned to lecture upon it a second time. Indeed, Philip Melancthon took over these lectures on Romans in 1519 after his appointment to Wittenberg University as Greek lecturer. Melancthon lectured on Romans several times (starting in 1519 and going at least as late as 1552), out of which came several commentaries on Romans. Melancthon's initial work on Romans was published in 1519 entitled "A Theological Introduction to Paul's Letter to the Romans." The following year his students published his arrangement of Romans according to its theological themes, which Melancthon revised in 1521 into his famous *Loci communes theologici*.⁵ Furthermore, Luther had Melancthon's lectures on Romans and Corinthians published in 1522.⁶ In 1532, Melancthon published his own commentary on Romans, which he revised and expanded in 1540. It is this latter 1540 commentary that is used in the writing of this essay.

John Calvin's commentary on Romans was also published in 1540 and based upon lectures he had given in Geneva around 1536-1537/38. This Latin 1540 commentary was expanded and translated into French in 1550.⁷ Calvin specifically names his reasons for writing a commentary on Romans in his dedication of the work to Simon Grynaeus. Calvin notes that several significant reformers have already written commentaries on Romans, such as Philip

⁴ Most scholars place the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation with the publication of Luther's *95 Theses* in October of 1517.

⁵ The work published by his students was entitled "Themes and Topics of Theological Matters" (*Rerum Theologicorum Capita seu Loci*). Notably, Melancthon's *Loci communes theologici* comes out of his work on Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

⁶ Luther published this under the title of "Annotations" (*Annotationes Phil. Melancthonis in Epistolas Pauli ad Romanos et ad Corinthios*).

⁷ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 2d ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 15, 206-207. This essay uses Calvin's 1540 Latin commentary, however.

Melancthon, Heinrich Bullinger, and Martin Bucer. Though he esteems these commentaries highly, Calvin assesses that Melancthon's topical approach leads him to neglect many important points, while Bucer's verbosity does not lend itself to clear and simple instruction of Christians. Hence, Calvin writes that he has undertaken this work "for no other reason than the common good of the Church" in order that he might "treat every point with brevity" and "point them [his Christian readers] to the best interpretation" of Romans.⁸

This essay examines the commentaries of Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, and John Calvin on chapters five and thirteen of Paul's Epistle to the Romans as lenses to compare and contrast their theological emphases and interpretive methods. Romans five provides a picture of their views on the fruits of justification, the role of suffering in the Christian life, and their definitions of sin, Law, and grace. Romans thirteen reflects these three reformers' teachings concerning the Christian's relationship to governing authorities and the fulfillment of the Law through love of neighbor. While many common correlations are found in Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin's readings of Romans five and thirteen, there are also some significant differences that speak to their particular theological emphases and exegetical strategies. Luther, at the time of his Romans commentary, writes as a Catholic monk concerned for pious practices and disillusioned with the church leaders of his day. In this context, he focuses upon the freedom of the Christian. Melancthon, on the other hand, often appears to be more Lutheran than Luther himself in his emphasis on such distinctively Lutheran theological themes as the distinction between Law and Gospel and justification by faith alone.⁹ Calvin is far more concerned to

⁸ See "John Calvin to Simon Grynaeus" in his dedication of his commentary on Romans in *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, 3.

⁹ While this statement is true, it is not exactly fair. Remember that Luther writes on Romans very early in his career before his Reformation program has fully emerged, while Melancthon writes a couple of decades after

follow carefully the authorial intention of the text—namely, what he sees to be the intentions of Paul—and is more apt to find and emphasize the doctrines of providence and election in these chapters.

II. Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin on Romans 5

Rom 5:1-2: Fruits of Justification by Faith Alone

Based upon the opening verse of chapter five, Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin all emphasize that the fruits of justification by faith alone are peace and a pacified conscience.¹⁰ Luther calls this a spiritual peace in contrast to carnal peace and asserts that it comes only through Christ and by faith. Indeed, Luther insists that one may not separate these two aspects of “through Christ” and “by faith”—a separation that he notes many make in his day.¹¹ Melancthon reiterates these teachings of Luther; however, he tends to place the conversation more within the framework of Law versus Gospel. While Melancthon also writes against the Catholic monks who teach Christ and not faith and accordingly insists that one needs both, he more heavily emphasizes that justification by faith alone does not come by fulfillment of the Law but through the actions of Christ the Mediator. Remission of sins, writes Melancthon, needs both Christ and faith: sins are remitted on account of Christ and by faith in the Mediator. Thus, he seethes against the scholastic theologians of his day “who suppose that the regenerate

Luther’s reformation has taken form. Hence, it is not surprising that Melancthon is more deliberate in handling the theology of Romans with much more explicit and distinctive reforming Lutheran emphases.

¹⁰ Rom 5:1 reads (NRSV), “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol 25: *Lectures on Romans*, ed by Hilton C. Oswald, trans by Jacob A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 285. Hereafter, *Luther’s Works* will be referred to by LW. Philip Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans*, trans by Fred Kramer (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1992), 122. Calvin, 104.

¹¹ LW 25:286.

are thereafter righteous on account of the fulfillment of the Law,” which, adds Melancthon, destroys faith and makes no need for Christ.¹²

In addition to his emphasis on Law versus Gospel, Melancthon adds two more aspects not touched upon by Luther. He affirms that this peace and pacified conscience are bulwarks against doubt, henceforth providing a kind of certainty and assurance of salvation and the remission of sins.¹³ Yet, Melancthon, unlike Luther, does not end the conversation with the peace of salvation but extends this peace to the ongoing process of sanctification. He writes that Christians can have peace and confidence even though they still struggle with sin. This is the “hope of sharing the glory of God” (Rom 5:2), for this glory is not yet attained perfectly. Thus, Melancthon concludes, “Although we are still unclean, we are pleasing by faith and await perfect newness.”¹⁴

John Calvin also affirms that peace and a serenity of conscience are the fruits of justification by faith alone. The weight of his exegesis, however, falls upon the *certainty* of salvation that he finds taught in Rom 5:1-2. His criticism of Catholic theologians is less about the inseparable connection between faith and Christ or their lack of distinction between Law and Gospel and more about their teachings that Christians are always in a state of uncertainty concerning their salvation. Paul, says Calvin, has set forth in these verses the “sure pledge in Christ of the grace of God.”¹⁵ Implicit within this emphasis is Calvin’s doctrine of election: the foundation of this certainty is that salvation is not based upon our works or efforts but upon the

¹² Melancthon, 122-24, there 122.

¹³ Melancthon, 123.

¹⁴ Melancthon, 124, there 125.

¹⁵ Calvin, 104, 105, there 105.

grace of God and that this same grace continues to be given to [elect] Christians so that they may persevere in their salvation and be certain of it.¹⁶

Rom 5:3-5: Role of Suffering in the Christian Life

Martin Luther spends a significant amount of time in his exegesis on Rom 5:3-5, which concerns the role of suffering in the Christian life. Indeed, this emphasis is only second to his teaching concerning original sin that occupies the focus of the remainder of his interpretation of Romans five. The primary point of Luther's teaching concerning suffering is that suffering reveals the true character of a person.¹⁷ A true Christian, writes Luther, accepts suffering willingly and bears it with patience.¹⁸ Luther connects the need for these trials and tribulations to two factors: the fact of original sin and the need to direct one's hope properly. He asserts,

If God did not test us by tribulation, it would be impossible for any [person] to be saved. The reason is that our nature has been so deeply curved in upon itself because of the viciousness of original sin ... Therefore our good God, after [God] has justified us and give us [God's] spiritual gifts, quickly brings tribulation upon us, exercises us, and tests us so that this godless nature of ours [original sin] does not rush in upon these enjoyable sins, lest in [one's] ignorance [a person] should die the eternal death.¹⁹

Furthermore, Luther asserts that this suffering instructs Christians to despair of the created things in which they place their hope and trust in God alone. This, says Luther, is what Paul means when he writes that suffering ultimately leads to hope (Rom 5:3-4).²⁰ Finally, based

¹⁶ Calvin, 105.

¹⁷ LW 25:288.

¹⁸ Here Luther asserts that the "impatient [person] is not yet a Christian" (LW 25:290). He continues by naming different kinds of persons based upon their degrees of impatience and patience. The lowest degree bears suffering impatiently and seeks a quick release from it; persons in the middle willingly bear suffering but do not seek it; and the highest grade seek suffering "like a treasure" (LW 25:290-91).

¹⁹ LW 25:291, 292.

²⁰ LW 25:292.

upon Rom 5:5, he concludes that it is the gift of God's love given through the Holy Spirit that provides the strength to bear suffering. Hence, this ability is a gift of God and not a result of human effort or practice. Moreover, this love of God given by the Spirit into human hearts is a sign of the distinction between the free sons of God and bondservants. Free sons of God accept suffering willingly and persevere in hope, while a bondservant runs away in fear.²¹

Melancthon is much less concerned with the question of the role of suffering in the Christian life *per se*; rather, his primary aim is to argue that suffering needs to be understood not under Law but under Gospel. Afflictions, insists Melancthon, are not signs of God's wrath but are exercises allowed by God to strengthen faith, patience, obedience, and hope. While he has just written about the *future* "hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom 5:2), he now declares that afflictions are a Christian's *present* glory, for it is through trials and tribulations that a Christian is transformed into a new creation in Christ. Thus, afflictions belong to Gospel, for they are not intended as punishment (Law) but as a means to bring about repentance, obedience, and faith.²² Finally, rather than emphasizing the contrast between a free son and a bondservant, Melancthon concludes by declaring that Rom 5:5 announces the very message of the Gospel: the love of God given on account of Christ by grace and not on account of merit (i.e., Law). Again, here, he also wants to emphasize the certainty that a Christian may have based upon the statement "hope does not confound" (Rom 5:5a). The basis of Christian certainty is the surety of God's promise that "God's love has been poured out" on account of Christ (Rom 5:5b).²³

²¹ LW 25:294-95. This theme of freedom and slavery appears more strongly in his comments on Romans thirteen.

²² Melancthon, 126-27, 125-26.

²³ Melancthon, 127, 128.

Calvin, unlike Luther, does not assert that Christians should seek suffering; rather, he admits that saints bitterly dread adversity. Instead, he points to the *providential* character of suffering for a Christian. He writes that Christians can be “greatly consoled by the thought that all their sufferings are dispensed for their good by the hand of a most benevolent Father.”²⁴ Hence, Calvin teaches that ultimately sufferings contribute to one’s salvation and final good, and this is why one may glory in afflictions. Furthermore, unlike Luther and Melancthon, Calvin feels compelled to reconcile the teaching of Rom 5:3-5 with that of James 1:2-4 to show that they are not contradictory: Paul speaks of patient endurance through sure trust in God’s protection, while James “uses the same word to mean tribulation itself.”²⁵ Finally, Calvin is even more intent than Melancthon to accentuate the certainty Christians may have as expressed in Rom 5:5. Patience in afflictions, writes Calvin, is proof of God’s help. The ability to endure afflictions confirms one’s hope and shows salvation to be most certain, for it demonstrates the presence of the Spirit in one’s life and the pouring of God’s love into one’s heart (Rom 5:5b).²⁶

Rom 5:6-11: Certainty of Salvation and God’s Love

Luther actually spends little to no space commenting on Rom 5:6-11. His main objective is to set forth varying interpretations of “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6). One interpretation is to say that Christ according to his humanity died in time but is alive forever according to his divinity. Another construal is that Christians are “weak” according to time but already righteous according to God’s

²⁴ Calvin, 106.

²⁵ Calvin, 107.

²⁶ Calvin, 107-108.

predestination. The reading that Luther prefers is simply that Christ died “when we were not righteous and whole, but rather weak and sickly,” and he leaves it at that with no other comments on these verses.²⁷

Melancthon interprets Rom 5:6-11 as an amplification of the signs and testimonies of the love of God already set forth in Rom 5:5. The facts that Christ did not owe his death, nor did humans deserve it, and that Christ died willingly with no benefit to himself demonstrate the greatness and magnitude of God’s love. Furthermore, Melancthon sees in Rom 5:11 an expression of the certainty a Christian may have. This certainty rests upon the fact that one’s salvation is not based upon Law but upon Gospel; it is not founded upon human worthiness or the keeping of the Law but upon the surety of God’s promise in Christ.²⁸

Not surprisingly, Calvin’s emphasis in his reading of Rom 5:6-11 again falls squarely upon the certainty of salvation Christians may have. The whole purpose of the Apostle Paul, writes Calvin, is to “establish the confidence and security of our souls.” Here, Calvin sets forth his distinctive teaching that when salvation is given it cannot be lost. Christ not only procures salvation for the elect, he preserves it “safe and secure to the end.”²⁹ Furthermore, Calvin proclaims that if reconciliation is accomplished through Christ’s death, how much more will Christ’s life sustain the lives of Christians and “strengthen [their] minds with confidence in [their] salvation.”³⁰ Though not in Melancthon’s language of Law and Gospel, Calvin also

²⁷ LW 25:296.

²⁸ Melancthon, 129-31.

²⁹ Calvin, 109.

³⁰ Calvin, 110.

emphasizes that this confidence rests upon the work of Christ alone and is nothing of our own doing.³¹

Rom 5:12-21: Sin, Grace, and the Law

For the remainder of Romans five, Luther focuses upon four main points: 1.) original sin (and not actual sins) as the subject matter of Rom 5:12-21, 2.) the proper definition of original sin, 3.) the correct understanding of the relationship between the Law and sin, and 4.) in what ways Adam is and is not a type of Christ. Luther sets forth ten reasons for why original sin is the correct subject matter of the last half of Romans five. These include the arguments that sin is spoken of in the singular, while actual sins would have to be spoken of in the plural; the passage speaks of a sin “in which all [persons] sinned,” which can only mean original sin; and the result of this sin is death for all humanity, but personal sins do not result in death and certainly not death for all.³² Next Luther contends against the scholastic definition of original sin as a “lack of original righteousness” and offers what he considers to be a more accurate and biblical definition that points to total depravity. He writes,

[I]t is not only a lack of a certain quality in the will, nor even only a lack of light in the mind or of power in the memory, but particularly it is a total lack of uprightness and of the power of all the faculties both of body and soul and of the whole [person]. On top of this it is a propensity toward evil. It is a nausea toward the good, a loathing of light and wisdom, and a delight in error and darkness...³³

Furthermore, Luther wants his readers to understand that the Law can never take away sin; it only serves to make sin manifest. The Law enabled the recognition of sin, but sin still existed even before the giving of the Law. More importantly, the Law reveals the need for

³¹ Calvin, 109-11.

³² LW 25:296-98.

³³ LW 25:299.

grace and faith. It is neither a help or a cure, asserts Luther, but it reveals that one can never keep the Law fully and is in the bonds of sin.³⁴

Finally, Adam is a type of Christ in that “the likeness of Adam’s transgression is in us,” while the “likeness of Christ’s justification is in us.” Yet, Luther emphasizes the differences between Adam and Christ. Adam brought death to all, while Christ brought life “to those who belong to him.”³⁵ Hence, Luther is implicitly denying a doctrine of universal salvation. Yet, he explicitly focuses upon Rom 5:15 (“but the free gift is not like the trespass”) to argue that if the sin of one man has so much power, how much more powerful is the grace of God. Luther concludes with an emphasis upon God’s grace as a gift that is received not on the basis of merit.³⁶

Melancthon reiterates all of the points made by Luther discussed above.³⁷ After this brief repetition of what are mostly Luther’s own points, however, Melancthon takes the discussion in a different direction. He sets forth the teachings of these passages in terms of his trope of Law versus Gospel. To believe that some quality in ourselves can make us righteous or to not realize that the remission of sins and the imputation of righteousness are completely gratuitous is a doctrine of Law, says Melancthon. But the Word of God declares the promises of the *Gospel*. Thus, he contrasts the effects of grace (Gospel) from the effects of the Law. Yet, this discussion of the effects of the Law, unlike Luther, leads Melancthon to expound on the

³⁴ LW 25:302-304, 307.

³⁵ LW 25:305.

³⁶ LW 25:305.

³⁷ Melancthon writes that the passage concerns original sin, not actual sins, and he defines original sin much like Luther. He also affirms that the Law cannot take away sin, only reveal it. He concludes, like Luther, that the differences between Christ and Adam are greater than their similarities. See Melancthon, 132-33, 134-35, 136.

usefulness of the Law not just to lead to salvation (i.e., reveal sin), but its ongoing usefulness in the Christian's process of sanctification.³⁸ Finally, unlike Luther, Melancthon emphasizes that God's offer of grace is universal. Grace is offered to all, for it is God's will that all be saved; yet, he does add that not everyone will accept this grace.³⁹

Calvin also maintains that Rom 5:12-21 concerns original sin, defines original sin as total depravity, and notes the role of the Law to reveal sin.⁴⁰ The weight of Calvin's exegesis, though, is very different from that of Luther or Melancthon. Calvin is particularly concerned about the possibility of people believing this passage speaks about universal salvation. Thus, he spends much time arguing that a central difference between Adam and Christ is that while Adam's sin extends to all, Christ's salvation only extends to the elect. Neither Rom 5:6 nor Rom 5:15-19 speak of universal salvation.⁴¹ Calvin stresses that one of the main differences between Adam and Christ is that "Christ's benefit does not come to all [people] in the manner in which Adam involved his whole race in condemnation."⁴² Thus, Calvin contends that in Rom 5:15 ("much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many") Paul does not speak of all humanity, but of only believers, for faith is necessary in order to participate in the grace of Christ.⁴³

³⁸ Melancthon, 137-38, 140-42.

³⁹ Melancthon, 139.

⁴⁰ Calvin, 111, 112-13, 119-20.

⁴¹ Calvin, 108-109, 115-17. On Rom 5:6 Calvin argues that "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" means that Christ died for believers at a time before their actual reconciliation to God. Namely, according to Calvin, Christ dies for the elect but he does so while they are still ungodly. See Calvin, 108-109.

⁴² Calvin, 117.

⁴³ Calvin, 115, 117. Calvin writes, "In order, however, that we may participate in the grace of Christ, we must be ingrafted into Him by faith. The mere fact of being a man, therefore, is enough to entail participation in the

A Few Conclusions on Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin on Romans 5

While many common theological themes are evident, several distinct emphases arise among these three exegetes' interpretations of Romans five. The import of Luther's exegesis of Romans five falls upon the role of suffering in a Christian's life and a proper understanding of original sin as total depravity. At least in his 1515-1516 commentary on Romans, one does not find a substantial stress upon the doctrine of justification by faith alone per se but more upon the role of tribulation in a Christian's life to exercise and test the Christian in order to overcome the power of original sin and to teach the Christian to rely upon the love God freely given through the Spirit. What is important to keep in mind is that Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone has not yet fully emerged at the time of the writing of his commentary on Romans. Indeed, Luther is still very much writing as a Catholic *monk*, which can be seen particularly in his emphasis on the role of suffering in the Christian life. However, one can see the seeds that will grow into his fuller doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Melancthon and Calvin both write after the emergence of the full development of Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone. Thus, Melancthon writes more clearly and centrally concerning the ways this doctrine is found in Romans five. He also employs the characteristic Lutheran exegetical tool of Law versus Gospel throughout his reading of Romans five. Moreover, he adds emphases upon the certainty of salvation, the processes of sanctification, and the ongoing role of the Law in sanctification. In these ways, Melancthon has crafted a distinctively *Lutheran* reading of Romans, while also attending to aspects for

wretched inheritance of sin, for it dwells in human flesh and blood. It is necessary, however, to be a believer in order to enjoy the righteousness of Christ, for we attain to fellowship with Him by faith" (Calvin, 117).

which Luther has been criticized. Namely, Melancthon inserts a greater emphasis on sanctification and allows for the ongoing role of the Law in sanctification.⁴⁴

Calvin and Melancthon exhibit in their exegeses the turn of second-generation reformers toward the focus on the certainty of salvation. This is even more prominent in Calvin's reading of Romans since it is a central element of his own Reformed theology. Likewise, Calvin's particular Reformed theology leads him to underscore the evidences of election and providence that he finds in Romans five and clearly to deny the doctrine of universal salvation. For Calvin, salvation can only be intended for the elect, and salvation is preserved safe and secure to the end (i.e., salvation cannot be lost).

III. Luther, Melancthon and Calvin on Romans 13

Rom 13:1-7: Submission to Authorities

According to Melancthon, Paul in Rom 13:1-7 is very clearly writing about the Christian's proper relationship to civil society and civil authorities. Only later in his commentary does he extend his discussion of authority to questions of church authority—and this only to demonstrate the ways that civil law is more binding than ecclesiastical law.⁴⁵ Likewise, Calvin reads the text as addressing the Christian's proper response to civil authorities; yet, Calvin does not extend the discussion to ecclesiastical authority.⁴⁶ Luther, on the other hand, while acknowledging in his gloss that the text is about civil authorities, prefers

⁴⁴ What is distinctively Lutheran is the reading through the lens of Law versus Gospel, which is an exegetical tool Luther strongly affirms. In later years, Luther is accused of neglecting sanctification in his emphasis upon justification by faith alone and of giving to the Law only the role of revealing sin and one's inability to save oneself. For a study of the centrality of Law and Gospel in Luther's exegetical method, see Gerhard O. Forde, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 240-52.

⁴⁵ Melancthon, 216-17, 222.

⁴⁶ Calvin, 280-81.

to read it concerning the spiritual realm. In this way, Luther uses Rom 13:1-7 to criticize church leaders, rather than to address the Christian's relationship to the state.⁴⁷

Both Melancthon and Calvin find in Romans thirteen the teaching that governments and their officials are ordained and preserved by God and given for the common good. Hence, together they emphasize obedience to civil authorities as part of a Christian's obedience to God.⁴⁸ Calvin and Melancthon also address, each in their own way, the problem of tyrannical governments and corrupt magistrates. Melancthon leaves little to no room for resisting tyrannical governments. Rather, he addresses this problem merely by arguing that a true magistrate should understand that this authority is given to him by God for the common good; thus magistrates who become tyrants and abuse this power for their own desires destroy the ordinance of God and are themselves guilty.⁴⁹ Moreover, Melancthon sternly warns that disobedience of the government is a mortal sin and that the overthrowing of governments is the work of the devil.⁵⁰ Like Melancthon, Calvin says that any who strive to overturn God's ordained order—i.e., state governments—are in effect resisting God, despising God's providence, and waging war against God. Yet, Calvin concedes "dictatorships and unjust authorities are not ordained governments"; they are not God's original intention. Nonetheless, *the right of government* is ordained by God for the common good.⁵¹ Hence, Calvin argues, "no

⁴⁷ LW 25:109, 468, 469, 471, 473.

⁴⁸ Melancthon, 217-18. Calvin, 281, 283.

⁴⁹ Melancthon, 219, 221.

⁵⁰ Melancthon, 220, 218. This language of insurrection as the work of the devil was used previously by Luther in his treatises against the German Peasants' Revolt. For examples, see LW 46:24, 28, 33, 49, 51-55, 67-68.

⁵¹ Calvin, 281.

tyranny can exist that does not in some respect assist in protecting human society.”⁵² Even tyrannies serve their purpose and are not outside of God’s sovereignty, asserts Calvin; thus, the proper response of a Christian to *any* government is obedience. Similar to Melancthon, he simply deals with unjust rulers by saying that they are answerable to God. Even more explicitly than Melancthon, Calvin even advocates obedience to wicked rulers, for that ruler acts as scourge to punish sin.⁵³

Though in his later applications of Romans thirteen Luther iterates these same emphases of Melancthon and Calvin concerning a Christian’s proper relationship of obedience to civil authorities,⁵⁴ in the early years of his commentary on Romans he does something completely different. First, he uses Rom 13:1-7 to criticize the church leaders of his day. These priests, says Luther, “are only shadows of what they should be”; they are only priests in appearance.⁵⁵ He accuses current church leaders of encouraging vices (pride, ambition, prodigality) rather than punishing them and of placing unfit, unholy and unlearned men in positions of power. They are guilty of hypocrisy and judgmentalism, and they do not practice love of neighbor but,

⁵² Calvin, 282.

⁵³ Ibid. Calvin writes, “If a wicked ruler is the Lord’s scourge to punish the sins of the people, let us reflect that it is our own fault that this excellent blessing of God is turned into a curse.”

⁵⁴ For example, this can be seen in his 1522 preface to Romans where Luther writes, “In chapter thirteen, [Paul] teaches us to respect and obey the secular authorities” (*Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, ed by John Dillenberger [New York: Doubleday, 1962], 33). More pointedly, in his 1523 treatise *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it should be Obeyed*, Luther repeatedly refers to Romans thirteen in order to argue that the state is ordained by God and should be obeyed out of love of neighbor. See LW 45: 91, 93, 99, 110. Yet, secular authority does not have the right to command in the area of faith. See LW 45:110.

⁵⁵ LW 25:470.

rather, love themselves too much. Indeed, says Luther, the secular authorities are fulfilling their duties more effectively than the ecclesiastical rulers.⁵⁶

Next, Luther makes a surprising move. On the basis of the wording in Rom 13:1 (“Let every *soul* be subject to the governing authorities”), he launches into a discussion of the three elements of the human—body, soul, spirit—in order to focus upon teachings concerning slavery and freedom. The body, says Luther, is subject to the state. The spirit, however, is completely free and subject to no one but God. The soul, on the other hand, is that midpoint between body and spirit. The soul, Luther writes, is the spirit “insofar as it lives and works and is occupied with visible and temporal matters.” Thus, the soul is subject to every human institution “for the Lord’s sake.”⁵⁷ Yet, Luther focuses upon a discussion of freedom and slavery in order to emphasize the Christian’s freedom from slavery to the Law and from preoccupations with temporal matters and to set forth the true ‘slavery’ to which a Christian is called. Namely, Christians are to be servants to one another through love (Gal 5:13). Luther avows that this is both the highest form of freedom of a Christian and also the proper kind of servitude of a Christian. The absolute wrong kind of servitude for the Christian is slavery to the Law; yet Luther adds that in respect to secular authorities, Paul does not address the question of freedom. According to Luther, obedience to governments is neither a matter of freedom nor a matter of servitude.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ LW 25:471-72.

⁵⁷ LW 25:468-69, there 469. See also LW 25:473. It is only in these brief statements (“the body is subject to the state” and the “soul is subject to every human institution”) that Luther touches upon obedience to the state. He does acknowledge in his interlinear glosses that Romans thirteen concerns civil authorities, and he comments that Paul teaches obedience to even evil rulers. He also affirms that governments are ordained by God for the common good and, therefore, should be preserved. See LW 25:109.

⁵⁸ LW 25:473-75. Later Luther will clarify this to argue that a Christian is ultimately free, but out of love of neighbor they should obey secular authorities and civil laws. See *Temporal Authority* (1523) in LW 45: 89, 94, 96.

If Luther finds theological instruction concerning freedom and slavery in Romans thirteen, Melancthon and Calvin find very different theological teachings. Melancthon uses Rom 13:1-7 to discuss the relation of the Gospel to civil society, teach about God's sovereignty, and contrast civil law and Mosaic Law. While state governments do not belong to Gospel but to reason, these governments are supposed to serve the purposes of the Gospel and, therefore, are not opposed to Gospel. Melancthon repeats several times the point that God ordained governments in order that "God might become known in society and in order that [Christians] might have exercises of confession, patience, faith, and love."⁵⁹ Hence, Melancthon concludes that the Gospel affirms temporal forms of government because ultimately the purpose of these governments is to preserve and protect civil matters so that spiritual matters may flourish.⁶⁰

Melancthon also briefly uses this passage to teach about God's sovereignty. He maintains that the fact that God is the one who is ultimately in control of all authorities is a source of comfort.⁶¹ More so, though, Melancthon focuses upon the contrast between civil law and Mosaic Law. Here he addresses a seeming contradiction that Christians are free from the Law and yet are commanded by Paul to be subject to the laws of the government. Melancthon explains that this spiritual freedom (i.e., freedom from the Law of Moses) does not exclude the

⁵⁹ Melancthon, 216-18, there 217.

⁶⁰ For example, Melancthon writes, "The Gospel does not set up any kind of worldly government, but approves the forms of government ... In public it wants our bodies to be engaged in this civil society and to make sure of the common bonds of this society with decisions about properties, contracts, laws, judgments, magistrates and other things. These external matters do not hinder the knowledge of God ... In fact, God put forth these external matters as opportunities in which faith, calling on God, fear of God, patience, and love might be exercised ... [God] wanted all offices of society to be exercises in confession and, at the same time, exercises of our faith and love" (Melancthon, 216).

⁶¹ Melancthon, 218. This is also the foundation of Melancthon's reasoning that one should never aim to overthrow governments, since they ultimately belong to God's sovereignty.

requirement of obedience to the laws of the government, which is part of one's *bodily* obedience. Hence the spirit is free from Mosaic Law, but the body remains subject to those laws that concern the body (i.e., civil laws).⁶² Indeed, Melancthon goes so far as to proclaim, "Civil laws obligate more than ecclesiastical laws," by which he means that disobedience to civil laws is a mortal sin, whereas Christ wants freedom to reign in the church.⁶³

More than Melancthon, Calvin uses Rom 13:1-7 to emphasize God's sovereignty, particularly God's providence. Governments are under the sovereignty and providence of God. This means that civil rulers are ultimately answerable to God and their power is limited by God. This also includes the fact that governmental rulers can have the authority to implement God's wrath in punishing the wicked, putting the guilty to death (i.e., the use of the sword), and exercising God's vengeance.⁶⁴

Rom 13:8-10: Fulfilling the Law through Love

Luther, at the time of his commentary on Romans, does not use Rom 13:8-10 to set forth his teaching of justification by faith alone and the proper relationship of faith and works—teachings not yet fully developed in his thought. Instead, he concentrates the whole of his exegesis of these verses upon what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself and how this is a very difficult task because humans are inherently selfish and narcissistic. He uses this text

⁶² Melancthon, 220-21. Note that Melancthon is very much echoing Luther's own alignment of the body's obedience to the state in contrast to the spirit's freedom.

⁶³ Melancthon, 222.

⁶⁴ Calvin, 281-83. Calvin particularly sets up the discussion of civil governments as part of God's *providence*. See Calvin, 281. For another study comparing Melancthon and Calvin's exegeses of Romans thirteen, see David Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Civil Magistrate" in *Calvin in Context* by David Steinmetz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 199-211.

to warn against the pretense of love and to urge a practice of love that is not self-seeking but truly seeks the good of the neighbor.⁶⁵

On the other hand, Melancthon and Calvin—whose commentaries come after Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith alone has fully emerged—both find the need to qualify Paul’s statement that the Law can be fulfilled through love (Rom 13:8). They stress that everyone is justified by faith alone and not by works. Thus, Melancthon argues that it is more accurate to say that faith is the true fulfillment of the Law.⁶⁶ Calvin, on the other hand, places the emphasis upon justification by faith alone via a different route. Calvin argues that when Paul writes that love fulfills the Law, he does not refer to the whole Law but only the to second table of the Law, since the commandments of the Decalogue cited by Paul are from the second table (Rom 13:9). Thus, the first table of the Law, which concerns humans’ relationship to God, can only be fulfilled through faith (i.e., justification by faith alone), while the second table concerns one’s relationship to one’s neighbor and is fulfilled by love. Furthermore, Calvin ties this to the previous section of Romans thirteen concerning obedience to civil authorities. One’s obedience to the government is part of one’s love of neighbor.⁶⁷

Rom 13:11-14: Closing Exhortations

Luther believes that Paul writes the final verses of Romans thirteen to lukewarm Christians. Thus, Luther exhorts these Christians to arise from their smugness and lukewarm

⁶⁵ LW 25:475-77. One should note that this commentary comes upon the heels of his previous emphasis upon the freedom of a Christian and the proper servitude of being servants to one another through love.

⁶⁶ Melancthon, 223-24.

⁶⁷ Calvin, 284-86. By the time of Calvin’s commentary, Luther has already set forth the theology that obedience to secular authorities is part of love of neighbor. Calvin writes that “to introduce anarchy, therefore, is to violate charity” (Calvin, 284). The attempt to overthrow governments, then, is in violation of love of neighbor.

lives and lay aside their wrong and superficial penitential practices. Indeed, these lukewarm Christians sound very much like the ecclesiastical leaders he has been criticizing previously. Luther defines “day” and “night” (Rom 13:12) as referring to faith and unbelief respectively. The warning against vices in Rom 13:13 provides instruction both for persons to flee personal vices, such as gluttony, and to guide them in proper relationship to their neighbors. Luther then uses this passage as an opportunity to exhort people to devotion to fasting and temperance.⁶⁸

Melancthon, on the other hand, thinks these final verses are written to those ignorant of true doctrine and in need of knowledge. Thus, those who “sleep” (Rom 13:11) are persons ignorant of true doctrine, while the “armor of light” (Rom 13:12) is the knowledge of God’s Word and the “works of darkness” (Rom 13:12) are the works resulting from ignorance of God.⁶⁹ Similarly, Calvin reads “sleep” in reference to those in need of the revelation of divine truth. “Night” and “sleep,” then, also refer to the ignorance of God, and “light” indicates the revelation of God’s truth.⁷⁰ Both Melancthon and Calvin want to explain why Paul says “salvation is nearer to us now,” but they do so quite differently. Melancthon writes that believers now have the revealed Christ, whereas the Old Testament patriarchs only had the promised Christ; hence, believers have a clearer, closer revelation. Calvin, on the other hand, simply explains the nearness of salvation in reference to the Romans themselves: now that they have faith, their salvation is nearer.⁷¹

⁶⁸ LW 25:478-84.

⁶⁹ Melancthon, 224.

⁷⁰ Calvin, 286-87.

⁷¹ Melancthon, 224-25; Calvin, 287.

While Melancthon does not comment on the list of vices (Rom 13:13) at all, Calvin deals with this list by dividing them up into three general kinds of vices: 1.) intemperance, 2.) carnal lust, and 3.) envious and contentious conduct.⁷² Finally, Melancthon and Calvin provide different interpretations of Paul's command to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 13:14), while Luther does not deal with this command at all. Melancthon emphasizes that Christ is not merely an example to be imitated but that the proper response to Christ is the response of faith, to apprehend Christ by faith. Calvin, alternatively, reads this verse in reference to the cloak of the Holy Spirit given for the believer's protection. Furthermore, "putting on Christ" signifies the renewal of God's image in the Christian soul and the calling of the believer to be ingrafted into the Body of Christ.⁷³

Conclusions: The Importance of Context and Exegesis for Confessional Interests

In his 1515-1516 Romans commentary, Luther employs chapter thirteen to criticize the church leaders of his day. This criticism continues throughout his exegesis of Romans thirteen from Paul's statements about obedience to governing authorities to the call to love of neighbor to the concluding exhortations of the chapter. In each case, Luther finds reason to rebuke the attitudes and practices of current church leaders. "How can one expect laypersons to obey the hypocritical ecclesiastical rulers, who love themselves more than they love their neighbors and who are 'sleeping in their smugness?'" asks Luther. One can see that Luther's immediate historical context and, more specifically, the pressing needs of the church, shape his reading of

⁷² Calvin, 288.

⁷³ Melancthon, 225; Calvin, 288.

the text. In a context in which he has become increasingly disillusioned with the leaders of the church, Luther finds the opportunity to voice his concerns and criticisms.⁷⁴

Furthermore, Luther is still very much a Catholic monk when he writes his commentary on Romans. This has already been seen in his emphasis on the role of suffering in Romans five, but it can also be seen in his exhortations to his readers to pursue with all devotion and seriousness practices of fasting, temperance, sobriety, and chastity.⁷⁵ Though of course Protestants will also encourage pious practices, one should keep in mind that at this time Luther is still a devout monk who observed practices such as fasting very regularly, if not severely.⁷⁶

Most significantly, Luther's theological emphasis in these early years concerns more the theme of freedom versus slavery and has not yet come to its full expression in his doctrine of justification by faith alone. We have seen a faint echo of this theme of freedom in his comments on Romans five, and it takes fuller force in his interpretation of Romans thirteen. A reading of all of Luther's commentary on Romans reveals that this theme of freedom versus slavery is at the very heart of his early understanding of Romans and should be understood as the groundwork of his later doctrine of justification by faith alone. Consequently, then, in his comments on love of neighbor (Rom 13:8-10), Luther does not yet express the clear distinction that faith is the right response to God while works belong to love of neighbor.⁷⁷ Melancthon

⁷⁴ Scholars particularly point to his visit to Rome in 1511 as a significant starting point of his disillusionment with Catholic leadership. See, for example, Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 73, 98-105.

⁷⁵ See his comments on Rom 13:11-14 in LW 25:481-84.

⁷⁶ Brecht points out the importance of Luther's life as a monk in his early years as a scholar and his early biblical exegesis in particular. See Brecht, 46-70, 144-50.

⁷⁷ This is clearly set forth by Luther in his 1520 treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*. See LW 31:343-77, esp 346-49, 364-67, 371.

and Calvin, on the other hand, are quick to clarify that justification is by faith alone and cannot be fulfilled by works or love of neighbor. Hence, they caution against a misunderstanding of Paul's statement that "the one who loves another has fulfilled the Law" (Rom 13:8).

Melancthon and Calvin write their commentaries on Romans not only after the doctrine of justification by faith alone has already become a hallmark of Protestantism, but also after such historical events as the German Peasants Revolt in 1524-1525. Thus, Luther had already issued stern statements about the Christian's duty to obey governmental authorities out of love of neighbor, even if those authorities are unjust and corrupt.⁷⁸ While practically, such an emphasis on obedience to secular authorities can be seen to be connected to many Protestant leaders' dependence on these authorities for protection, one can discern the slightly different theological foundations of this doctrine for Lutherans as opposed to Calvinists. Melancthon appeals to the purpose and usefulness of civil governments for the flourishing of the Gospel (i.e., how civil law serves Gospel), while Calvin is more apt to appeal to state governments as part of God's providence.

Finally, yet again the reader can detect in the exegeses of Melancthon and Calvin themes that point to their distinctive confessional interests.⁷⁹ Both reveal their concern for correct doctrine in their interpretation of the closing comments of Romans thirteen as concerning those ignorant of God's truth. Once more Melancthon reads Romans thirteen

⁷⁸ See Luther's *Admonition to Peace, A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia* (1525); *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants* (1525); and *An Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants* (1525) in LW 46: 17-85, see esp 25, 31-32, 49, 50, 52-53, 66, 67-68, 70, 73, 74. Luther appeals to verses in Romans thirteen several times in each of these documents.

⁷⁹ Placed in more modern terms, I mean themes that point to denominational differences in theology. Remember that the denominations, or confessions, are only just now taking formation at this time. Thus, biblical exegesis is a key tool to promote what Reformation historians call "confessional formation"—the ways in which Lutherans, Reformed, Anabaptists, and Catholics began to differentiate themselves. Ernst Walter Zeeden first coined this term in his book *Die Entstehung der Konfessionen: Grundlagen und Formen der Konfessionsbildung* (Munich, 1965).

through the lens of the distinction between Law and Gospel. Calvin, on the other hand, emphasizes his characteristic doctrines of election, providence, the sovereignty of God, the certainty of salvation, and the particular and unshakeable salvation of the elect (over against the doctrines of universal salvation and the possibility that one can lose salvation).

IV. Closing Comments on Exegetical Method

In conclusion, a word needs to be said about the differing exegetical strategies of Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin. Luther, as a Catholic monk trained in scholastic method, writes his commentary according to the expected scholastic schema of glosses and scholia. Glosses are short interlinear comments, while scholia are the longer, marginal comments that are gathered together as his commentary on the biblical text. In his comments on Romans five and thirteen, however, Luther does not employ the medieval fourfold senses of Scripture (historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical readings).⁸⁰ Luther's own context is very important for the exegetical moves he makes; his situation as a Catholic monk starting to question ecclesiastical authorities and their practices and teachings greatly shape his reading of Romans. Thus, one sees a monk-like emphasis on the good of suffering and devotion to ascetic practices, while also seeing challenges to and criticisms of ecclesiastical authorities.⁸¹

In terms of practice, Luther comments verse by verse, but has no problem with skipping over several verses with little to no comment. What is very evident in Luther's Romans

⁸⁰ Indeed, throughout his Romans commentary he only refers to these senses individually a handful of times. On the allegorical sense, see LW 25:141, 144, 398. On the literal sense, see LW 25:209, 214, 398; and on the tropological sense, see LW 25:141, 212, 398.

⁸¹ Eric W. Gritsch argues precisely this point that Luther's cultural and historical contexts greatly shape his exegesis. See his article "The Cultural Context of Luther's Interpretation," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 266-76. See also Scott H. Hendrix, "Luther Against the Background of the History of Biblical Interpretation," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 229-39.

commentary—and indeed in all of his biblical exegesis—is his principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture. He brings in many other scriptural passages to highlight, expand, supplement, or explain a biblical verse. And when he wants to focus upon a specific theological theme, such as suffering and original sin in Romans five or freedom and slavery in Romans thirteen, Luther writes an extended commentary devoted to the explication of just those few verses. In addition, in his Romans commentary he refers fairly often and usually positively to church fathers' readings of certain verses, particularly to Augustine and sometimes Chrysostom, Bernard, Ambrose, Lombard, and Lefèvre.⁸² In addition to other biblical passages and the church fathers, at other points Luther gives reference to philosophers, historians and poets, such as Aristotle, Vergil, Suetonius, Juvenal, and Catullus, in order to highlight or explain a point.⁸³

While Melancthon also uses Scripture to interpret Scripture, he does this on a much smaller scale than Luther. Melancthon comments on the text verse by verse, but also displays a more explicit didactic method by setting forth lists of key teachings from particular passages.⁸⁴ His *loci* method—the method of drawing out theological themes—is most evident through his use of the lens of the distinction between Law and Gospel throughout his exegesis

⁸² In his comments on Romans five, Luther refers to Augustine eleven times and all positively. See LW 25:296, 297, 302, 303, 304, 305, 307. He refers to Chrysostom five times (LW 25:297, 304, 305) and Lefèvre (LW 25:304), Lombard (LW 25:292), and Ambrose once (LW 25:304). In his comments on Romans thirteen, Luther refers to Bernard of Clairvaux twice positively. See LW 25:472, 478.

⁸³ At least in his comments on Romans five and thirteen these are used positively and informationally. For example, on Romans five Luther uses Vergil's mythological monsters (Hydra, Cerberus, and Antaeus) to describe the power of original sin (LW 25:300). On Romans thirteen, he uses the testimonies of Suetonius, Juvenal, and Catullus to describe the vices of Rome (LW 25: 481).

⁸⁴ For example, on Rom 5:3 Melancthon gives a list of four teachings concerning afflictions. See Melancthon, 126. Likewise, he lists four key teachings Paul gives in Romans thirteen concerning the Christian and civil governments. See Melancthon, 218.

of both Romans five and thirteen, but it can also be seen in his emphasis on describing the theological virtues of faith and hope and defining what he understands to be the correct doctrines of justification by faith alone, original sin, Law, and grace. At least in his exegesis of Romans five and thirteen, Melancthon rarely refers to church fathers; when he does, it is negative and often targeted at a general group (such as the scholastic theologians).⁸⁵ On the other hand, in his comments on Romans thirteen, Melancthon refers to Greek philosophers and Greek history to highlight the meaning of the text.⁸⁶

Calvin's exegetical method in his commentary on Romans is different from those of Luther and Melancthon in significant ways. Calvin also gives a verse by verse exposition, but he leaves no part of a verse uncommented upon. At least in his Romans commentary, Calvin employs the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture on a vastly lesser scale than Melancthon, let alone Luther.⁸⁷ Most importantly, a key governing principle of Calvin's exegesis is his concern for authorial intention. This concern can be seen frequently in his comments on Romans five and on nearly every page of his comments on Romans thirteen.

⁸⁵ In his comments on Romans five and thirteen, Melancthon only names one church father explicitly: he argues against Origen's reading of Rom 5:1. See Melancthon, 122. He also rants against the scholastic theologians' definition of original sin, as does Luther and Calvin. See Melancthon, 137-38; LW 25:299; Calvin, 115.

⁸⁶ Melancthon exalts Paul's definition of government as superior to Aristotle's (Melancthon, 219), and he refers to Clodius, Catiline, and Mark Antony as examples of scornful persons who stirred up rebellion against governments and incur eternal punishments for doing so. See Melancthon, 221. For a few studies on Melancthon's exegetical method in his commentary on Romans, see Rolf Schäfer, "Melancthon's Interpretation of Romans 5.15: His Departure from the Augustinian Concept of Grace Compared to Luther's," in *Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, ed by Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 79-104; Richard Muller, "'Scimus enim quod lex spiritualis est': Melancthon and Calvin on the Interpretation of Romand 7.14-23," in *ibid.*, 216-37; and Timothy J. Wengert, "Philip Melancthon's 1522 Annotations on Romans and the Lutheran Origins of Rhetorical Criticism," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed by Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 118-40.

⁸⁷ One should keep in mind that Calvin always intended for his commentaries to be read alongside his *Institutes*. In his *Institutes* one finds Calvin drawing many biblical passages together in order to interpret one another and provide a clear teaching of a doctrine or theological theme.

Often Calvin will write “Paul intends” or refer to what Paul “means to do.” Indeed, Calvin will even supply his own words and explanation in addition to those of Paul, if he deems that Paul’s text does not sufficiently or clearly express what Calvin knows to be his intention. For example, on Rom 5:17 Calvin adds to the words of Paul in order to demonstrate that Paul does not mean universal salvation.⁸⁸ Similarly, on Rom 13:9 Calvin writes that one must “supply what [Paul] has passed over in silence”—namely, that obedience to civil authorities is part of love of neighbor.⁸⁹ As part of his concern for authorial intention, Calvin also makes a point to put the biblical text in its original social setting and context. For example, he begins his comments on Romans thirteen with the conviction that some social situation necessarily led Paul to write on the subject of Christians’ relationship to civil authorities. Likewise, at the end of his comments on Romans thirteen, Calvin simply interprets Paul’s words that “salvation is nearer to us now” from the perspective of the recipients of the letter.⁹⁰ In addition to his focus on authorial intention, another interesting difference between Calvin’s method and those of Melancthon and Luther is Calvin’s greater attention to philology and grammar. He often refers to points of grammar in order to support his reading of the passage.⁹¹ Finally, at least in his comments on Romans five and thirteen, Calvin makes no explicit reference to Greek philosophers, historians, or poets. He does refer to Augustine and Origen in a few of his

⁸⁸ See Calvin, 116-17.

⁸⁹ Calvin, 285. A prime example from his exegesis of Romans five comes from his comments on verse five. After citing Augustine’s reading of the passage, Calvin comments that this reading “is a devout sentiment but not what Paul means” (Calvin, 108).

⁹⁰ Calvin, 280, 287.

⁹¹ See, for examples, Calvin, 109, 113, 117, 287. Melancthon is a Greek scholar, but he gives little explicit attention to Greek grammar in his commentary on Romans. Luther does give attention to grammar in many of his other commentaries, but not at all in his comments on Romans five and thirteen and hardly at all in Romans in general.

comments on Romans five, but similar to Melancthon, these references to the church fathers are mostly negative.⁹²

It should be cautioned that some of the nuances and differences between Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin's exegesis and interpretative method should not be generalized as a definite rule, such as how well they attend to philology and grammar. Yet, some attributes are distinctive and characteristic for each, such as Melancthon's *loci* method, Calvin's concern for authorial intention, and the importance of context and the use of supplementary Scripture in Luther's exegesis. Significant as well is the use of biblical exegesis—specifically by the second-generation reformers such as Melancthon and Calvin—to set forth particular confessional teachings and emphases (Lutheran versus Reformed) in order to advance the development and formation of their separate confessional identities.

⁹² Calvin, 108,114. For significant studies on Calvin's exegetical method, see Hans-Joachim Kraus, "Calvin's Exegetical Principles," *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 8-18; Richard C. Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 1-17; and T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 2d ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 85-108. For more recent studies, see David Steinmetz, "John Calvin as an Interpreter of the Bible," in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed by Donald K. McKim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 282-91 and R. Ward Holder, "Calvin as Commentator on the Pauline Epistles" in *ibid*, 224-56. Each of these scholars point to Calvin's concern for authorial intention and find its roots in his humanism. Holder particularly cautions against giving a too modern read of Calvin's concern for authorial intention.