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THE DIVINE-HUMAN
RELATIONSHIP
IN ROMANS 1–8
IN THE LIGHT OF
INTERDEPENDENCE
THEORY

YOONJONG KIM

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Abbreviations

All abbreviations of ancient literature, academic journals and monograph series follow the forms indicated in the *SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines*, Second Edition (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), with the following exceptions, which are not included in the *SBL Handbook of Style*:

Academic journals

<i>APSR</i>	<i>American Political Science Review</i>
<i>APsy</i>	<i>American Psychologist</i>
<i>ARP</i>	<i>Annual Review of Psychology</i>
<i>BASP</i>	<i>Basic and Applied Social Psychology</i>
<i>CV</i>	<i>Counselling and Values</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>Early Christianity</i>
<i>IntS</i>	<i>Interaction Studies</i>
<i>JPSP</i>	<i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>
<i>JSCP</i>	<i>Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology</i>
<i>JSPHL</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters</i>
<i>PR</i>	<i>Personal Relationships</i>
<i>PSPB</i>	<i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i>
<i>SPPC</i>	<i>Social and Personality Psychology Compass</i>

Interdependence theory

<i>IT</i>	<i>Interdependence Theory</i>
<i>CL</i>	<i>Comparison Level</i>
<i>CL-alt</i>	<i>Comparison Level for Alternatives</i>
<i>PC</i>	<i>Partner Control</i>
<i>JC</i>	<i>Joint Control</i>
<i>AC</i>	<i>Actor Control</i>
<i>MPC</i>	<i>Mutual Partner Control</i>
<i>MJC</i>	<i>Mutual Joint Control</i>

Abstract

The present project aims to analyze the divine-human relationship in Paul's theology, focusing on Paul's portrayal of the relationship in Romans 1–8. The issue of the divine-human relationship has been treated by multiple Pauline studies with various foci, for instance, the issues of agency, the apocalyptic character of Paul's gospel, the concept of χάρις and the covenantal relationship. Nevertheless, these approaches often do not pay sufficient attention to the fact that the divine-human relationship in Romans is not static but exhibits progression and development towards a goal. As a result of this, such studies cannot effectively address the significance of the human agent's role in the relationship, a role which changes at each stage of the relationship's development.

In order to offer a different perspective, the present study utilizes a social psychological theory, namely, interdependence theory (IT). IT offers a consistent analytic framework for diagnosing the interactions in a dyadic relationship in terms of the dependency created by each partner's expectations of outcomes. By deploying IT, we explore several key stages of the divine-human relationship and the direction in which the relationship develops throughout Romans 1–8 in order to highlight the significance of the human partners in the course of the development. The key stages include: betrayal (1:18–3:20), restoration (3:21–26; 5:1–11), the oppressive relationship with Sin (5:12–8:11) and the investment for the future (8:12–39). From our investigation, we conclude that although the foundation of the relationship rests on God's initiative, the divine outworking guides the relationship so that it facilitates mutual participation of the human partners in the restoration and development of the relationship toward the ultimate goal. Another contribution of the present study can be found in our attempt to introduce IT to the field of NT studies through our methodological considerations.

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Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The issue of the divine-human relationship has long been a significant topic in studies of Paul's theology, and scholars have reached various conclusions through different routes of interpretation. In particular, the differences in position derive from how important and influential one thinks the role of each party in the relationship is. Some scholars perceive human beings to be totally dependent upon God; therefore, the human role cannot make any significant difference in the relationship, particularly with regard to salvation. Other scholars, although acknowledging the special quality of the divine action, have attempted to give weight to the meaning of human action. Although a few Pauline studies discuss the issue of the divine-human relationship with various foci, a full-scale study on the question of how the relational dynamics can vary according to the development of the relationship has not been thoroughly attempted. The present study aims to map the geography of the relational dynamics between God and human beings in the course of the relationship's development, examining to what extent both partners' roles are significant in each situation and how the relationship is characterized in terms of dependence between the partners. As will be argued, although the divine-human relationship is fundamentally contingent upon God's initiative, Paul indicates the importance of the mutual engagement of the human actors as the relationship progresses and develops in order to achieve a shared ultimate goal. For our study, we will deploy an analytic framework from social psychology that focuses on relational dynamics in a dyadic relationship, namely "interdependence theory."

Before delving into discussion, it should be noted that we will limit our primary focus to Romans 1–8. Although we can find Paul's description of the divine-human relationship in several places throughout his letters, Paul puts more effort into this topic in Romans 1–8 than in his other letters. Since Romans 1–8 contains rich information about the different stages of the divine-human relationship at a universal level, these chapters can be considered the most appropriate field for our discussion of Paul's view on the divine-human relationship in general.¹ Although Paul's view on the

¹ This is because one of the purposes behind Paul's epistle to the Romans was to explain his theological outlook (cf. Rom. 1:15) to a people whom he had not yet met, thereby obtaining their support, and also to encourage them to cooperate with him (cf. 15:22–24) by presenting his universal plan according to his gospel, along with his apostolic authority, which springs from what he says. Cf. Jeffery A.D. Weima, "The Reason for Romans: The Evidence of Its Epistolary Framework (1:1–15; 15:14–16:27)," *Re&E* 100

issue of the divine-human relationship can be expressed variously throughout his letters, given the importance recognized by scholars of Romans in Paul's theology, even called a "template,"² what we observe in Romans 1–8 can provide grounds for further discussion later on. As will be shown, various stages of the divine-human relationship constitute the flow of Romans 1–8. For instance, the broken state (1:18–3:20), the restorative moments (3:21–26; 5:1–11) and a high degree of intimacy (8:12–39), along with the depiction of an antithetical type of relationship (5:12–8:11). Therefore, in Romans 1–8 our focus will primarily be on the passages related to the aforementioned key stages. Another crucial portion of Romans that also discusses the issue of the divine-human relationship, Romans 9–11, is not dealt with in our research. Although Paul speaks of the divine-human relationship at a universal level in Romans 9–11, because of the particular interest of Romans 9–11 in the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, these chapters will need independent treatment, though this is not to weaken the link between Romans 9–11 and other chapters in Romans. In a similar vein, Romans 12–15, which mainly concentrates on the relationship between believers, is not our main focus, though we will refer to several passages from these chapters that reflect how believers' relationships with God can be related to their lifestyle in practical ways regarding the relationship with others.

In pursuing this aim, we will firstly review several seminal works of Pauline scholarship on the issue of the divine-human relationship mainly in Romans 1–8, elucidating the differences between perspectives as well as the areas for further development. In dealing with the scholars, we will classify them according to their primary orientation of approach to Paul.

1.2 Scholarship on the divine-human relationship in Romans 1–8

In this section, we will critically survey several crucial clusters of Pauline scholarship. The topics of "agency," "apocalyptic" interpretation of Paul, the concept of χάρις

(2003): 17–33. Also, from a pastoral point of view, to spell out the universally meaningful history of the divine-human relationship has the effect of inviting everyone in the community into a single story in which the distinctions between ethnic groups are blurred (cf. 3:9, 23, 29; 14:1–15:13), which will consequently strengthen the community to become a partner for his missionary work. As noted by a few scholars, despite the different degrees of emphasis on each opinion, the two broad aims should not be regarded as mutually exclusive. Cf. F.F. Bruce, "The Romans Debate—Continued," *BJRL* 64 (1981): 334–59; James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), liv–lvii; A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Klaus Haacker, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16–20; A. Andrew Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 52; Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 92–3; *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 10. Therefore, it appears necessary for Paul to give a detailed description about the divine-human relationship as one of the crucial elements that constitute his theological outlook to deal with several practical issues that he faces for his ministry in relation to the Roman believers. For various suggestions regarding the purpose of Romans, see Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991).

² Cf. James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 25–6. See also, Sheila E. McGinn, ed., *Celebrating Romans: Template for Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

(gift) and “covenantal relationship” provide entry points for our discussion on the divine-human relationship.³ As will be shown, one of the main points commonly considered is the possibility of human beings’ active involvement in the relationship.

1.2.1 Divine and human agency

A crucial aspect in discussions about the divine-human relationship is the issue of “agency.” John Barclay’s categorization of different perspectives on divine and human agency summarizes what is at issue among scholars. The three categories are as follows: 1) the “competitive relationship” model in which “the more that one is to be effective, the less can be attributed to the other,” while both agencies remain separated—thus “divine sovereignty and human freedom” would be treated as “mutually exclusive” from this viewpoint;⁴ 2) the “kinship” model in which “the agency of one is shared with the other, rather than standing in competition”—thus, in this shared agency, what can make human agency “most effective” is what is “shared with God”;⁵ 3) the “non-contrastive transcendence” model, which sees the transcendence of divine agency as not necessarily conflicting with human agency, while distinguishing one from the other—thus “created human agencies are founded in, and constituted by, the divine creative agency, while remaining distinctive from God.”⁶ Two questions are embedded in such categorization. On the one hand, it considers the matter of independence of agency; on the other, it considers the matter of competitiveness between agencies.

Francis Watson’s interpretation of Paul appears to fall into Barclay’s first category when he examines Paul’s interpretative work on the OT in light of the Christ-event. Watson argues that Paul, in contrast to other contemporary Jewish interpreters, prioritizes divine agency in his interpretation of the Torah:

Paul’s controversy with “Judaism” (Christian or otherwise) is in fact a conflict about the interpretation of the Torah. . . . [T]he question at issue is whether interpretative priority is to be given to a particular mode of divine agency (the making of an unconditional promise) or of human agency (the observance of the commandments).⁷

Watson argues that Paul, in his reading of Gen. 15:6, prioritizes and acknowledges divine agency in terms of salvation over the counter principle based on the reading

³ The Πίστις Χριστοῦ debate is not dealt with as one of the main categories, because 1) this issue will be dealt with in more detail when we discuss some of the key texts for the issue (e.g. Rom. 3:21–26), and 2) the issue will be referenced when we discuss other categories (e.g. Francis Watson; “apocalyptic Paul”; “covenantal relationship” [N.T. Wright]).

⁴ John M.G. Barclay, “Introduction,” in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. John M.G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷ Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, Second Edition. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 486.

of passages such as Lev. 18:5 (cf. 4 Maccabees; 4QMMT),⁸ which reflects Paul's distinctive grammar of hermeneutics, i.e. "the hermeneutics of faith."

However, Watson does not merely stress the passivity of human beings, but appears to acknowledge the importance of human response. Regarding the meaning of faith as human "acceptance," Watson states that "'faith' is foundational to the divine-human relationship because faith alone is the human act that corresponds to the prior divine communicative action and is intended in it."⁹ Responding to Hays' critique that Watson's interpretation of faith makes the divine-human relationship contingent upon the human act,¹⁰ Watson spells out the nature of faith as something intended in the divine promise. According to Watson, "if divine speech is to be effective, it must evoke a human response."¹¹ Therefore, as a human response, faith still points toward God's initiative. In this sense, Watson argues that in Paul "gracious divine initiative and human activity are not mutually exclusive after all,"¹² which touches upon Barclay's third category.

However, Watson's position becomes somewhat obscure when he also thinks that Paul views human agency as "incorporated within the transformative divine agency (cf. Phil. 2:12–13)" in his ethical discourses.¹³ This might require another type of category (i.e. the second one), and is also the same when he contends that the implication of the antithesis of agency is meaningful in the context of "scriptural controversy."¹⁴ In a positive sense, Watson's readings could represent the divine-human relationship according to Paul as dynamic in specific contexts. However, such an observation also indicates the need for extra clarity, which could be provided by a consistent framework that explicates why Paul is making such different points.

A similar interpretative strategy can be found in other recent works. Jason Maston attempts to understand Romans 7–8 in the context of Second Temple Judaism, in which the issue of agency is a crucial topic among the contemporary writings.¹⁵ Maston presents two opposing points of view that emphasize either human agency for earning salvation (Sirach) or the decisiveness of divine agency (Hodayot), arguing that Paul is making a critique of the former view (i.e. the "two-ways theology") in Romans 7–8 by showing the inability of human beings to obey the Torah. According to Maston, in Rom. 7:7–25 Paul is describing the person "who thinks that he possesses the moral capacity to obey" the law, an epitomized model of the "two-way tradition," but ends up

⁸ See Francis Watson, "Constructing an Antithesis: Pauline and Other Jewish Perspectives on Divine and Human Agency," in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. John M.G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 99–102.

⁹ Watson, *Hermeneutics*, 177 (see n. 37). In this sense, Watson sympathizes with Bultmann who signifies the meaning of faith as the acceptance of the *kerygma*. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. by Kendrick Grobel (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), Vol. 1, 314 ("'faith' is the acceptance of the Christian message"); 318–19.

¹⁰ Cf. Richard B. Hays, "Paul's Hermeneutics and the Question of Truth," *ProEccl* 16 (2007): 126–33.

¹¹ Watson, *Hermeneutics*, xl.

¹² *Ibid.*, xxxviii.

¹³ Watson, "Constructing," 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Jason Maston, *Divine and Human Agency in Second Temple Judaism and Paul: A Comparative Study* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

failing because of the power of Sin.¹⁶ Hence, Paul offers an alternative view in 8:1–13 showing that it is the divine act that enables the human agents to obey, similar to how Hodayot sees divine action as the solution to the “human dilemma.”¹⁷

Maston argues that it is divine agency that “creates human agency,” and “the divine and human do not stand opposed to one another.”¹⁸ However, Maston’s point of view appears to be drawn toward Barclay’s second category when he explicates the nature of human obedience. Maston argues that human obedience cannot be understood as a sort of “response” but rather is “a continuation of God’s gracious work in the believer’s life,”¹⁹ and that Paul does not describe human agency as “independent of divine action.”²⁰ Such a viewpoint becomes clearer when he interprets Rom. 8:4 as saying that “the obedience required for life arises from a unification between the divine and human agents.”²¹ In this sense, for Maston, it seems natural to ascribe the failure of believers to obey to the fact that “one does not possess the Spirit and therefore is outside the bounds of God’s grace.”²² Nevertheless, such an explanation makes some of Paul’s exhortations about obedience confusing, as they appear to admit the possibility for believers to fall away from Christ (cf. Rom. 8:13), thereby acknowledging the independence of human agency to some extent.

Preston Sprinkle attempts to understand the issue of agency in Paul, comparing Paul’s letters with the Dead Sea Scrolls.²³ In five issues related to soteriology, Sprinkle finds similarity/dissimilarity between the two perspectives, and consistently observes that Paul’s soteriology has a unique emphasis on divine agency: 1) In terms of the rescue from the curse of the law, Paul, like a few of his contemporaries, depends upon OT prophetic texts in prioritizing God’s unilateral intervention;²⁴ 2) Paul highlights the agency of the eschatological spirit for the transformation of human beings (cf. Rom. 8:1–13),²⁵ and human obedience “flows from God’s prior work and is underwritten by the spirit’s agency;”²⁶ 3) Paul holds comprehensive anthropological pessimism, and this is true even when human capacity is not compared with God (cf. Rom. 1:18–3:26);²⁷ 4) Paul’s idea that God justifies the ungodly is unprecedented (cf. Rom. 3:23–24; 4:2–5; 5:6–9) in the Scrolls;²⁸ and 5) regarding the final judgement according to works, Paul puts greater emphasis on divine agency than is found in the Scrolls, showing that Christ will advocate believers at the final judgment. Believers’

¹⁶ Ibid., 20; 127–40. I use the capital “S” throughout this study to point out Sin as a personified cosmic power.

¹⁷ Ibid., 153–70.

¹⁸ Ibid., 168.

¹⁹ Ibid., 169.

²⁰ Ibid., 170.

²¹ Ibid., 167.

²² Ibid., 170.

²³ Preston M. Sprinkle, *Paul and Judaism Revisited: A Study of Divine and Human Agency in Salvation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic Press, 2013).

²⁴ Ibid., 68–94.

²⁵ Ibid., 95–121.

²⁶ Ibid., 241.

²⁷ Ibid., 125–44.

²⁸ Ibid., 145–71.

obedience that is necessary for “a positive verdict” is also divinely empowered (cf. Rom. 8:1–13).²⁹

Sprinkle’s work appropriately underscores the importance of divine initiative in Paul’s soteriology. However, since Sprinkle’s discussion of agency is restricted to a rubric of “soteriology,” which he defines as “the restoration God brings to those who belong to his covenant community,”³⁰ it seems to be inevitable for him to pay extra attention to divine agency, overlooking the matter of how human agency changes in response to the works of divine agency. Although Sprinkle recognizes that Paul’s anthropological outlook becomes rather optimistic when the believers’ life is at issue in Romans 6 (cf. 6:1–11), Sprinkle’s emphasis is still on divine agency in claiming that the empowered human agency is “bound up ‘in Christ’ and infused with the divine spirit”;³¹ thus, “obedience in Paul is not just made possible but *inevitable*.”³² However, similar to Maston’s case, this type of interpretation has difficulty in accounting for the subtle tension in Paul’s warning about falling away as well as his exhortation about obedience (cf. 6:12–23). Consequently, Sprinkle’s approach might result in an incomplete understanding of human agency.

In contrast, Colin Miller is keen to vivify the significance of human agency in Romans. Miller locates Paul within “a classical model” by Alasdair MacIntyre, which insists on an indissoluble connection between human action and virtues. Miller argues that MacIntyre’s concept of virtue as “a quality which tends towards achieving goods internal to a practice and the lack of which prevents us from attaining such goods,” can explain Paul better than the modern philosophical strands that tend to detach practice from human agency (e.g. Kant).³³ Unlike some threads of thought that downplay the meaning of human agency by emphasizing either the “forensic” aspect of justification or “magical transformation,” Miller claims that obedience is a “genuine human action” and simultaneously a “gift” of God:

In Rom. 5 Paul argues that Christ makes possible for the church a just practice. Christ’s obedience unto death, his “just act” (δικαίωμα) is what makes an obedient life possible. This act, however, comes to the world entirely as God’s gift (ἡ χάρις, ἡ δωρεά) . . . [and] creates a community of just practice (δικαίωμα).³⁴

Miller interprets Romans 6–8 as requiring “a strong notion of realistic participation,” i.e. “participation by practice.” For such practice, what matters is not “cosmic powers,” but embodying “virtues” and overcoming “the passions of the body” in cooperation with the Spirit.³⁵ Despite its divine origin, Miller sees that the human practice cannot

²⁹ Ibid., 172–203 (see especially 180).

³⁰ Ibid., 33–4.

³¹ Ibid., 202.

³² Ibid., 202–3 (emphasis original).

³³ Colin D. Miller, *The Practice of the Body of Christ: Human Agency in Pauline Theology after MacIntyre* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2014), 24; 29–30. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Third Edition. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

³⁴ Miller, 61–2.

³⁵ Ibid., 102.