

## CORPORATE ELECTION IN ROMANS 9: A REPLY TO THOMAS SCHREINER

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### I. INTRODUCTION

It has been a little over a dozen years since Thomas Schreiner argued in this journal that Romans 9 teaches individual election unto salvation.<sup>1</sup> He correctly points out that Romans 9 is a standard proof text for Calvinists, who hold that God unconditionally elects individuals to be saved. He also correctly observes that scholars increasingly reject the Calvinist exegesis of the chapter as a misreading of the text.<sup>2</sup> His article seeks to refute two common objections to the Calvinist interpretation, namely, that Romans 9 (1) addresses historical, national destiny rather than salvation; and/or (2) relates to the salvation of groups rather than individuals. I have no disagreement with the main thrust of Schreiner's first major point. Paul's argument in Romans 9 surely concerns the salvation of Israel.<sup>3</sup> But I find his attempt to counter the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation? Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections," *JETS* 36 (1993) 25–40. The article has been reprinted with only minor changes as "Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation?" in *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will* (ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 1.89–106, and again in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 89–106. References in this article will refer to the latter-mentioned reprinted version. Cf. Schreiner's treatment of Romans 9–11, and especially chapter 9, in his commentary on Romans (*Romans* [BECNT 6; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998] 469–638, esp. pp. 472–530).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the similar observation of Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 571. Indeed, several recent treatments of Romans 9 have found that Paul is not speaking of the eternal fate of individuals specifically: e.g. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992) 238–39; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 563; Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Sacra Pagina 6; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996) 299; Luke T. Johnson, *Reading Romans* (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 140; Ben Witherington III with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 246–59. In addition to Schreiner, two other outspoken modern scholars who argue for individual election unto salvation in Romans 9 are especially noteworthy: Moo (in his Romans commentary mentioned above); idem, "The Theology of Romans 9–11: A Response to E. Elizabeth Johnson," in *Pauline Theology III: Romans* (ed. David M. Hay and Elizabeth E. Johnson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 254–58; and John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> See also esp. Piper, *Justification of God, passim*, esp. chs. 1 and 2; and my own doctoral dissertation: "Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2004) 78–81, 195–259, 312–13, 317. A revised form of this dissertation is scheduled to appear in the JSNTSup series under the same title.

primacy of corporate election in Romans 9 unpersuasive. This article will examine his case and seek to articulate the nature of election as it is represented in Romans 9.

## II. CLARIFYING THE DEBATE AND UNDERCUTTING THE ARGUMENT: DETERMINING THE PRIMARY ORIENTATION OF ELECTION

Schreiner argues that the election described in Romans 9 "is both corporate and individual and that a reference to the former does not rule out the latter."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, he maintains that corporate and individual election are inseparable, and that the former entails the latter.<sup>5</sup> In one sense this must be true, but not in the individualistic way Schreiner means it. He appears to argue against a conception of corporate election that denies any place to the individual. This may be due to the position of the scholars he interacts with and/or some misunderstanding on his part of what corporate election entails.<sup>6</sup> But in any case, I want to make it clear that when I speak of Romans 9 as containing corporate rather than individual election, I am speaking of the primary orientation of election, which of necessity must include individuals in its purview to some extent.<sup>7</sup> But this in no way implies a traditional concept of individual election and actually undercuts much of Schreiner's argumentation. A proper view of corporate election, which takes full account of the place of individuals, avoids much of Schreiner's criticism.

Schreiner appears to contend for an election that is equally corporate and individual in orientation. But this is an untenable position, ironically due to the inextricable connection between the individual and the group to which Schreiner repeatedly calls attention. For there is a definite logical connection between the group and the individual, but this connection must be viewed primarily from either the corporate or the individual perspective. Interestingly, it can be viewed legitimately from either perspective, but not both equally at the same time. Either corporate or individual election must be primary (see below). The important question that Schreiner fails to address is: How do the corporate and individual aspects of election relate to each other? Which is primary?

If corporate election is primary, then it is the group that is the focus of election, and individuals are elect only in connection with the group. If individual election is primary, then individuals are separately the focus of election, and the group is elect only as a collection of elect individuals. Thus, either the corporate focus of election determines the identity and benefits of the individual based on participation in the group, or the individual focus of

<sup>4</sup> Schreiner, "Individual Election" 99.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 102, 105.

<sup>6</sup> The representative of corporate election that Schreiner interacts with most is William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). But even though he may not give much attention to the place of individuals in the elect people, Klein certainly affords a place to individuals in his scheme; see e.g. pp. 264–65.

<sup>7</sup> On the concept of corporate election, see also Abasciano, "Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9" 310–17 (cf. pp. 108–12) and the literature cited there.

election determines the identity and benefits of the group based on the individuals who have been grouped together according to their similar individual characteristics/status. The fact that Schreiner repeatedly argues that corporate election entails Calvinistic individual election, amounting to an election of individuals as autonomous entities before God, only shows that he is assuming individual election to be primary. For if election is primarily individual, then corporate election must equally imply individual election since the identity of the group is entirely determined by the identity of the individuals who make it up. The fact that Schreiner *presupposes* this stance suggests a failure to look beyond a modern, western, individualistic viewpoint.

### III. THE PRIMACY OF CORPORATE ELECTION

Schreiner notes that many scholars have been persuaded by the corporate view of election.<sup>8</sup> This is for good reason. The case for the primacy of corporate election in Paul's thought in general and Romans 9 in particular is strong. Besides the evidence provided by exegesis of Romans 9–11 and other specific NT texts,<sup>9</sup> there are three general factors that support it.

1. *The OT concept of election is clearly corporate.*<sup>10</sup> God chose the people of Israel in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel (Deut 4:37; 7:6–8). That is, by choosing Jacob/Israel, the corporate/covenant representative, God also chose his descendants as his covenant people. It is a matter of OT covenant theology. The covenant representative on the one hand and the people/nation of Israel on the other hand are the focus of the divine covenantal election, and individuals are elect only as members of the elect people. Moreover, in principle, foreign individuals who were not originally members of the elect people could join the chosen people and become part of the elect,<sup>11</sup> demonstrating again that the locus of election was the covenant community and that individuals found their election through membership in the elect people. The corporate nature of the election of God's people in the OT is so well recognized that Moo, an advocate of individual election in Paul's thought and Romans 9, concedes that Paul would have found only corporate election in the Scriptures and his Jewish tradition.<sup>12</sup> And John Piper, one of the most forceful and outspoken

<sup>8</sup> Schreiner, "Individual Election" 99.

<sup>9</sup> For a survey of the NT in relation to the issue of corporate/individual election, see Klein, *Chosen People*. Interestingly, in an essay arguing for a Calvinistic view of individual election, Donald J. Westblade accepts Klein's argument that Paul has corporate election in mind throughout Romans 9–11, though he does not believe that this excludes individual election ("Divine Election in the Pauline Literature" in Schreiner and Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign* 63–87, esp. p. 83 n. 35). But this latter judgment seems to be based on the same sort of faulty reasoning regarding the relationship between the collective and the individual identified above in Schreiner's article ("Individual Election").

<sup>10</sup> For a demonstration of this point, see Klein, *Chosen People* 25–44.

<sup>11</sup> See D. I. Block, "Sojourner; Alien; Stranger," *ISBE* 4.561–63. Rahab and Ruth are prominent examples from the OT.

<sup>12</sup> Moo, "Theology of Romans 9–11" 254–58; cf. Moo, *Romans* 586, esp. n. 73. Nevertheless, he argues that the rejection of the gospel by the Jewish people and the flood of Gentiles entering

modern advocates of individual election, is forced to acknowledge that “the eternal salvation of the individual as Paul teaches it is almost never the subject of discussion in the OT.”<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, the OT passages Paul interprets and applies in Romans 9 have a corporate view of election. This weighs heavily in favor of taking Paul to speak of corporate election in Romans 9 as well. He surely expected his audience to be familiar with the passages he refers to and should be taken as pointing to the broad original contexts of his scriptural quotations and allusions.<sup>14</sup> Even passages that might seem to modern individualistic eyes to refer to individual election turn out to be corporate in orientation in light of the OT background.

For example, Paul’s references to the divine choices of Isaac over Ishmael (Rom 9:7–9) and Jacob over Esau (Rom 9:10–13) invoke instances of primarily corporate election. The point of Isaac’s election in the passage Paul quotes is that the seed of Abraham, the elect covenant people, would be named/identified by connection to Isaac (Rom 9:7; Gen 21:12). *Individuals* would be regarded as part of the covenant people based on their relationship to Isaac. Paul interprets this to mean that only “the children of the promise are regarded as seed,”<sup>15</sup> that is, as the chosen people of God (Rom 9:8). Similarly, both of Paul’s quotations concerning Jacob speak of his election primarily as the election of a people. The fuller context of Paul’s first Jacob quotation makes this perfectly clear: “The Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will be divided from within you. One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger’” (Gen 25:23; cf. Rom 9:12). Likewise, as Cranfield comments concerning the second Jacob quotation (Rom 9:13), “There is no doubt that the concern of Mal 1:2–5 is with the nations of Israel and Edom, and it is natural to suppose that by

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individually into the Church led Paul to individualize election (but see below). It is interesting that Moo approvingly directs attention to Schreiner’s article for the problems with finding corporate election in the NT while recognizing that this was the view of the OT and Judaism (*Romans* 586 n. 73), for one of the major thrusts of Schreiner’s article is that the concept of a primarily corporate election is itself invalid.

<sup>13</sup> Piper, *Justification of God* 64.

<sup>14</sup> As Piper comments: “Most commentators agree that the OT quotations in Rom 9:6–13 assume an acquaintance with the whole story of which they are a part and that without this knowledge the isolated quotations would be virtually unintelligible as part of the argument” (*Justification of God* 60 n. 27). On Paul’s scriptural allusions in Romans 9 as pointers to their original contexts, see Abasciano, “Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9”; cf. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989) 63–68; Douglas A. Oss, “Paul’s Use of Isaiah and Its Place in His Theology, with Special Reference to Romans 9–11” (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 1992); J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul “in Concert” in the Letter to the Romans* (NovTSup 101; Leiden: Brill, 2002) ch. 2; and more generally, C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952); G. K. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (ed. G. K. Beale; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 387–404, and a number of scholars he cites throughout, esp. on pp. 390–91, n. 10.

<sup>15</sup> All translations of Scripture are the author’s.

'Jacob' and 'Esau' Paul also understands not only the twin sons of Isaac but also the peoples descended from them."<sup>16</sup>

The examples of Isaac and Jacob embody the OT concept of corporate solidarity or representation in which the individual represents the community and is identified with it and vice versa.<sup>17</sup> The concept is especially evident in the case of kings and patriarchs, who are seen to represent their people and sum them up in themselves, especially in the context of covenant. The observation is important because it provides the model for the corporate representative role of Christ in the NT as *the* seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16), the true Israel and embodiment of the covenant people of God. As Galatians 3–4, a passage in which Paul uses similar language and treats similar subjects,<sup>18</sup> bears out, Christians are only considered the seed of Abraham because they are in Christ by faith, and therefore share in his identity as their (covenant) representative. Strikingly, Paul also uses the same "in x" language as Gen 21:12/Rom 9:7 do to describe covenant participation through the covenant representative when he speaks explicitly of salvific election in Eph 1:4, declaring that the Church has been chosen *in Christ*.<sup>19</sup>

But we have begun to move beyond the point at hand. What needs to be highlighted at this juncture is that a corporate election which on the one hand allowed a full and vigorous role to the individual in the context of community

<sup>16</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975–79) 480.

<sup>17</sup> On this concept, see Klein, *Chosen People* 36–42; Beale, "Jesus and His Followers" 392; idem, "The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5–7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1," in Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?* 217–47, esp. 230–31; E. Earle Ellis, "Biblical Interpretation in the New Testament Church," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. J. Mulder; CRINT 2.1; Assen: Van Gorcum/Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 716–20; idem, "How the New Testament Uses the Old," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (ed. I. H. Marshall; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 212–13; Klyne Snodgrass, "The Use of the Old Testament in the New," in Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?* 29–51, esp. p. 37. The concept of corporate solidarity/representation in modern scholarship especially goes back to H. W. Robinson's distinct notion of corporate personality (*The Christian Doctrine of Man* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911]; idem, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964]). Despite the inadequacy of Robinson's construct, which has been forcefully criticized, the corporate perspective of the OT is undeniable and supported by recent research (in addition to the above, see e.g. Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1995] esp. 16–22; Gary W. Burnett, *Paul and the Salvation of the Individual* [Biblical Interpretation Series 57; Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2001] esp. 73–80).

<sup>18</sup> Note that Paul treats the same OT concept in Rom 9:7 and Gal 4:21–31.

<sup>19</sup> Of course, the Pauline authorship of Ephesians is disputed, but I believe that Schreiner and I agree that Paul is the author of the epistle. Even if one is inclined to reject Pauline authorship, Ephesians may still be regarded as faithful to Paul's teaching. Harold Hoehner is now notable for providing what may be the most extensive defense of Pauline authorship of Ephesians (*Ephesians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002] 2–61); see also Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 4–47. Against Pauline authorship, see Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990) lix–lxxiii. On the covenantal-incorporative significance of Paul's "in Christ" language, see very briefly, Abasciano, "Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9" 205–6. Cf. the works listed in n. 17 above; Wright, *Climax of the Covenant* 18–55; Michael Cranford, "Election and Ethnicity: Paul's View of Israel in Romans 9.1–13," *JSNT* 50 (1993) 27–41, esp. p. 30. On Eph 1:4, see IV.4.c below.

and on the other hand subordinated the individual to the collective by granting elect status to individuals based on their membership in the covenant community was the view of the OT and the scriptural texts Paul uses in Romans 9. The burden of proof should lie on those who would claim that Paul departed from this standard biblical and Jewish conception of election.

2. *The explicit language of election unto salvation is always corporate in Paul (and the rest of the NT).* While one might argue that the *concept* of election can be present and applied directly to individuals even when the explicit language is not, it still favors a corporate understanding of election that one will look in vain for an overt use of the language of election unto salvation in reference to an individual. Paul speaks, for example, of “the elect ones of God” (ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ, Rom 8:33), the Church as being chosen in Christ (ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ, Eph 1:4) and of τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν (“your [plural] election”; 1 Thess 1:4), but never with individual language.<sup>20</sup> I would dispute that the concept of direct election of individuals as individuals is present anywhere in Paul or the NT, but that is a matter of exegesis of a number of specific texts that is far beyond the scope of the present discussion. Here, I only wish to point out that the corporate language surrounding election unto salvation in Paul and the NT surely weighs in favor of a corporate conception of election. If one were to object that corporate language is only to be expected because Paul and the other NT writers were addressing churches and often discussing matters of import for all Christians, then I would agree, and add that this only underscores the corporate orientation of the texts that we are dealing with.

3. *The Mediterranean Hellenistic culture of the first century was collectivist rather than individualistic in outlook, and first-century Judaism was even more so.*<sup>21</sup> This means, *inter alia*, that the dominant perspective of Paul and his contemporaries was that the group was primary and the individual secondary.<sup>22</sup> The individual, while important, was not thought of as standing on

<sup>20</sup> The only case of Paul using the language of election in relation to an individual is Rom 16:13, where he refers to Rufus as “the chosen one in the Lord” (τὸν ἐκλεκτὸν ἐν κυρίῳ). However, this probably does not refer to Rufus’ election unto salvation, but to his being a choice/outstanding Christian, which Cranfield calls a very widespread interpretation (*Romans* 794). But even if it were referring to salvation, it would still not support a traditional notion of individual election because it is qualified as an election in the Lord, which fits better with the concept of corporate election as argued above. Outside of the Pauline corpus, individual language is used in connection with salvific election in 1 Pet 5:13; 1 John 5:1, 13. But these instances turn out to be cases of collective singulars that refer to the election of corporate entities, which only strengthens the case for corporate election as the view of the NT.

<sup>21</sup> On this point in relation to Romans 9–11, see Abasciano, “Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9” 108–12.

<sup>22</sup> For a fuller yet conveniently brief description of the character of collectivist vs. individualistic cultures, see Burnett, *Salvation of the Individual* 47–49; cf. Abasciano, “Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9” 108–12. For an extensive though in some ways problematic description, see Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 51–70; Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 153–201, 225–31. For a critique of Malina, see Burnett, *Salvation of the Individual* 43–46.

his own, but as embedded in the group of which he was a member. Personal identity was derived from the group rather than the group drawing its identity from the individuals contained in it.

Recognition of the collectivist character of Paul's first-century culture commands a firm consensus of scholarly support.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, in an important recent monograph dealing with the salvation of the individual in Paul's thought, Gary Burnett seeks to redress what he perceives to be an over-emphasis in recent NT scholarship on the collective character of Paul's thought that virtually excludes an appreciation of its individual concerns.<sup>24</sup> Yet, though he argues vigorously for Paul's concern for the salvation of the individual, even Burnett acknowledges that Paul's culture was collective rather than individualistic in orientation and that there was little individualism in the first century.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, he recognizes that in the OT, Paul's Jewish tradition, and Paul's own perspective, both the community and the individual were important, but that the community was primary and the individual important within the context of the community.<sup>26</sup> He describes the scripturally-shaped Jewish view well:

Kaminsky . . . suggests that it is always the case [in the Hebrew Bible] that the "individual's very self-understanding was derived from his or her relationship to the community." It is the individual as a member of the community where the emphasis lies, not the individual as an "autonomous entity before God."<sup>27</sup> . . . [S]alvation was both a matter for the individual and the community of the people of God. One would participate in the salvation which God had prepared for his people by living as part of the covenant people. . . . Only by deliberately sinning and refusing to repent could one become apostate and put oneself outside the covenant and therefore outside of salvation. The personal piety, we have noted, then, must be seen in the context of individuals seeking to live within the covenant, and in such a context, salvation was typically seen as concerning the nation (or the sectarian group within the nation), something in which an individual would participate, assuming he kept within covenantal boundaries. We see, then, within Judaism the importance of individual responsibility and active participation in the covenant relationship with God;

<sup>23</sup> Burnett, *Salvation of the Individual* 1–2, 26, 91–114.

<sup>24</sup> Burnett, *Salvation of the Individual*. For a recent survey of the present state of scholarship on the relationship between the group and the individual in biblical studies, see Shannon Burkes, *God, Self, and Death: The Shape of Religious Transformation in the Second Temple Period* (JSJSup 79; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 17–29.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Burnett, *Salvation of the Individual* 46, 50.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 76, 80, 84–85, 109–14, 229. One of the drawbacks of Burnett's study is that he does not state clearly enough the relationship between the group and the individual in Paul's thought (cf. the criticism of Jeffrey S. Lamp, review of Gary W. Burnett, *Paul and the Salvation of the Individual*, in *Review of Biblical Literature* [<http://www.bookreviews.org>] 2003). At times he gives the impression that the individual was primary for Paul, but this appears to be a result of the purpose of the study to argue for the importance of the individual in Paul's thought. As mentioned above, he does indicate that the importance of the individual for Paul was within a corporate perspective. In any case, he does clearly express that he regards Romans 9–12 as solidly collectivist and finds it necessary to argue that Paul's concern for collective matters in these chapters "does not make up the sum total of Paul's thinking in Romans" (p. 18).

<sup>27</sup> Burnett, *Salvation of the Individual* 76. The quotations of Kaminsky are from *Corporate Responsibility* 153.

this indicates clearly for us the interdependence of both the individual and the community. The individual was not subsumed within the larger group, but neither was he an autonomous agent. There was a much more balanced sense of both individual and community.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the OT's and Judaism's corporate view of election, Paul's exclusive employment of corporate language in connection with election unto salvation, and the corporate orientation of Paul's socio-historical context all combine to provide a very strong case that Paul's view of election was corporate, and that he carried this view of election, which emanates from the Scriptures he interprets, into Romans 9. It will not do to argue that the individual entrance of Jews and Gentiles into the Church demands a concept of individual election,<sup>29</sup> for as we have seen, the concept of corporate election embraces individual separation from and entrance into the elect community without shifting the locus of election to the individual. Moreover, as Howard Clark Kee has well said, "Although an act of decision could align the individual with one or another of . . . [the] competing factions within Judaism in this period, the outcome of the decision was a mode of community identity."<sup>30</sup> As mentioned earlier, the biblical view of corporate election, which recognizes the place of the individual, strips much of Schreiner's argument of its force. This will become clear as we analyze the four lines of argument he presents to support his thesis.

#### IV. EXAMINING THE CASE AGAINST THE PRIMACY OF CORPORATE ELECTION IN ROMANS 9

1. *Singular language.* Schreiner argues that the repeated use of singular language in Romans 9 supports the traditional concept of individual election and opposes the suggestion that Paul refers only to corporate groups.<sup>31</sup> But immediately we encounter a major flaw that runs through each of Schreiner's four main points, viz. that corporate election involves only the group with no thought of the individual. This is, as we have seen, a faulty understanding of corporate election. Rather, to speak of election as corporate rather than individual means that the primary focus of election is the community and that the individual is elect only secondarily as a member of the community. Therefore, it is not at all inconsistent with the concept of corporate election

<sup>28</sup> Burnett, *Salvation of the Individual* 80.

<sup>29</sup> See note 12 above and cf. Abasciano, "Old Testament in Romans 9:1-9" 316, n. 135.

<sup>30</sup> Howard Clark Kee, *Knowing the Truth: A Sociological Approach to New Testament Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 5. It is worth noting that the thesis of Kee's book is that an individualistic "perception of Christianity in its origins is directly contradicted by the study of the New Testament—the New Covenant—which sets out the ways that Jesus and the movement to which his words and works gave rise sought to define participation in the community of God's people" (p. 1).

<sup>31</sup> Schreiner, "Individual Election" 99. It is surprising that Schreiner shows no awareness in this section of the fact that many scholars view Paul's singular language as applying primarily on the corporate level and offer significant reasons for doing so. On the other hand, Piper takes the arguments of such scholars seriously while arguing vigorously against them (*Justification of God*).



for Paul to refer to individuals. The important question is where the primary emphasis lies and whether individuals are viewed as elected as members of a group or as isolated individuals who are then, as it were, collected into a group. The data we have looked at would suggest that the corporate perspective predominates. There is no reason why the presence of individual language would call for a redefinition of what was at that time the standard perception of the orientation of election since the standard view included individuals in its scope. Moreover, it is necessary to determine whether the individual language Paul does use actually pertains directly to election.

Be that as it may, some of the singular language that Paul uses in Romans 9 actually supports the primacy of corporate election in the chapter much as do the individual references to the election of Isaac and Jacob discussed earlier. Schreiner points to Paul's quotation of Exod 33:19 in Rom 9:15: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." He argues that the singular  $\delta\upsilon$  ("whom") indicates that Paul has specific individuals who receive God's mercy in view. But in its original context, the singular language of Exod 33:19 actually refers to corporate Israel and her restoration to covenantal election.<sup>32</sup> In the LXX translation, which Paul quotes, it is a case of referring to a corporate entity with singular terminology insofar as it represents the thought of the original Hebrew, a sort of collective singular.<sup>33</sup> In harmony with the OT corporate view of election, the highly covenantal context, and the specific concerns of its narrative context, the  $\delta\upsilon$  of Exod 33:19 has to do with whom God will acknowledge as his covenant people. Indeed, Paul uses  $\delta\upsilon$  of God's corporate people in Rom 11:2. As far as election is concerned, individuals come into view by virtue of their membership in the group.

When Paul uses the singular to make an inference from Exod 33:19 in Rom 9:16, he does not speak directly of the individual objects of election, but simply makes the point that the decision concerning who God grants his mercy to rests with him (and the stipulations he chooses to lay down) rather than with the will or effort of man, the very point made by Rom 9:18, where the singular appears again ( $\delta\upsilon$ /whom), except that it adds the fact that God also has the right to judge/harden those whom he decides to as well. But significantly, the form of Rom 9:18 is surely based on Exod 33:19 and its *ad sensum* collective singular relative pronoun, suggesting what one might have surmised already from the context of Romans 9 alone, that the singulars of Rom 9:18 refer to groups or classes of people. The final instances of singulars noted by Schreiner appear in Rom 9:19, 21, where Paul moves into the

<sup>32</sup> See Abasciano, "Old Testament in Romans 9 1-9" 159-71, 359, cf R Alan Cole, *Exodus An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC, Downers Grove InterVarsity, 1973) 225-26

<sup>33</sup> The LXX's  $\delta\upsilon$  translates the Hebrew  $\text{וְ$ , which is a numberless relative particle that can refer to either a singular or plural referent. We have no way of knowing whether the LXX translator of Exod 33:19 used  $\delta\upsilon$  in a collective or singular sense, that is, how he interpreted the passage. The LXX uses the singular Greek relative pronoun to translate  $\text{וְ$  in relation to a group in e.g. Num 13:32, Isa 19:25, 41:8. Cf. the use of singular language applied to the nation at various points elsewhere in Exodus 32-34 such as Exod 33:3, and throughout the OT.

diatribe, defending verse 18, especially its advocacy of God's sovereign right to harden whom he wills. Given the collective thrust of the context, these singulars are best seen within a corporate perspective. Even so, it is important to observe that these singulars do not refer to election directly. The singular *τίς* ("who") of Rom 9:19 is used to present the point that no one resists God's will as part of an objection to Paul's argument that is subsequently dealt with. The singular *σκεῦος* ("vessel") of Rom 9:21 is part of an illustration Paul uses in his refutation of the objection in Rom 9:19. It begs the question to assume that the singular vessel must refer to an individual person. It could just as well refer to a group of people like Israel or the Church. Indeed, when Paul specifically applies the illustration, he does so in corporate language (9:22ff.). Furthermore, the most important OT background behind Paul's imagery applies the metaphor to Israel as a people or to a group within Israel, texts rooted in a corporate view of election that deals with the individual within its scope (Isa 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer 18).

2. *The selection of a remnant.* Schreiner argues that the selection of a remnant out of Israel referred to in Rom 9:6–9 and 11:1–6 necessarily involves the selection of certain individuals from a larger group.<sup>34</sup> But the very concept of a remnant is corporate in nature. Schreiner acknowledges this point, but does little more than to insist that this does not exclude individuals, pointing to Paul's use of himself as an example of an individual who is part of the remnant. However, this line of argument again founders on the false assumption that corporate election excludes individuals from its view. To show that individuals were part of the groups to which they belonged or were impacted by what their groups were impacted by contributes nothing to determining where the focus of election lies.

On the other hand, it would appear that even Paul's perspective of those making up the remnant was corporate, focusing on Jews and Gentiles (Rom 9:24–33).<sup>35</sup> Moreover, we have already seen how one of the passages mentioned by Schreiner (Rom 9:6–9) fits squarely into a corporate conception of election (see III.1 above).<sup>36</sup> Romans 11:1–6 is no different. It clearly focuses primarily on God's *people*: "I say, therefore, God has not rejected his *people*, has he? Absolutely not! For I myself am also an Israelite, from the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his *people* whom he foreknew" (Rom 11:1–2a; emphasis mine). Paul uses himself, an individual ethnic Jew, as evidence that God has not rejected ethnic Israel outright. But

<sup>34</sup> Schreiner, "Individual Election" 99. Schreiner could have pointed elsewhere in Romans 9–11 as well, such as Rom 9:24–29.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Paul's corporate approach to the Gentiles throughout Romans, such as his singular offering of the Gentiles to God in Rom 15:16 (see also, e.g., Rom 11:11–13, 25; 15:9, 16, 27; 16:4, 26), and elsewhere in his writings such as his vision of the making of the two groups of Jews and Gentiles respectively into one new man in Christ in Eph 2:11–22; the corporate view of the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's people expressed by James at the Jerusalem council, where Paul figured prominently, speaking of God taking from the Gentiles a *people* for his name (Acts 15:14).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. n. 41 below.

notice that the language of election is specifically attached to the corporate people. That is where the focus of election rests in this passage, as most commentators (including Calvinists) hold.<sup>37</sup> The fact that Paul is part of the corporate remnant, the true Israel, shows that God has not written off the Jewish people or simply shifted election to the Gentiles. Paul's own election is best seen as deriving from his membership in the corporate remnant.

3. *The validity of distinguishing between individuals and groups in Rom 9:30–10:21.* Schreiner argues that Paul undeniably refers to individuals as well as corporate Israel in Rom 9:30–10:21 and that it is inappropriate to distinguish between individuals and the groups of which they are part because what is true of the collective is necessarily true of its individual members.<sup>38</sup> But once again, he argues against the view that Paul speaks “only of corporate groups in Romans 9–11 and is not referring to individuals.”<sup>39</sup> Hence, he appears to believe that he merely needs to show that individuals are part of the issues Paul discusses in order to refute the idea of corporate election. However, we have seen that this sort of argument does not apply to the concept of corporate election that is inherent in the biblical tradition, which nonetheless militates against the traditional Calvinist concept of individual election.

It is important to recognize that Paul is not speaking directly about election in Rom 9:30–10:21. Nevertheless, it is true that his discussion does bear in some measure on the ground of the corporate election (Rom 9:30–10:4) and the means by which individuals become part of the elect group (Rom 10:5–13)—faith. Even so, pointing out that Paul talks about individuals exercising faith in no way contradicts the idea of corporate election. As we have seen, the concept always included individuals within its scope without concentrating election on the individual. Indeed, I would argue that Rom 9:1–9 in the context of Romans contends that faith was always the means for the individual to truly possess the blessings of the corporate divine election. Moreover, such a role for faith is to be expected in a doctrine of election articulated on this side of the cross, which finds the corporate election of Israel to have come to its fulfillment in Christ, the true seed of Abraham and the covenant representative of God's people.

Schreiner's own attempt to relate Paul's corporate language to its unavoidable implications for individuals shows that the corporate facet of the issues Paul addresses takes precedence over—but does not exclude—the individual facet. He observes that Paul speaks of Israel as a corporate entity failing to attain the righteousness of God but that this does not apply to every individual Israelite. Yet this appears to contradict his own points that Paul speaks equally of the group and the individual and that whatever is true of the group must also be true of the individual in the same way. He seems to

<sup>37</sup> See Moo, *Romans* 674–75, a Calvinist who takes this view and asserts that most commentators agree. Nevertheless, we would differ in significant ways in our approaches to Rom 11:1–6.

<sup>38</sup> Schreiner, “Individual Election” 99–100.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 99; emphasis removed.

be saying that Paul speaks generally, but that what Paul says must apply at the individual level. I agree. But to say that Paul speaks generally (in such a way that does not apply to every individual) is to concede that Paul does not speak equally of the group and individuals, but that his focus is on the group even though what he says surely applies to individuals. This is actually a different aspect of corporate thinking and terminology than we find in the case of election, in which one's membership in the group determines one's situation. But both of these aspects of corporate thought emanate from the priority of the group in the synchronic perspective of the writer.<sup>40</sup>

While Rom 9:30–10:21 does not call the concept of corporate election into question as Schreiner maintains, the broad internal context of Romans 9–11 does furnish support for the notion in any number of ways, some of which we have already looked at. Here, we will mention only one: Paul's olive tree metaphor (Rom 11:17–24). It demonstrates the idea of corporate election quite well. The olive tree undoubtedly represents the elect people of God (though it must be admitted that election is not Paul's main concern here). But individuals get grafted into the elect people and participate in election and its blessings by faith or get cut off from God's chosen people and their blessings because of unbelief.<sup>41</sup> The focus of election is clearly the corporate people of God with individuals participating in election by means of their participation (through faith) in the elect group, which spans salvation history.

4. *The selection of one group rather than another and the very validity of the concept of corporate election.* In his final section, Schreiner argues that corporate election is no less arbitrary than Calvinistic individual election and that the typical view of corporate election is specious in that it does not hold to the election of people at all, but constitutes an abstract entity or a concept.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> This is not to say that general corporate language necessarily indicates the broader view of a given author or that it indicates objective reality. But it does present the perspective of the author as he chooses to portray it in a specific instance, similar to his choice of verb tense/aspect. Moreover, in the case of general corporate language the corporate situation can be determined by the state of the individuals who make up the group (unlike the concept of corporate election)—though even here it does not have to do with individuals in and of themselves, but with individuals as members of the collective in accordance with the corporate orientation of first century Mediterranean culture—but the author's choice of language indicates where the primary emphasis of his discourse lies and means that there is not a one-to-one correlation between what can be said to be true of the individual and what can be said to be true of the group. Strikingly, corporate thought can also characterize a group in a way that is at odds with what is actually true of the majority of its members (e.g. Josh 10:29–43; *passim*).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. the corporate election contained in Exod 32:31–33, which was focused on the people and from which individuals could be cut off. This passage serves as the background for Rom 9:1–5 and belongs to the same general context as Exod 33:19, which Paul quotes and interprets in Rom 9:15–18. In response to Moses' intercession on behalf of Israel, the Lord tells him that he will blot out of his book any individual who sinned (with the golden calf), a punishment that entails being cut off from the elect people and exposed to the fatal covenant curse and wrath of God. This figure stands partly behind Paul's designation of Israel as anathema in Rom 9:3 and sets up the challenge to God's word posed by ethnic Israel having been cut off from the elect people. On Paul's use of Exodus 32–34 in Rom 9:1–5, see Abasciano, "Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9" 138–263.

<sup>42</sup> Schreiner, "Individual Election" 101–5.

a. *The arbitrariness of election and Rom 9:11–12, 16.* Concerning the arbitrariness of election, Schreiner essentially argues that even if corporate election is true, Rom 9:11–12, 16 would then imply that God predestines the faith of the elect group and that faith is thus the consequence of election. But this construction is suspect. Romans 9:11–12 does not actually seek to make a point about election *per se*, but uses the example of God's election of Jacob (with all its corporate significance) to make a statement about God's *purpose* in election,<sup>43</sup> that it remains based on God's sovereign will and call rather than human works. The fulfillment of God's purpose and promises to bless the world (cf. Rom 9:4, 6–9) depends on his sovereign freedom to designate whom he chooses as his covenant people on whatever conditions he decides to establish.<sup>44</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that Rom 9:10–13 supports the insistence of Rom 9:8 that "it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as seed." The phrase "the children of the promise" is a rich designation that surely includes faith as a defining characteristic of those it refers to, as Romans 4, 8, Galatians 3–4, and the OT background surrounding Isaac demonstrate.<sup>45</sup>

Romans 9:16 then makes much the same point as Rom 9:11–12: God's bestowal of mercy is at his discretion rather than man's (see also III.1 above). The verse does not address God's reasons for dispensing mercy, still less does it assert that he has no reasons that are related to people,<sup>46</sup> but it actually argues that he has the right to do as he pleases. In the context of both Romans generally and Romans 9–11, this means that he has the right to regard those who have faith as his covenant people. The bestowal of God's mercy is "not of the one who wills nor of the one who runs, but of God who has mercy" (Rom 9:16).

But these are matters of exegesis that have long been debated and require much more attention than I can give here. For now, I would like to register my skepticism concerning the claim that Rom 9:11–12, 16 imply that faith

<sup>43</sup> The meaning of the phrase ἡ κατ' ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ ("the purpose of God according to election") is, of course, debated, with many possible semantic options (cf. BDAG, s.v. κατὰ, B, esp. B7), most of which are compatible with the interpretation offered above. Moo is probably correct to take the phrase to indicate that election is the means by which God carries out his purpose (*Romans* 581 n. 53). See further Abasciano, "Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9" 357.

<sup>44</sup> That the purpose of election referred to in Rom 9:11 is none other than God's purpose to bless the world is suggested by the broader context of Romans as well as by the OT background of Rom 9:6–9, particularly the broader context of Gen 18:10, 14, namely Gen 18:17–19. See Abasciano, "Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9" 271–72, 343, 357.

<sup>45</sup> For a thorough discussion of the phrase, see Abasciano, "Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9" 325–27.

<sup>46</sup> Piper argues that Rom 9:16 teaches unconditional election based largely on Exod 33:19, but in this respect he has mishandled this verse with its *idem per idem* formula (*Justification of God* 81–83, 88–89, 157). This is a serious error that undermines the main thesis of his study if G. K. Beale is correct that Piper's chapter on Exod 33:19 is "the theological cornerstone for the entire monograph" and that its validity would sustain the book's essential thesis: "Review of J. Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23*," *WTJ* 46 (1984) 191–92; quotation from p. 191. On both Exod 33:19 and Piper's mishandling of it, see Abasciano, "Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9" 166–71.

is a predestined result of election. But even if one agrees with Schreiner's conclusion that these verses at least imply that God's people are corporately elected unconditionally, his faulty view of corporate election produces a fatal objection to the larger point he is trying to make out of these verses, viz. that even if corporate election is granted in Romans 9, the (alleged) unconditional election of the group must also mean the direct unconditional election of individuals (as individuals). For the proper view of corporate election maintains that what is true of the elect people as a whole is not necessarily true of the individuals in the group autonomously. Moreover, what is true of the elect people as a whole does not apply equally and directly to individuals on their own, but when applicable at all, it applies secondarily (yet truly) to individuals as members of the group. This leads us straight into Schreiner's challenge to the validity of the concept of corporate election.

b. *The validity of the concept of corporate election.* Schreiner charges that advocates of corporate election "do not actually hold to corporate election of a group or of people" but to God's choice of an abstract entity or a concept.<sup>47</sup> But this is simply not true. As we have seen, individuals participate in the elect status of the elect body. They are truly elect, but only secondarily as members of the group. Here is the scandal of corporate election to modern individualistic sensibilities, which find it hard to grasp corporate ways of thinking: the group is primary and the individual secondary. It would seem that because the individual is not primary in the corporate view, Schreiner cannot see that people are involved at all, and therefore, the concept does not make sense to him. This suggests an inability to understand the corporate perspective, which was so prominent among the ancients, due to individualistic assumptions.

Indeed, Schreiner's argument in effect denies the widely recognized OT concept of election. Would he contend that Israel's election in Abraham/Isaac/Jacob was the election of a concept rather than a people? Perhaps he would assert that, in light of his arguments, the OT concept of election must be equally individual and that the OT contains a full-blown concept of individual election. But this would be hard to defend. There is little evidence for it in the OT as Piper's comment quoted above (see III.1 above) and the great weight of scholarly opinion would suggest. Clearly, the OT concept of corporate election is both coherent and the election of people even though individuals are not the focus. If this is correct, then Schreiner's argument about the invalidity of corporate election falls to the ground.

It is the primacy of the group above the individual that helps to explain why Schreiner's insistence that, if a group is chosen, then individuals must also be chosen directly as individuals, is mistaken. We have already seen both that Schreiner admits that corporate language does not necessarily apply to every individual in a group and that this demonstrates that the focus of such language is on the collective (see III.3 above). We may now add that it is often

<sup>47</sup> Schreiner, "Individual Election" 101.

true that, in a corporate perspective, group identity transcends individual identity or the mere collection of individual identities. As the old saying goes, "the whole is more than the sum of the parts." Yet this does not mean that in the case of a group of people the whole is only an abstract entity or a concept, though it is true that a group is inherently more general and abstract than specific individuals. Rather, it means that the corporate identity and reality transcend that of the individual on his own and that some things that are true of the group might not be true of the individual. It also means that the individual's experience of corporate realities depends on his participation in the group.

The analogy of a baseball team that Schreiner offers actually provides a good illustration of such corporate modes of thought and tells against his own argument. To be sure, the analogy does show that "to choose a team requires that you choose one team among others along with the individuals who make it up."<sup>48</sup> But Schreiner fails to observe that the purchase of a baseball team is more corporately oriented than individually oriented. One buys/"elects" the team, and the individual players who are part of the team are chosen as a consequence of their membership on the team.

Anyone familiar with the workings of professional baseball knows that when a new owner buys a team, he does not individually select each player he wants to be on the team, but acquires the individual players on the team as a consequence of his corporate purchase.<sup>49</sup> The actual individual membership of the team is rather fluid and can be different from one day to another before or after a sale. But as long as the owner owns the team, he "owns" whoever belongs to the team. There is a distinction between the purchase of the team/the team's status as owned or elected on the one hand and the addition of individual players to the team on the other hand. The team remains primary, and the addition or exclusion of individual players is oriented toward the team, participation in which ties the individual player to the benefits, responsibilities, and destiny of the team. Thus, while formally correct as stated, Schreiner's assertion that corporate election entails individual election is not correct as he intends it.

The identity of a professional baseball team transcends the simple collection of its individual members as well as the identity of any of its individual members. It is a corporate entity that in many cases spans generations, tying all who participate in it together by their identification with its corporate identity. To take the analogy further, we could imagine that every year the American League randomly selected one of its teams by lot for a special award that would grant the team special notoriety as its "team of the year" and a special \$20,000 bonus for each team member. This is equivalent to an unconditional election. But no player could claim that he was individually chosen as "the player of the year" or even to receive the bonus. The unconditional

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 102.

<sup>49</sup> If we were to consider the formation of a completely new team, it is interesting to note that it was a corporate approach that enabled the Colorado Rockies baseball team to exist before it had any players; I owe this observation to an unpublished paper by William W. Klein.

election of the team would not translate into the unconditional election of the individual players *as individuals*. While the team would indeed be unconditionally elected, the individual players would only be elected as a consequence of their membership in the team. At the same time, one could say that the individual players were unconditionally elected *as members of the team*. Moreover, players who joined the team in mid-season would come to share in the team's unconditional election.

It has not been my intention to make professional baseball determinative for our view of election, but to take Schreiner's own analogy and demonstrate that it does not really support his larger argument for Calvinistic individual election, but actually supports the concept of corporate election we have articulated. It is not that Schreiner fails to show that corporate election must in some way involve the individual members of the group. This is not at all the issue between corporate and individual election. On this the two views agree. But Calvinistic individual election claims much more. It claims that individuals are (unconditionally) elected to become part of the elect people. This the concept of corporate election does not support, nor does Schreiner's analogy. It would seem that corporate election does avoid the arbitrariness of the Calvinist view after all.

c. *Election in Christ and Eph 1:4*. But how is it that individuals share in the election of God's people? Schreiner correctly notes that advocates of corporate election stress that election is in Christ (Eph 1:4).<sup>50</sup> But he incorrectly states that this idea means that God elected the Church "to be in Christ."<sup>51</sup> That is exactly what his quotation of Forster and Marston as advocates of the view denies.<sup>52</sup> The idea is rather that Jesus is the Elect One (Schreiner gets this point right) and the Church was chosen as a consequence of its being in Christ. Christ is the sphere of election. All who are in him share in his election just as all who were in Jacob/Israel were also elect.

But Schreiner takes issue with this interpretation of Eph 1:4. He objects that the text does not speak of Christ's election, but of the election of people. But the election of Christ is surely part of the background and meaning of the verse. Schreiner is correct to say that the verse emphasizes the election of people rather than the election of Christ (though even this point may be called into question by the striking emphasis on the phrase "in Christ" or its equivalent throughout Eph 1:3–14). But the corporate interpretation of Eph 1:4 does not shift the stress of the verse to Christ's election, but simply uncovers the background of the language and helps us to understand what it means for God to have chosen the Church in Christ. The verse clearly assumes the election of Christ just as similar OT affirmations of election/blessing "in Abraham," "in Isaac," and "in Jacob/Israel" assume the election/blessing of

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> "We are chosen in Christ. This does not mean that we were chosen *to be put into Christ*. . . . It means that as we repented and were born again into the body of Christ, we partake of his chosenness" (Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* [Wheaton: Tyndale, 1973] 97).



the covenant representatives of God's people. To take an example from Rom 9:7/Gen 21:12, it cannot be denied that the election of Isaac forms part of the background and meaning of the statement to Abraham that "in Isaac seed will be called to you." The point is that the Church has been chosen as a consequence of its covenantal union with Christ, who represents the Church and sums his people up in himself.

This actually helps clarify how it is that the Church was chosen before the foundation of the world. The election of Christ, the pre-existent corporate head of the Church, before the foundation of the world entails the election of the Church because he is the corporate head and representative of the Church, and what is true of him as their representative is also true of them, his body. This is similar to the fact that Israel was chosen in Abraham/Isaac/Jacob before the nation ever existed (cf. the way Levi paid tithes in Abraham according to Heb 7:9–10). It is not that the people of Israel were somehow literally existent in Abraham, but the choice of the corporate representative necessarily includes the choice of the corporate entity he represents.

Now when we inquire as to how someone comes to be in Christ, Paul's answer is obviously, through faith (see, e.g., Romans 3–4, 8; Galatians 3–4). Thus, Schreiner's objection to faith as the basis of election is unfounded. It is true that Eph 1:4 does not mention faith, but neither does it specifically state that election is unconditional. What it does say is that election is *in Christ*, which we know in Pauline theology to be partly a way of indicating a sphere of identity entered into through faith. But the idea is not that God's choice was based on our foreseen faith per se. It is that the Church's election is intrinsic to the election of Christ, and membership in the Church is based on faith, an idea suggested by the implication of Eph 1:13 that Christians are sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit as a result of hearing and believing the gospel.

Schreiner's own interpretation of Eph 1:4's assertion of election in Christ is that it indicates that Christ is the agent through whom election is accomplished. But this interpretation does not actually preclude the incorporative sense of the phrase advanced above. Both senses are probably present. Indeed, the incorporative sense necessarily includes the instrumental, though the opposite is not necessarily true. The incorporative sense is strongly supported by the obviously incorporative significance of the same language elsewhere in Ephesians, such as the identification of Christ as the head of the Church/his body (Eph 1:20–23), the raising up/new creation of the Church in Christ (Eph 2:6–10; cf. the similarity of Eph 2:6 and Eph 1:3 with their language of "the heavenlies"!), and the incorporation of Jews and Gentiles into Christ as one new man/body/temple (Eph 2:11–22), to name just a few examples. Schreiner's attempt to restrict Paul's "in Christ" language in Eph 1:4 to an instrumental sense simply does not do justice to the evidence of Ephesians.<sup>53</sup> Despite his assertion, a corporate election that individuals

<sup>53</sup> Hence, commentators commonly affirm both the instrumental and incorporative sense of Paul's language in Eph 1:3–14. See, e.g., William W. Klein's forthcoming contribution on Ephesians in the

participate in through faith can hardly be considered insignificant. To those who are in Christ, it would be everything, as Eph 1:3–14 testifies.

d. *The role of logic.* From all that has been said, it should go without saying that Schreiner's appeal to logic as requiring Calvinistic individual election is without warrant.<sup>54</sup> His assertion that corporate election must involve individuals is a simplistic truism that misses the nuanced nature of the relationship between the collective and the individual and of the question of the focus of election. The result is that his assault on the concept of corporate election via repeated attempts to show that individuals must be in view when groups are spoken of because groups are made up of individuals amounts to knocking down a straw man if a proper view of corporate election is under consideration.<sup>55</sup>

But Schreiner is quite right to insist that the law of non-contradiction cannot be abandoned. For without it, all communication is rendered meaningless. That is why there can be no true human freedom if the Calvinistic doctrine of the absolute divine determination of all things is true. That is also why the Calvinist interpretation that takes Romans 9 to teach that God absolutely determines who will exercise faith and Romans 10 to teach "that those who do not exercise faith are responsible and should have done so"<sup>56</sup> foists an illogical position on Paul. Schreiner would like to relegate the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility to the status of mystery. But I would argue that the theological/philosophical (as opposed to biblical) concept of mystery that Schreiner invokes should be reserved for realities in which we do not know how something works, but in which there is no logical contradiction.

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revised Expositor's Bible Commentary and the works he cites there; Lincoln, *Ephesians* 21–23; O'Brien, *Ephesians* 97–100. Though he recognizes the incorporative sense of Paul's language, O'Brien objects to the suggestion that election in Christ is primarily corporate rather than individual (p. 99). But his position seems to be based on the same type of misunderstanding displayed in Schreiner's objection to the validity of a primarily corporate election. The concept of corporate election advanced in this article strips O'Brien's comments of their force, since it includes the notion that election and all its blessings come to individual believers personally. As O'Brien himself states, the "in Christ" phrase "signifies that God's gracious gifts come not only through the agency of Christ but also because the recipients are incorporated in him who is himself in the heavenly realm" (p. 97).

<sup>54</sup> Schreiner, "Individual Election" 103–5.

<sup>55</sup> But it is probably true that many advocates of a corporate orientation for Paul's thought have overstated their case so that they inappropriately present Paul and his contemporaries as having almost no concern for individuals or the implications that corporate realities have for individuals. On the other hand, Schreiner's criticism of Klein on this point is probably misguided, arising from his assumption that logic requires a one-to-one correlation between the individuals in a group and the group itself (cf. Schreiner, "Individual Election" 103–4, and Klein, *Chosen People* 264). Klein seems to be using the term "logic" in the sense of "one coherent way of thinking." Schreiner's individualistic scheme is a logical way of thinking about the relationship between the individual and the group, but it is not a logically necessary way, as I have tried to show. Indeed, Schreiner's approach is unfit for contexts in which the group is deemed primary. At the same time, the corporate perspective is equally logical.

<sup>56</sup> Schreiner, "Individual Election" 105.

The example of the Trinity that he gives is a good one. It is not contradictory because it claims that there are three persons in one God rather than that God is three persons yet one person. But it is mysterious because we do not know how three persons can exist in one being. However, to claim both that God absolutely predetermines human actions and that human beings are free is nonsensical.<sup>57</sup> So is the idea that someone whose lack of faith was absolutely predetermined should have believed. But these issues have been debated for millennia, and I am unlikely to persuade anyone committed to compatibilism with such brief comments on the role of logic in the discussion.

Ultimately, it must be biblical exegesis rather than philosophical commitment that determines our theological conclusions about election. This bodes even better for the thesis that Romans 9 manifests a corporate concept of election rather than a Calvinistic individual one. For Paul's emphasis there is clearly corporate and fits comfortably into the OT concept of corporate election in which the texts he invokes are steeped. Romans 9 teaches neither individual election in the traditional sense nor that God determines who will believe. This harmonizes nicely with Rom 9:30–10:21, which Schreiner admits, "teaches us that those who do not exercise faith are responsible and should have done so."<sup>58</sup> When paired with his own postulate of unconditional individual election in Romans 9, Schreiner is compelled to ask, "How can both of these be logically true?"<sup>59</sup> and he is forced to resort to the concept of mystery. While not fatal to his view, this does not readily commend it. Logic, which he tries to claim as supporting his position over against corporate election, certainly favors an interpretation that does not demand such inconsistency in Paul's argument.

## V. CONCLUSION

Thomas Schreiner's defense of a Calvinist reading of Romans 9 based on the supposition that corporate and individual election are inseparable is unpersuasive. Practically, his argument knocks down a straw man version of corporate election.<sup>60</sup> One of the main points throughout his argument in support of the thesis that election must be both corporate and individual is to show that what is spoken of the group must involve individuals in some way. But the biblical view of corporate election always contained individuals

<sup>57</sup> This is true despite John Calvin's and Jonathan Edwards's valiant attempt to rescue the assertion from absurdity. Against their view, see Bruce R. Reichenbach, "Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (ed. Clark H. Pinnock; Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1989) 281–87.

<sup>58</sup> Schreiner, "Individual Election" 105.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> This is not to deny that there may be some scholars who hold the type of view that Schreiner convincingly refutes and others whose view of corporate election may be vague as Schreiner charges. His article may successfully counter the inadequate view of some scholars, but it does not successfully defend a Calvinistic view of individual election in Romans 9. Moreover, the representative of corporate election whom Schreiner mentions the most, William Klein, does not hold the sort of view against which Schreiner's argument succeeds.

within its scope based on their participation in the group/identification with the corporate representative without extending the concept of election to entrance into the elect people or shifting the focus of election to the individual. Individuals were elect, but only as members of the elect people. Therefore, a crucial part of the main foundation of Schreiner's thesis does not actually oppose a proper view of corporate election, which recognizes that corporate realities must apply to individuals and lends no support to the Calvinist view.

An accurate view of corporate election undercuts much of Schreiner's argumentation. Its inclusion of individuals within its scope accounts for reference to individuals in the language and thought of Romans 9–11 and contradicts Schreiner's claim that it implies only the election of an abstract concept rather than a group of people. On the other hand, a careful examination of Romans 9–11 reveals that its individual language and thought are actually corporately oriented, whether one thinks of singular language in chapter 9, the selection of a remnant in chapters 9 and 11, or the faith or failure of individuals in chapter 10.

What Schreiner fails to address adequately is the relationship between the group and the individual. His assertion that corporate election must involve individuals turns out to be a simplistic truism that neglects the complexities of corporate thought. He appears to assume facetly that there is a one-to-one correlation between the group and the individual so that what is true of the group is true of the individual in the exact same way. Therefore, for Schreiner, if the group has been selected, then this implies that each individual member of the group was selected on his own to become a member of the group. But this does not necessarily follow, and as we have seen, does not fit the contours of corporate thought, which regards the group as primary and the individual as secondary. Such an outlook finds (1) the corporate identity and reality to transcend that of the individual on his own; (2) that some things that are true of the group might not be true of the individual; and (3) that the individual's experience of corporate realities depends on his participation in the group.

The important question about election that must be answered concerns its primary orientation. Is it corporate or individual? Schreiner, whether consciously or not, presupposes that it is individual. Indeed, he does not seem able to grasp the corporate perspective due to modern individualistic assumptions. This is probably why he states that it demands an extended explanation.<sup>61</sup> Hopefully, the present article will meet this demand.

Schreiner's critique of corporate election does not succeed at upholding the Calvinist view of individual election in Romans 9. The OT and Judaism's view of election was corporate, Paul himself only spoke explicitly of election unto salvation in corporate terms, and Paul's socio-historical context was solidly collectivist. Moreover, Paul, who deals with Scripture extensively in Romans 9–11 and attempts to show that his views are in accord with it, refers

<sup>61</sup> Schreiner, "Individual Election" 101.

to a number of passages that evince a corporate view of election. Furthermore, the OT concept of corporate election embraces individual separation and entrance into the elect community without shifting the locus of election to the individual. The burden of proof must lie on those who would claim that Paul departed from this standard biblical and Jewish conception of election. If it be claimed that the shift of the locus of election from Abraham or Jacob/Israel to Christ demands such a departure, I would point out that election in Christ is only the fulfillment of Israel's election and that this election fits perfectly into the OT pattern. Again, if it be objected that this sets up an impossible standard because Paul nowhere directly argues for individual election in such a way that does not fit into a corporate perspective, I would respond that that is exactly the point. We would have to assume the corporate view unless there was some good reason to the contrary. Neither Paul nor the rest of the NT gives us any reason to make this leap.<sup>62</sup> Quite the opposite, they, not least Romans 9, support the corporate view through corporate language, socio-historical context, and recourse to the OT. In response to Schreiner's question, "Does Romans 9 teach individual election unto salvation?" we must answer, no, it does not. It contains a corporate view of election unto salvation that grants elect status to all who are in Christ.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Schreiner, in *ibid.* 105, claims that individual election is taught in too many texts to be dismissed, citing without comment John 6:37, 44–45, 64–65; 10:26; Acts 13:48; 16:14. But I would counter that these texts neither teach nor imply individual election in the Calvinist sense. Unfortunately, discussion of them is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>63</sup> I would like to thank Paul Ellingworth and Bill Klein for reading this article and offering helpful comments. I am also thankful to Bill for sending me his unpublished paper on the same topic and a portion of his forthcoming commentary on Ephesians.



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