

## I. LETTER PRESCRIPT: ROMANS 1:1-15

### A. The Apostolic Greeting (1:1-7)

#### BEHIND THE TEXT

Born *Saul* of Hebrew parents (Phil 3:4-6), *Paul* was his Roman name. He was both a Roman citizen and a Diaspora Jew of the sect of the Pharisees. The former placed him in the elite category of Greco-Roman society, the latter potentially among the elite of Jewish society (Acts 16:37-39; 22:22-29). Acts indicates that Paul received his elementary education in Jerusalem, not in Tarsus—"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers" (22:3). Admittedly, Paul's claim in Gal 1:22 that he was unknown to the Judean church complicates this traditional view.

As a child from a well-connected Jewish family, Paul would have learned to speak, read, and write in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. His ministry in Illyricum (Rom 15:19) and his plans to evangelize in Spain (v 28), both Latin-speaking regions, suggests that he also spoke that language. Under Herod the Great, Jerusalem had become a cosmopolitan and Hellenistic city, with both a hippodrome and a Greek theater. It was an important city to Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora like Paul's parents as well as a great pilgrimage destination for pious Jews from all over the Mediterranean.

Formal education began at age six for both Jewish and pagan boys. Jews of both Palestine and the Diaspora were early grounded in Jewish traditions. Paul would have been thoroughly grounded in Holy Scripture. Paul's OT citations indicate that he regularly consulted and followed the Septuagint (LXX: "seventy," designating a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible begun in the third century B.C.), as well as the Hebrew text. Paul's theological education would have been comparable to that of today's seminary students (Gal 1:14; Acts 5:33-39).

Paul embraced the eschatology of the Pharisees, but his understanding of it was radically altered by his conversion to Christ (see Gal 1:3-5). Pharisees divided salvation history into two epochs: the old age before the coming of the Messiah was considered evil and unredeemable due to Adam's fall; the new age would inaugurate the future rule of God that was to be good and incorruptible. Because of his encounter with the risen Christ, Paul came to share the Christian view that the future age had broken into history in the person and work of Jesus Christ, while the present age persisted. Thus, there was an overlapping of the ages, referred to in the NT as "the last days" (see Acts 2:16-21). In this "time between the times," those who have been "rescue[d] . . . from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4) may experience the blessings of the future here and now (Heb 6:5), as they await the final consummation at Christ's return in glory (Rom 8:18-25).

Paul would also have learned methods of debate and persuasion from his teachers, such as argument from current experience to scriptural proof in midrashic fashion (1 Cor 9:7-14) and the use of allegory (Gal 4:21-31). In his oral culture, rhetoric was a fundamental staple of ancient education. Paul's oratorical skills suggest influences from both Jewish and pagan rhetoricians. In addressing a church he had neither founded nor visited, Paul introduced himself and his gospel with obvious rhetorical sensitivities. His apostolic greeting in Rom 1:1-7, one sentence in Greek, is the longest salutation in the Pauline letters.

Paul claims that his gospel was promised long ago but gives no hint as to where the promise is found in the OT. Paul's summary of his gospel seems to incorporate a fragment of early Palestinian proclamation, handed down to the Roman community (see Acts 2:22-36). Joseph Fitzmyer (1993, 229-30) re-

constructs the kerygmatic formula as a two-pronged affirmation (italics indicate Paul's additions):

**his Son**

**born**

**of David's stock**

**according to the flesh**

**by his resurrection from the dead**

**established**

**as Son of God *with power***

**according to the spirit of holiness**

**Jesus Christ our Lord.**

The basic formula in Rom 1:3-4 is probably pre-Pauline; it contains the only reference in Paul's letters to Jesus as the Son of David, the only use of the verb *horizein* ("to declare"), and the Semitic phrase **Spirit of holiness** rather than "the Holy Spirit." This confessional formula summarizing **the gospel . . . regarding his Son**, quotes Jewish Christian tradition that Paul believes will establish his faith-identity with the Romans.

Paul regards his hearers as predominantly Gentile (see 1:6, 13; 11:13; 15:15-19), although their community contained Jewish Christians as well. The apostle understood his commission to be the fulfillment of God's ancient promise to Abraham in Gen 12:1-4, that through him "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (v 3) with the salvation that provides the obedience of faith that eluded ancient Israel but is now gloriously possible for the new Israel of God composed of "everyone [both Jews and Gentiles] who believes" (Rom 1:16; see 9:6-8) **in Jesus Christ our Lord** (1:4).

## IN THE TEXT

■ I Ancient Greco-Roman letters followed the pattern: "Sender to Recipient, Greetings." Paul adapts the customary form—Paul . . . **to all in Rome**, expanding and giving it a Christian emphasis throughout. Because he had not founded nor yet visited the Roman church, the letter's lengthy salutation allowed him to present his credentials (Jewett 2007, 97) and the salient points of the argument to follow. His opening words are more than a formal introduction; they anticipate the theme of the letter.

Paul introduces himself as a **servant** (*doulos*, "slave") **of Christ Jesus** (v 1). This is more than an expression of feigned humility; Paul is completely at his Master's disposal. "The essential theme of his mission is not within him but above him" (Barth 1933, 27). Abraham (Gen 26:24; Ps 105:6, 42), Moses (Num 12:7-8), David (2 Sam 7:5, 8), and the prophets (Isa 20:3; Jer 7:25; Amos 3:7) were all called servants of the Lord. This is the first instance of this usage in the NT. Paul quietly replaces "the prophets and leaders of the Old Covenant, and . . . substitutes the name of his own Master . . . for that of Jehovah" (Sanday and Headlam 1929, 3). Paul's Roman audience may have heard

his self-description as *a slave of Christ Jesus* as comparable to the title “slave of Caesar,” proudly borne by those in the emperor’s service (Jewett 2007, 99).

By identifying himself as **called to be an apostle** (*klētos apostolos, a called apostle*), Paul insists that he is “an apostle *by way of a call*” (Godet 1883, 74). *Klētos* has its roots in the OT: Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), Moses (Exod 3:10), and the prophets were God’s servants by way of a divine summons. In Gal 1:14-16 Paul describes his call, echoing the language of Isa 49:1 and Jer 1:5.

*Apostolos* means literally an “envoy” or “missionary” (“one sent out”; note the Latin equivalent *missus*). **Apostle** has two applications in the NT. In the narrow sense it applied only to the Twelve (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:21-26). But in the broader Pauline sense it included Barnabas (14:4, 14), James the brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19), and others (Rom 16:7; see Luke 24:10; assuming Joanna = Junia [see the commentary on 16:7]), whose call derived from their personal encounter with the risen Christ (1 Cor 9:1-2; 15:8-9; Gal 1:1, 15-16). Paul’s summons to be an apostle came directly from “Jesus Christ and God the Father” (Gal 1:1), who laid on him the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentile world (Rom 1:16).

**Set apart for the gospel** thus parallels *klētos apostolos*. **Set apart** (*aphōrismenos*) has the same root meaning as *Pharisee* (*pharisaios*). As a fulfilled Pharisee (see Jewett 2007, 101-2), he was “separated” **for the gospel of God**. **The gospel** is the good news of God’s saving intervention in human history in his Son, **Christ Jesus** our Lord.

Submission is the human response to the divine act of separation. God separates his servants; they make themselves available to him (see Rom 12:1). Human acceptance of the divine act of separation, faithful cooperation with the plan of God, is not inevitable. “I pommel my body and subdue it,” Paul writes as a *klētos apostolos*, “lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27 RSV; see Matt 24:13).

■ **2** Paul emphasizes the continuity of the gospel dispensation with the old covenant. The good news had been **promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures** (Rom 1:2). Although, the thought of God’s promising activity is “deeply rooted in the OT . . . , it is not expressed there” explicitly (Cranfield 1975, 55 n. 3). NT authors do not limit the term **prophets** to those we normally think of; they include all the inspired authors of the OT, such as Moses (Acts 3:22) and David (Acts 2:30-31; Jewett 2007, 103). It is unusual that they are designated here “*his* prophets” (emphasis added; *tōn prophētōn autou*). This is the only place in the NT where the expression **the Holy Scriptures** (*graphais hagian*) appears (in 2 Tim. 3:15, “holy Scriptures” translates *hiera grammata*). The term *hagios* (“holy”) modifies the usual designation for *hai graphai* (“the writings”)—what we call the OT.

It is impossible to determine with certainty which passages Paul has in mind as he refers to the OT precedents for the **gospel**. Dunn suggests that

“they would already include at least some of the texts cited or alluded to later on (see, e.g., on 4:25) and in the sermons in Acts, and here particularly 2 Sam 7:12-16 and Ps 2:7 (see on 1:3)” (2002a, 38A:10). Many NT scholars speculate that the earliest Christians had compiled *testimonia*, collections of Christian proof texts, used to validate their reading of the OT in light of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (see 1 Cor 15:3-4). There is evidence corroborating this in “the sequence of Isa 28:16, Ps 117, 118:22, and Isa 8:14 repeated in Matt 21:42, Rom 9:33, and 1 Pet 2:6-8” (Brooke 1992, 6:391) and the existence of such collections among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

## Promised in the OT

Cranfield (1975, 55 n. 3) notes that the two-preposition (*pro* and *e*pi) compound form of the verb translated **promised beforehand** (from *proepangellō*) occurs only here and in 2 Cor 9:5. The *pro*- prefix particularly emphasizes the priority of the promise. The one-preposition verb form (from *epangellōmai*) occurs fifteen times in the NT, notably in Rom 4:21 and Gal 3:19. The noun *epangelia* (“promise”) occurs nearly fifty times, including eight in Romans (4:13, 14, 16, 20; 9:4, 8, 9; 15:8) and nine in Galatians. Paul may have appropriated the Greek terms applied to God’s promises in the earlier pseudepigraphal Psalms of Solomon (7:9 [10]; 12:7 [6]; and 17:6 [5]).

The **gospel** represents, not a break with the past, but the consummation of it. Thus, Paul writes in 1 Cor 15:3-4 that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” and that “he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” The repeated insistence that these things happened in accordance with the Scriptures shows how vital this was to Paul. “The words of the prophets, long fastened under lock and key, are now set free. . . . Now we can see and understand what was written, for we have an ‘entrance into the Old Testament’” (Barth 1933, 28; quoting Luther; see 2 Cor 3:14-16).

1:2-3

■ **3** Although the gospel has its *source* in God, the *content* of the good news is **regarding his Son** (Rom 1:3), in whom all the OT promises are fulfilled (2 Cor 1:20) and the saving acts of God performed (2 Cor 5:18-19). “The gospel is the center around which it all revolves. From beginning to end it treats of the Son of God” (Nygren 1949, 47).

Many scholars agree that Rom 1:3-4 seems to cite a brief creedal formula expounding on the nature of the Son of God. Paul diplomatically “selects a credo that bears the marks of both . . . the Gentile and Jewish branches of the early church” (Jewett 2007, 107; see 103-8). The key to understanding this christological formula is to grasp its antithetical character. The Greek term translated **human nature** (*sarx*) here is the same one frequently (mis-)translated **sinful nature** elsewhere in the NIV (see the sidebar “Flesh” with the commentary on Rom 7). **As to his human nature**, Jesus was descended from David.

Paul's point is not merely that God's Son shares our common humanity or that he was a Jew, although he takes both for granted. If his point were merely to insist that Jesus was human, any ancestor would do. He does not speak of him here as "born of a woman," as in Gal 4:4. If his point had been to emphasize Jesus' Jewishness, he would surely have mentioned his descent from Abraham (see Matt 1:1). That Jesus was a **descendant of David** reflects Jewish messianic expectation, that the Messiah would be the Son of David.

■ **4 Through the Spirit of holiness** (Rom 1:4), he who in his human existence belonged to the royal line of David was **declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.**

It is implied that there are two things to be said about Christ, not indeed contradictory but complementary to and different from each other. Christ belongs to two spheres or orders of existence, denoted respectively by flesh and Spirit. (Barrett 1957, 36)

An even more basic truth, however, underlies the twofold formula. He who was *from the beginning Son of God* was manifested first in weakness, then in power. The preexistent Son of God became incarnate, "sent" in the flesh (8:3; see 8:32; Gal 4:4).

The participle translated *was* (*genomenou*) in the phrase **was a descendant of David** (Rom 1:3) properly denotes "transition from one state or mode of existence to another. . . . '[Who] was born' . . . is practically equivalent to the Johannine '*elthontos eis ton kosmon*' ('coming into the world')" (Sanday and Headlam 1929, 6). If this passage alone supported the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence, it would be difficult to sustain, but its canonical context—alongside John 1, Phil 2, and Col 1—certainly makes this a plausible reading.

Jesus, as a human **descendant of David** was **declared with power to be the Son of God**. His prior divine status was recognized **by his resurrection from the dead** (Rom 1:4); it did not make one who was merely human divine. **Declared** (*horisthentos*) is elsewhere translated "decreed" (Luke 22:22), "determined" (Acts 17:26), and "appointed" (v 31).

There is neither need nor warrant to resort to any other rendering than that provided by the other New Testament instances, namely, that Jesus was "appointed" or "constituted" Son of God with power and points therefore to an investiture which had an historical beginning parallel to the historical beginning mentioned in verse 3. (Murray 1959, 36)

Paul's point is similar to that expressed in Heb 1:5, on which H. Orton Wiley comments:

The words, "This day have I begotten thee," (1:5a) are applied by St. Paul to the Resurrection in Acts 13:33, and by St. John in Rev. 1:5. The Son is indeed the "only begotten of the Father" before all worlds, and the deity of the Son necessarily underlies the Incarnation and the Resurrection;

otherwise, it would exclude His work as Mediator. *But the Son was also begotten again in the Resurrection, which marked the full out-birth of the humanity of Jesus from a state of humiliation to that of glorification and exaltation.* (1959, 52-53; emphasis added. Wiley quotes Rom 1:3-4 as parallel to Heb 1:5.)

Whether *horisthentos* means **declared**, “designated” (RSV), or “proclaimed” (REB) does not threaten belief in Christ’s essential deity. The debated issue is whether the resurrection confirmed an existing status or conferred a new one.

What does the phrase **with power** modify? Should it be translated **declared with power to be the Son of God** (NIV) or designated “the Son of God with power” (KJV)? The Greek allows either rendering. The majority of modern versions follow the KJV. The phrase *en dynamei* (**with power**) elsewhere in the NT (see Mark 9:1; 1 Cor 15:43, 56; and 1 Thess 1:5) is used in the sense of “invested with power.”

The meaning of the first six words of this clause then is probably “who was appointed Son-of-God-in-power” (that is, in contrast with His being Son of God in apparent weakness and poverty in the period of his earthly existence). (Cranfield 1975, 1:62)

“The divine glory, which formerly was hidden, was manifest after the resurrection” (Nygren 1949, 48).

The most difficult phrase in the formula is rendered literally and accurately **the Spirit of holiness**. Is this a reference to Jesus’ human spirit or to the Holy Spirit? Is a contrast between Jesus’ flesh and spirit intended? Is his human nature (“the sphere of flesh”) contrasted with his heavenly nature (“the sphere of the Holy Spirit”)? By capitalizing **Spirit of holiness** the NIV correctly identifies the phrase with “the Holy Spirit.” Although Paul nowhere else refers to the Holy Spirit in this way, the Semitic expression probably quotes a Palestinian formula (as in the Dead Sea Scrolls), accounting for the unique terminology. Romans 8:11 similarly mentions the activity of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection.

A second surprising phrase, **by his resurrection from the dead**, in Greek is literally “by resurrection of those who are dead.” Nygren understands Paul to mean, “Through Christ the resurrection age has burst upon us” (1949, 50). Ephesians 1:19—2:7 notes that the same power that raised Christ from the dead has resurrected *us* from the death of sin. So also in 1 Cor 15:19-58, Paul insists that

*the resurrection is the turning point in the existence of the Son of God. Before this the whole race was under the sovereign sway of death; but in the resurrection of Christ life burst forth victoriously, and a new aeon began, the aeon of the resurrection and life.* (Nygren 1949, 51)

The phrase **Jesus Christ our Lord** presumes the primitive Christian con-

fession, “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3; see Phil 2:11). God designated Jesus Son of God with power by the resurrection and assigned him the name and authority implied in the name **Lord**. The name **Jesus** identifies the person, the incarnate Son. The title **Christ** speaks of him as the promised, Spirit-anointed Messiah of Israel (see John 1:33-34). **Lord** was used of human masters as well as divine beings in Greco-Roman practice. But the LXX use of *kyrios* to translate the divine name of Israel’s God Yahweh expedited the church’s exalted Christology. **Lord** identifies Jesus with the ineffable name of God (Phil 2:9-11 and Rom 14:9-11 echo Isa 45:23). The Aramaic prayer, *Marana tha*, “**Come, O Lord!**” (1 Cor 16:22), suggests that Jesus was first addressed as Lord among Jewish, not Greek-speaking Gentile Christians.

■ **5** The revelation of the lordship of Jesus rounds out the christological formula Paul quotes, while it amplifies and explains the nature of the apostle’s commission to preach the gospel in Rome. From the exalted and glorified Lord Paul received **grace and apostleship** (Rom 1:5). Paul did not receive two gifts. As an example of hendiadys, the two expressions are mutually interpretive. For Paul, grace was the undeserved privilege and responsibility of being a spokesman for Christ. Not everyone who receives grace is made an apostle, but for Paul the two were inseparable. He was not first converted and later called to be an apostle. Rather, he received the double call on the Damascus Road (see Acts 9:15; Gal 1:15-16).

1:4-6

Paul was commissioned at his conversion to **call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith**. Paul’s fourfold use of the word **all** (from *pas*) in the introduction to Romans (1:5, 7, 8, and 16) emphasizes the inclusive scope of his message to the fractured Christian community there (Jewett 2007, 113). Before the letter is complete Paul will have used the word *pas* more than seventy times.

The phrase **to the obedience that comes from faith** (*eis hypakoēn pisteōs*; see 16:26; Acts 6:7) is translated literally in the margin of the KJV: “to the obedience of faith.” Those who accept Jesus as Lord are expected to obey him. *Lordship* and *obedience* are correlative terms. J. A. Beet comments aptly, “The act of faith is submission to God” (1885, 33). Since sin means making self the end and rule of life, faith means the abdication of self and the exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord. “The expression here used by Paul defines admirably the goal at which Christian apostleship aims: to bring men back into a state of obedience, since the present state is essentially one of disobedience (5:19)” (Leenhardt 1957, 40). The formula **for his name’s sake** (Acts 5:41; 9:16; 15:26; 21:13; 3 John 7) emphasizes that “Jesus Christ is ‘the foundation and theme of proclamation’ in missionary contexts” (see Rom 15:20; Jewett 2007, 111).

■ **6** The apostle addresses the Roman Christians as **among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ** [*klētoi Iēsou Christou: called of Jesus Christ*]

(v 6). Their call to be the people of Christ, to be **saints** (see v 7), is exactly parallel to his call to be an apostle (v 1; Jewett 2007, 112).

How does one come to belong to Christ? Despite contemporary Christian usage emphasizing human volition and choice, the NT insists that people come to him by invitation only. Believers, as *hoi klētoi*, the **called**, come to God wholly “by grace” (Eph 2:8). The Synoptic Gospels refer to *klētoi* as “all who are invited to enter Christ’s kingdom, whether or not they accept the invitation.” Thus, the *eklektoi*, “the elect,” are a smaller, select group within “the called” (see Matt 22:14; Keck 1995, 24-26). In Paul, however, “both words are applied to the same persons; *klētos* implies that the call has been not only given but obeyed” (Sanday and Headlam 1929, 4). Romans 8:28 validates Karl Barth’s claim that Jesus Christ is the Elect One, with *all* believers “elect in Christ.”

■ **7** Paul emphasizes that **all** the Roman Christians—Jews and Gentiles—are **loved by God** (v 7). Here Paul employs the great NT word for love—*agapē*. This is God’s own love for all humanity revealed supremely in the cross, where Christ died for “sinners” (5:8), even while they were still his “enemies” (5:10). His love is personally experienced through the Holy Spirit “poured” into human hearts by the gift of his Holy Spirit (5:5). His love entirely encompasses the lives of believers. Henceforth, no power whatever can separate them from the love God has given them in Christ Jesus (8:35-39). When Paul addresses the Roman Christians as **loved by God**, he uses the word in this profound and inclusive sense. To be God’s beloved, his friends, characterizes the existence of all Christians.

Finally, they are **called saints** (*kletois hagiois*), not simply **called to be saints**, as if they were not already. They are really “saints” by virtue of God’s call (Godet 1883, 74). The NT understands all believers to be “saints,” i.e., “holy” or “sanctified” (*hagioi*; see 15:25-26, 31; 16:2, 15). The basic idea of sainthood is separation. The saints are those people God has separated “from all the people on earth to be his very own” (Deut 7:6 NCV; see 1 Kgs 8:53; 1 Pet 2:9-10). In this sense the Roman Christians were “holy.” They were no longer simply Gentiles or Jews; they had been **called to belong to Jesus Christ** (Rom 1:6). God had claimed them for himself.

Paul’s opening greeting, **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ**, is similar to that found in all his letters. The Pauline greeting has been explained as the combination of the Greek *charein*, “greetings,” for which Paul substitutes *charis*, “grace,” and a translation of the standard Jewish greeting *shalom*, “peace”—*eireinē* in Greek.

But the combination of “grace and peace” also echoes the Aaronic blessing: “The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Num 6:24-26 RSV). If so,

then “grace” would represent God’s merciful bounty or covenantal favor revealed in Christ Jesus, and “peace” would connote the fullness of prosperity and well-being characteristic of God’s goodness to Israel of old. For all of this Paul prays: that it may come to the Christians of Rome from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ as the sum of evangelical blessings. (Fitzmyer 1993, 228)

## FROM THE TEXT

Paul’s understanding of **the gospel of God . . . regarding his Son** (Rom 1:1, 3), and of himself as an apostle set apart for the proclamation of that gospel **among all the Gentiles** (v 5) is the central theme of this passage. At least four theologically significant assertions arise naturally from the introduction to Romans.

*First*, the christological formula defining the gospel in 1:3-4 stands at the center of orthodox Christian faith. In the early years the church fathers wrote learned treatises on the subject, emphasizing the meaning of Christ’s deity and incarnation. The church condemned the Jewish teaching that Jesus was a man who *became* the Son of God, either by the Spirit coming upon him at his baptism or by his resurrection from the dead. This doctrinal error became known later in history as adoptionism, a denial of the incarnation (John 1:14).

On the other extreme, the church condemned the error, arising from the gnostic notion that matter is essentially evil. Gnostics held that Jesus was a phantom, having only the *appearance* of human flesh. This doctrine became known as Docetism, from the Greek word *dokein*, meaning to “seem” or “appear.”

Another heresy, known as Sabellianism, is more properly a Trinitarian error, but it does affect Christology. Sabellius taught that there was but one God, who manifested himself, first as Father, then as Son, and finally as the Holy Spirit. This error, also called modalism, has been popularized in recent history by the “Jesus only” doctrine, which denies the Trinity, insisting that Jesus alone is truly God.

As the christological discussions of the church continued, a very serious challenge to Christ’s essential deity arose, which threatened the Christian faith. It was fostered by Arius (256-336), a Greek theologian. Arius taught that while Christ was divine, and was incarnate, there was a time when he was not. Arius’s Christ was a demigod, not the *eternal* Son of God.

The triumph of orthodox Christian faith over Arianism was accomplished chiefly by the skillful biblical argumentation of Athanasius (293-373). The issue was officially settled by the Council of Constantinople in 381 and

enshrined in the Nicene Creed, to which all orthodox Christian churches subscribe.

A close examination of the christological formulas in Rom 1:3-4 reveals that the essential elements of the creed are confessed there in germinal form. But Paul's concerns in Romans go well beyond confessional considerations. Not only faith as opinions, but also faith as obedience matters.

*Second*, to obey the gospel requires that believers must live obediently as those who belong to Jesus Christ (vv 5-7). To obey fully means not only to hear but also to hearken to God. It requires "submission" to his lordship and purposes (Fitzmyer 1993, 137).

To understand the gospel and proclaim it with saving power, we must be convinced and thoroughly changed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:12-14). As important as theological education and ministerial training may be, the power of Paul's ministry (and ours) is not human but supernatural—by "the Spirit who is from God" (see 1 Cor 2:4). Paul's ministry embodies and models this primal truth (Gal 1:11-16; see 2 Cor 3:7-18), applicable to all (see 2 Cor 3:3-6).

The intermediate goal of the gospel is ongoing moral *transformation* into the likeness of Christ—to be saints (Rom 1:7). John Wesley calls this process *sanctification*, by which he means renewal in the image of God (see Col 3:10). Believers as **saints** are not only *separated* from the rest of humanity but also *purified*.

Since all sin is the erection of self into the end and rule of life, sin is utterly opposed to holiness. God's holiness makes Him intolerant of sin, because sin robs Him of that which His holiness demands. Only the holy are pure, only the pure are holy. (Beet 1885, 39)

Purification begins in conversion. John Wesley expected this cleansing to deal with both *outward* and *inward* sin (1979, 5:150; commenting on 1 Cor 6:9-11). Conversion purifies from sin as God breaks the *rule* of sin in the lives of the saints—his people. Having received the sanctifying Spirit, they yearn to be cleansed from the *root* of sin that remains—to be transformed, ruled, renewed, and used unreservedly by God (see 6:13, 19; 12:1-12; 2 Cor 7:1)—to be entirely sanctified (1 Thess 5:23-24).

Wesley was convinced that God justifies us in order to sanctify us. Sanctification begins a lifelong process of transformation, marked by certain specific stages on the way. Wesley often described this process in terms of Gal 5:6—"faith expressing itself through love." In his sermon "On Patience" he describes the distinction between the various phases of the process as ever-increasing degrees of love.

*Third*, what the Lord called Israel to become at Sinai, he makes universally possible through Christ and the church: "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6 NRSV; see Gen 12:1-4; Exod 19:5-8). God's concerns ex-

tend well beyond salvaging random individuals to the creating of a holy community. “Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5-6).

God’s covenant with Israel promised the people they would be “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (NRSV). Now, in the end time of salvation history, God made his people “priests of the Lord” and “ministers of our God.” God never wavered in his purpose (see 1 Pet 2:9-11 and Rev 1:6 NRSV). Old Testament priests brought Israel before God to worship and experience the glory of his holiness. Their two key functions were to represent God to the people and to represent the people to God. God expected Israel to perform these two functions in relation to the nations (see Exod 19; Isa 42:6-7; 43:10-12; 49:6), but Israel failed in its mission (see 42:19-20).

*Fourth*, Paul is confident that his gospel is no novelty. It was **promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures** (Rom 1:2). If he explains this claim in Gal 3:6-9, the gospel merely continues what God set out to do in Israel. Paul appeals to Abraham, the father of Israel, in Gen 12 (esp. vv 1-3) and 15 (esp. vv 4-6), on whom he will elaborate at length in Rom 4.

The gospel was not an unexpected irruption into history; it was the culmination and fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan for humanity. The multiplied millions transformed by the power of the gospel seal the truth of God’s promise to Abraham. “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God” (2 Cor 1:20).

The God of Abraham is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To understand what God is doing in our world, we must come back to this central point: God is determined to fulfill the promises he made to father Abraham. The very essence of God’s character—his holiness, righteousness, justice, power, and love—hangs on his faithfulness to the covenant promises he made to Abraham.

The God of history invites his people to join him in carrying out his ultimate goal: “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11).

## **B. Paul’s Interest in the Roman Church (1:8-15)**

### BEHIND THE TEXT

The first sentence of an ancient Greek letter, after the salutation, was often of a religious nature, informing the recipients of the writer’s prayer to the

gods on their behalf. The prayer was usually a thanksgiving (or petition), typically concerned with the recipients' health. Romans follows this practice, although the character and content of Paul's thanksgiving are far from conventional. His prayer is not for the physical welfare of those to whom he writes, but a prayer of thanksgiving that their faith was widely reported. Paul assures them of his unceasing prayers for them, including the prayer that God may permit him to visit them.

Epistolary thanksgivings in ancient letters also typically serve as a rhetorical exordium. That is, they introduce and anticipate the key concerns that will be developed in the letter. Paul explains that he desires to see them so that they may be mutually strengthened by their fellowship together. And he assures the Roman community that he had long planned to visit them, but he had been previously prevented by circumstances beyond his control. Jewett notes the rhetorical interplay between "me" and "you" (plural) developed in vv 8-12 that Paul uses to establish "the relationship between himself and his audience within the framework of the inclusive gospel" outlined in vv 1-7 (2007, 117).

Verses 13-15 solemnly express Paul's sense of the obligation laid upon him as apostle to the Gentiles and his particular eagerness to preach the gospel to the Christians in Rome as in the rest of the Gentile world. Paul felt obliged to preach the gospel as if he were constantly discharging a debt owed to all humankind—"a debt which he will never fully discharge so long as he lives" (Bruce 1963, 75).

The letter to the Romans stands as a stopgap measure to preach the gospel to the Romans until Paul arrives and is able to do so in person. Only at the close of the letter does Paul disclose his ambitious scheme to recruit the Romans to assist him in taking the gospel to Spain, the western extremes of the empire (15:22-29).

Since Paul has never been to Rome and had no part in founding the Roman church, his thanksgiving must overcome the barrier of strangeness that separates him from his mostly unknown readers (see ch 16). Barclay is typical of the interpreters who imagine that Paul also feels obliged to break down their suspicions (Barclay 1957, 5). What many see as a strategy to overcome suspicions is actually a normal feature of ancient rhetoric—establishing one's trustworthy ethos with an audience. Since effective persuasion requires all the rhetorical resources available, ancient authors characteristically appeal to ethos (character), logos (reason), and pathos (emotion) to make their case. Paul is no exception. He is not on the defensive, but on the offensive, as he seeks to persuade the Romans to become partners in the gospel.

## I. Paul's Prayer (1:8-12)

■ **8** Paul begins his thanksgiving with a sincere compliment: **First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world** (v 8). First probably intends no more than *From the very outset* or *Above all*; not that he meant to make a further point but did not. This is Paul's "main point," his reason for writing (Jewett 2007, 118).

**My God** is an OT phrase Paul would naturally use (see Pss 3:7; 5:2; 7:1, 3, etc.), which expresses the intimacy and reality of his present relationship to **God through Jesus Christ**. "The gifts of God," Wesley observes, "all pass through Christ to us, and all our petitions and thanksgivings pass through Christ to God" (1950, 517; on Rom 1:8).

Paul's prayer was for **all** of the Roman Christians without exception (see vv 5, 7, 16). He is thankful that there is a church of Jesus Christ in the imperial capital. His claim that their faith is *universally* known—is **being reported [katangelletai] all over the world**—is an obvious example of hyperbole (see 1 Thess 1:8). His gratitude is not for their strategic location or splendid reputation but simply that they *believe* (Cranfield 1975, 1:75). Their faith, like the gospel itself, is *being proclaimed* (see 1 Cor 9:14; 11:26; Phil 1:18; Jewett 2007, 119).

Paul does not use **your faith** as we sometimes do, to refer to the particular doctrinal content of Roman Christianity. His thanksgiving is occasioned by the fact that they, like other Christians, are believers who have staked their eternal salvation on the conviction that Jesus is the Christ (see Rom 1:17; see 1 Cor 1:5-7; Eph 1:15-16; Col 1:3-7; 1 Thess 1:2-3, 7-8; 2 Thess 1:2-4; Phlm 5). At their best, Christians incarnate the gospel and represent their Lord.

■ **9** Paul frequently calls upon God to vouch for the truth of claims only God can validate. Here he writes, **God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times** (Rom 1:9-10a). The verb *latreuō* translated *serve* is used in classical Greek for the service of a deity; in the LXX it regularly refers to the worship of Israel's God Yahweh (see the noun *latreia* in 12:1). In 15:30-32, Paul will invite the Romans to intercede in prayer in his behalf, as he has been doing in theirs for some time.

The Greek phrase translated **with my whole heart** is literally "with my spirit" (KJV). Paul does not mean that his worship of God was only a subjective or purely spiritual act. His service to God not only takes the form of a continuous attitude of prayer but also comes to expression in evangelical

preaching, of necessity, something externally observable and objective. **Preaching the gospel of his Son** is for Paul an act of worship directed from his inner self as an expression of praise to God himself (Käsemann 1980, 18; Fitzmyer 1993, 244, 245; Moo 1996, 58).

■ **10** Paul's prayers for the Romans are an integral expression of his worship (see Phil 3:3). But his **prayers at all times** (Rom 1:10a) for all his churches are "one part of Paul's service to God, . . . which he fulfils inwardly and secretly" (Cranfield 1975, 77).

## Paul's Oath and Hyperbole

Paul frequently calls upon God to witness to the truth of his claims (see 2 Cor 1:23; 11:31; Gal 1:20; Phil 1:8; 1 Thess 2:5, 10; see also Rom 9:1; 2 Cor 2:17; 12:19). How such implicit *oaths* before God stand in relation to Matt 5:33-37 and Jas 5:12 is a question that has, naturally, often been asked. That the canon includes Paul's oaths is one indication that Matt 5:33-37 and Jas 5:12 may not be understood as forbidding all oaths without exception (Cranfield 1975, 1:75).

But why does Paul make oaths at all? It is not that he is usually a liar who can be trusted only if he solemnly swears to tell the truth. It seems to be rather that the claims he makes under oath are impossible to validate: Only God knows the truth.

That the faith of the Roman Christians was universally proclaimed may be innocent flattery intended to win the favor of his unknown audience. Paul's repeated claims to pray unceasingly for his readers are certainly hyperbolic. Both claims deliberately exaggerate the truth to make their truthful point more forcefully. That there were Christians in the capital of the empire was a significant milestone in the Christian mission to reach the whole world (Matt 26:13; 28:19-20; Jewett 2007, 120).

In more than half a dozen passages in Paul's letters, he claims to pray constantly (Rom 1:9; 12:12; Eph 1:16; Col 1:9; 1 Thess 1:2-3; 2:13; 2 Tim 1:3). Certainly, for example, he cannot literally spend all his time in thanksgiving for the Romans and for the Thessalonians. He also prays for other congregations. And he obviously spends time in other activities as well—plying his trade, preaching, and teaching. Some of his time must be spent eating, drinking, sleeping, traveling, writing pastoral letters, and other mundane tasks.

Paul's hyperbolic point is to claim that intercessory prayer is not only an interruption in his normal activities but also his normal activity. Worship is not something Paul does only at scheduled intervals. He practices a variety of prayer that is unceasing, fervent, and comprehensive of all of life (see Luke 18:1; 21:36; and Heb 5:7). And whenever he prays, he asks God to enable him to come to Rome. And God alone can vouch for this.

Paul finally gets to the object of his longstanding prayers: **I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you** (Rom 1:10b). His plan to visit Rome is no lately conceived plot. The expression *ēdē pote, now at last*, expresses Paul's sense that he has spent enough time waiting (see Phil 4:10). He is persuaded that finally it is **God's will** for him to make his long proposed visit to Rome (see Rom 15:32).

Paul takes seriously that his plans are subject to the sovereign *will of God* (see 12:2; 15:32; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:5; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:1; 6:6; Col 1:1; 4:12; 1 Thess 4:3; 5:18). Throughout the NT, writers recognize that "man proposes, God disposes" (see Acts 18:21; 1 Cor 4:19; 16:7; Heb 6:3; Jas 4:15). Paul could not have known how God's purposes for his visit would be affected by the leaders of the Jerusalem church, by the scheming of his opponents, and by corrupt Roman politicians. Thus, it was years, not months, before Paul was able to visit Rome, and then not as a missionary, but as a prisoner (see Acts 21–28).

■ 11 Paul's claim, **I long [epipothō] to see you** (Rom 1:11), employs terminology sometimes used to express "familial feelings or personal friendship," but "nowhere outside early Christianity does it appear in reference to bonds among group members" (see Rom 15:23; 2 Cor 9:14; Jewett 2007, 123).

The apostle explains the motive of his visit: **that [hina] I may impart to you some spiritual gift [charisma . . . pneumatikon] to make you strong**. Evidently the Romans will miss this spiritual endowment if they remain personally unacquainted with him. Precisely what Paul meant by this *charisma* may only be guessed from descriptions in his other letters. He would, of course, come to Rome endowed with the "fruit" of divine love (*agapē*—1 Cor 13; Gal 5:16, 22-25) and empowered with "gifts" (*charismata*) to serve the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:4-31; 14:1-40).

But here, the "particular gift of the Spirit" Paul had in mind

is simply the Gospel, which according to i.5 had been entrusted to him.

Other men have other gifts. . . . This particular gift, the proclamation of the Gospel, is the gift of the apostolic office bestowed on him. (Barth 1959, 18)

If this is what Paul means, he assumes that the Spirit would empower his preaching in Rome so that by hearing the gospel in faith, the Romans would experience the *charisma* (see Acts 19:1-6; Gal 3:2).

Paul's express reason for desiring to visit the Romans is **to make you strong** (lit. *for you to be established*). He does not say, "that I may establish you." The modesty of the passive omits Paul's personal part in the process. He notes later that it is God "who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ" (Rom 16:25).

Precisely how Paul expects the Roman house and tenement churches to be strengthened will become clear only in the course of the letter. Paul hopes

to enrich their understanding of and deepen their commitment to the gospel (chs 1—11), to consolidate them as a community characterized by love (chs 12—13), to resolve the conflicts separating the weak and the strong (chs 14—15), and to enlist them for his mission to Spain (ch 15).

■ **12** But the fact that Paul's relationship to Rome is not like that to the churches he founded causes him to reformulate his aspirations. He continues, **that** [*touto de estin*, **but that is** + an infinitive of purpose] **you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith** (v 12). The stress falls on the mutuality of what will take place when he visits them. The Romans will have something to give him too (see 15:24, 30-32).

## 2. Paul's Plans (1:13-15)

■ **13** Paul is a stranger to Rome; and the church there was founded by others. But as an apostle to the Gentiles (see 11:13; 15:14-21) he can write, **I do not want you to be unaware** [*agnoein*], **brothers [and sisters], that I planned many times to come to you . . . in order that** [*hina*] **I might have a harvest among you, just as I have among the other Gentiles** (1:13). This epistolary disclosure formula (see 11:25; 1 Cor 10:1; 11:3; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8; 1 Thess 4:13) suggests that Paul begins a new section here. He turns from his prayer report concerning his forthcoming Roman visit to introduce its evangelistic purpose [*hina*]. He does not disclose the details of his plans until Rom 15:22-29.

The familial address heightens the sense of intimacy between Paul and his readers (see 7:1, 4; 8:12; 10:1; 11:25; 15:14, 30; 16:17). The term **brothers**, of course, does not refer to Paul's biological male siblings or even more broadly to his fellow Jews. The bond that unites them is not gender or ethnicity but their shared faith in Christ. He addresses them as fellow Christians.

Although Paul considers his readers fully evangelized, not all in Rome are believers. Thus, Paul anticipates winning converts (**a harvest: *tina karpon, some fruit***) as a result of his preaching in Rome—**among you . . . as . . . among the other Gentiles**. But more importantly, he looks beyond Rome to more distant harvest fields of Spain awaiting the gospel, which he hopes the Roman Christians will help him evangelize. This and other passages (see 11:13, 25-28; 15:15-16) in the letter indicate the dominantly Gentile character of the Roman church. The **brothers** Paul addresses include "sisters" (see ch 16). And most of them are apparently non-Jews (see e.g., 11:13-24).

There is no question of Paul's right, or his desire, to preach in Rome. The reason he has not already visited them is that he had been **prevented from doing so until now** (1:13). Barrett comments:

Paul does not here (as at I Thess. 2:18) speak of a hindering of Satan; indeed the use of the passive may (in Semitic fashion) conceal a reference to God—it had not been God's will that Paul should come (see Acts 16:6f. and perhaps I Cor. xiv.12). This should probably be understood to

1:11-13

mean that urgent tasks (only recently completed, xv. 18f., 22 f.) had kept him in the East. (1957, 26)

■ **14** Paul wants to make it clear that the purpose for his longed-for visit is greater than his own wish; it is his inescapable duty. Accordingly, his announced purposes for visiting Rome reach their climax in the declaration, **I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks** [lit. *barbarians*], **both to the wise and the foolish** (Rom 1:14). Jewett identifies this verse as “in several respects the ‘key to Romans’” (2007, 130).

■ **15** Paul here as elsewhere (see the commentary on 4:4; 8:12; 13:7, 8; 15:1, 27) uses the economic term **obligated** (*opheiletēs*, “a debtor,” v 14 NRSV) in an extended, metaphorical sense. Paul does not **preach the gospel** (v 15) as a volunteer. His divine calling compels him to consider preaching to all a moral obligation, but one he is **eager** to discharge (see 2 Cor 8:11, 12, 19; 9:2).

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation [*anankē*, “necessity” or “pressure”] is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. (1 Cor 9:16-17 NRSV)

Jews typically divided the world between Jews and non-Jews, “Gentiles” (*ta ethnē*, lit. “the nations”; see Acts 14:5; 26:17; Rom 3:29; 9:24; 1 Cor 1:23; 2:15). Rather than ethnicity, language was the basis Greco-Romans used to divide the world between “us” and “them.” Greek speakers typically distinguished themselves from non-Greek speakers, whom they designated with the derogatory term of contempt *barbarians* (*barbaroi*; v 14). Such people were not only uncivilized but also subhuman.

*Barbaroi* is a meaningless onomatopoeia word that attempts to represent the strange, unintelligible sounds foreign speakers make (“*bar, bar*”), comparable to our colloquial “blah, blah.” Although Paul certainly speaks Greek, he does not accept the assumptions underlying this linguistic dualism. He simply adopts the standard terminology of “the imperial worldview” his Roman audience readily understands. He certainly knew that “Spaniards were viewed as barbarians par excellence” (Jewett 2007, 130). But he is convinced that the gospel is for all.

The educational dualism classifying all humanity as either **wise** or **foolish** (see Titus 3:3) was essentially synonymous in the minds of most Greeks, who considered their language, culture, and worldview superior to that of the rest of the world. Dunn observes:

That Paul should be thus prepared to designate the Gentile world in categories of culture and rationality (rather than of races or geographical areas) is striking; it indicates his confidence in the power of his message even in the face of hellenistic sophistication. (2002a, 38A:32)

Thus, when Paul refers to **Greeks** and “barbarians” he means practically “the cultured and the uncultured” or “the sophisticated and unsophisticated.” Similarly, **the wise and the foolish** signify “the educated and the uneducated” (Dodd 1932, 8). Paul acknowledges the inclusive character of his obligation to preach the gospel to the entire Gentile world. His task as an apostle to the Gentiles is to bring all men and women everywhere under the lordship of Jesus Christ and “to the obedience that comes from faith” (1:5; see 11:13; 15:18; and Gal 2:8). And he is resolved to pursue this mission with passion, fervor, and enthusiasm (Jewett 2007, 133).

## FROM THE TEXT

Those called to full-time professional Christian ministry would do well to emulate the apostle Paul as he reveals his mission-passion in this passage.

His ministry was *eucharistic*: The thought of standing before the Romans and proclaiming the gospel filled Paul with *thanksgiving*. He felt compelled to thank God for the privilege and obligation to preach the gospel (see 1 Cor 9:16; 2 Cor 5:14-20). Paul’s ministry was sustained through constant *prayer*.

Not only prayer but also preaching was an integral expression of Paul’s *worship*. Preaching in the power of the Spirit allowed Christ to take human words and communicate through them his living word to the hearts of all who would listen. It is a characteristic Pauline tendency to conceive of acts of mundane service as expressions of worship. Those who occupy the pulpit, as well as those who sit in the pews, must get over the notion that worship involves primarily singing praise songs to Jesus.

Paul’s was an appropriately *contextualized* ministry. Despite his Jewish upbringing, his confidence in the power of the gospel allowed him to understand the cultural assumptions of his Gentile audience in order to communicate the good news intelligibly and effectively. He understood his world well enough to speak in categories it understood; and he understood the gospel well enough to communicate it faithfully, without accommodating its truth to the culture in the process.