

# Romans: Chapter One

## Romans 1.1-17: The Prologue (Righteousness Revealed)

The Prologue is the longest in all of Paul's letters probably because he had never personally visited the local churches in Rome. Paul first states his credentials as the *messenger* (v.1), then the credentials of the *message* itself (vv.2-7). He then speaks of his *desire* to see the saints at Rome (vv.8-12) and explains why he has been *hindered* thus far (vv.13-17).

### The Subject of the Gospel (vv.1-7)

**v.1:** Paul (probably his Roman name), was first and foremost a 'servant' (*doulos*). He had been bought with a price (the precious blood of Christ) out of the slave market of sin and Satan. **McClain:** *Now, all he is and has, his time, strength, talents, even life itself no longer belongs to Paul, but to Jesus Christ!* (Acts 9.6). Second, Paul was an Apostle, divinely called and receiving his office from the risen Christ on the Damascus road (1.5). He was officially sent by God to the Gentiles (11.13) and thus invested with divine authority. As a former Pharisee, Paul was once 'set apart' to the Law, but now to the 'gospel of God'. Nothing else had any other claim over his life. Paul was separated *from* his mother's **womb** (Galatians 1.15); *from* the **world** (Acts 9) and *to* the **work** (Acts 13.1-2).

**v.2:** The gospel was no emergency contingency plan on God's part, but promised in the OT (1.17; 3.21; 4.3; Genesis 3.15; Isaiah 53). **vv.3-4:** It concerns God's Son, 'Jesus Christ our Lord' who is both man (v.3) and God (v.4) and therefore the perfect Mediator (1 Timothy 2.5). Entering into manhood, He was 'made' or 'became' of David's seed (implying pre-existence) – this is His title to the throne. He was not only a real man, but also the Son of God. He was 'marked out in distinction' or 'by signs' (*horizo*) as God's powerful Son by the Spirit of holiness who raised Him from the dead (8.11). This same Jesus is now made Lord and Christ, seated at God's right hand with all authority having been given to Him (Matthew 28.18; Acts 2.36; Philippians 2.9-11). The Greek literally has 'out of resurrection of dead ones' (see Acts 26.23). 'Of dead ones' suggests that Christ is the forerunner and cause of the future resurrection of all mankind (John 5.25-29; 11.23-25). His resurrection was the promised sign (John 2.19-22; Matthew 12.38-40). **vv.5-7:** It was the risen Lord through whom Paul had graciously received the gift of apostleship (12.3) for the purpose of preaching the gospel to 'all nations' (Gentiles). The gospel is characterised here as the 'obedience of faith', probably meaning both 'the obedience that is faith' *and* 'the obedience that springs from faith'. Salvation is not obtained through observance of the Law, but the exercise of faith in Christ which is an act of obedience (16.26; Acts 6.7). This obedience involves submission to the lordship of Christ and characterises the Christian's life (Acts 9.6; Hebrews 11.8). Paul's ministry is ultimately 'for His name', that is, for the glory and honour of Christ. Paul closes his opening remarks by referring to the Christians at Rome as those who 'belonged to Jesus Christ' (v.6), were designated 'God's loved-ones' and 'separated' or 'made holy ones' (saints, v.7). All results from *hearing* and *responding* to the call of God through the gospel (8.28, 30).

### The Servant and the Gospel (vv.8-15)

Paul first describes his longing to see the saints at Rome (vv.8-12). **v.8:** He thanks God for their 'faith' (i.e. salvation) which was widely reported across the empire (Luke 2.1). It must have been quite remarkable that so many had turned to Christ in such a city; the centre and capital of the known world and full of every kind of idolatrous worship. **vv.9-11:** Paul also calls God to witness (only He knew) his *habitual* prayers for them, requesting that it might now be God's will to visit them. He was longing to see them, literally 'homesick', such was the strong family bond he felt for these believers, many of whom he had met in his missionary endeavours in Asia Minor. Paul also desired that, being with them, he might pass on a 'spiritual gift' or 'blessing' through the teaching of the word of God. This would 'strengthen' and 'fix' them firmly in the truth (16.25). **v.12:** But Paul did not consider himself to be above and beyond being helped by other Christians. They would *all* be mutually comforted by one another's faith.

**vv.13-15:** It is possible that Paul was being *criticised* for not visiting Rome sooner, and even *accused* of being ashamed to bring his gospel to the great city of Rome. Far be the thought! He explains that he had often purposed to come to Rome but was 'hindered' thus far. There is no hint of satanic opposition, but rather he was completing the work of preaching the gospel in the eastern Mediterranean before he came to them on the way to Spain (cf. 15.17-24). Paul was 'eager' (v.15) to preach the gospel in Rome because he was 'morally obligated' and 'duty bound' to preach to the whole of Gentile humanity, whether *Greek* (included Romans, cultured) or *Barbarian* (non-Greek speaking, uncultured); *wise* (educated) or *unwise* (uneducated). Jesus Christ had **entrusted** the gospel to him. Here was a treasure which he could not keep to himself and a debt he must discharge.

I am **debtor** (v.14); I am **ready** (v.15); I am not **ashamed** (v.16). *People nowadays tend to regard evangelism as an optional extra and consider (if they engage in it) that they are conferring a favour on God; Paul spoke of it as an obligation. The modern mood is one of reluctance; Paul's was one of eagerness or enthusiasm. Many of us today would have to confess, if we are honest, that we are ashamed of the gospel; Paul declared that he was not.*

**A Summary of the Gospel (vv.16-17)**

The apostle gives *four* reasons why he was eager to bring the gospel to Rome, all of which build one on the other ('for').

- Paul is not ashamed (v.16). This is a figure of speech (litotes). **Bruce:** *Paul means that he glories in the gospel and counts it a high honour to proclaim it.* It is the gospel of Christ; the message is not *what* but **Whom**.
- Power of God (v.16). The gospel is divine, transforming power (*dunamis*) to effect complete salvation in all who believe. **Moody:** *The gospel is like a lion. All the preacher has to do is open the cage and get out of the way!* Historically, the gospel was first preached to the Jew, then the Greek. This was *precedence* in time, not *preference*.
- Righteousness of God (v.17). The gospel reveals a righteousness *from* God. This is not a reference here to God's own intrinsic character (3.25-26) but the act of God whereby He brings sinners into a right relationship with Himself. This glorious and full salvation is offered on the *principle or ground* of faith (in contrast to works), to be *received* by faith. Nothing but faith can put us into a right relationship with God as the OT had long before revealed. Habakkuk 2.4 is quoted to emphasise that 'the justified by faith ones shall live' (Galatians 3.11; Hebrews 10.38).
- Wrath of God (v.18). Why is the gospel needed? Because the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. Sin incurs wrath and judgment, but the gospel cleanses, justifies and saves.

**Romans 1.18-3.20: SIN (Righteousness Required)**

Paul has introduced the gospel, but must now establish the **need** for it and demonstrate *universal guilt*. This he does by dividing mankind into *three* groups (1.18-32; 2.1-16; 2.17-3.8) before condemning the whole world (3.9-20). It should be remembered that Paul is generally considering mankind prior to the gospel age, although the occasional use of the present tense suggests these conditions are still evident today. Paul also introduces an increasing degree of light (revelation) received by these groups, resulting in a corresponding increase in responsibility before God.

<b>1.18-1.32: Sons of Ham</b>	<b>2.1-16: Sons of Japheth</b>	<b>2.17-3.8: Sons of Shem</b>	<b>3.9-20</b>
Barbarian (Uncivilised) Unwise (Uneducated) Pagan Creation	Greek (Civilised) Wise (Educated) Philosopher Conscience	Jew Religious Pharisee Covenant (Law)	<b>ALL under sin</b> <b>ALL the world</b> <b>guilty before God</b>

**Increasing Revelation** 

**Increasing Responsibility** 

**The Barbarian Pagan (vv.18-32)**

**v.18:** God's wrath is not an emotional outburst of temper but His complete abhorrence of sin. It was clearly unveiled in OT times, the present tense of 'unveiled' indicating a statement of fact. Occasionally it was poured out from heaven in a particular event (e.g. the flood), but more often it was revealed as God 'gave up' certain individuals to their own desires (vv.24, 26, 28). These individuals were marked by 'ungodliness' (living as if there were no God) and 'unrighteousness' (living as if there was no revealed will of God). In fact, they 'suppressed the truth' of the existence of the Creator God. **vv.19-20:** These individuals saw the revelation of God's eternal power and attributes as it was clearly presented before their very eyes in creation – rendering them inexcusable. Creation declares God: **Napoleon**, *on a warship in the Mediterranean on a star-lit night, passed a group of his officers who were mocking at the idea of a God. He stopped, and sweeping his hand toward the stars, said, 'Gentlemen, you must get rid of those first!'* **vv.21-23:** Despite the evidence they failed to 'glorify' Him as God, neither were 'thankful' for His creatorial grace (Acts 14.17; 17.28). Instead they began to think independently of their Creator, becoming *fools* (and foolish in their thinking and affections). Their spiritual darkness culminated in the **lie** of worshipping creation (images of birds and beasts) *rather* than the Creator (**v.25**).

**v.24:** How did God respond? He 'gave them up'. *A God-forsaking world becomes a God-forsaken world* as God judicially (and sorrowfully) abandons men to their sin. He withheld the hand that formerly restrained them, and the evil lusts of their own corrupt hearts led them into sexual immorality, even dishonourable and unnatural sexual relations (**vv.26-27**). Having abandoned God from their minds, God abandoned them to a 'reprobate mind', i.e. a mind incapable of judging between right and wrong (suggesting that their minds were capable of this previously). This led to being filled to overflowing with all manner of 'unrightness' and sin (**vv.28-31**). **Verse 32** summarises the perversity into which mankind has fallen. They know that God is right and just to punish sin with (eternal) death and yet they not only continue to do these things themselves, but actively encourage others to do the same.