



## The Excellence of the Gospel Romans 1:1-17

### Introduction

Letters today usually begin by addressing the recipient, "Dear.....," but in Paul's day, letters had a very different format. The writer began by introducing him or her self with name and title. This was followed by the name of the recipient and a short greeting or prayer.

Paul follows this customary pattern in all of his letters but with some modifications, depending upon whom he is addressing. He often uses his introduction to convey important teachings. This is especially true in his Epistle to the Romans. Besides merely greeting the believers in Rome, he goes into detail concerning his thoughts, feelings, and desires concerning them. Furthermore, he uses his salutation, not only to introduce himself, but to introduce the excellence of the gospel. Paul's opening establishes his identity and authority and also lays the framework for his teaching in the remainder of the letter. Romans 1:16-17 present the thesis of his letter.

### Outline of Romans 1:1-17

- I. Paul Introduces Himself and the Gospel - Romans 1:1-7
- II. Paul Expresses His Longing to Preach the Gospel in Rome - 1:8-15
- III. Paul Presents the Grandeur of the Gospel Message - Romans 1:16-17

#### I. Paul Introduces Himself and the Gospel - Romans 1:1-7

##### A. Paul introduces himself - Romans 1:1

Paul introduces himself as the author of Romans in verse 1. In the Gentile world he was known by his Greek name, Paul (Acts 13:9), although his Hebrew name was Saul (Acts 13:9). He introduces himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ and a *called....apostle*.

##### 1. *Servant of Jesus Christ* - 1:1

The word *servant*, literally "bondservant," emphasizes the concept of total devotion and unconditional commitment.

##### 2. *Called to be an apostle* - 1:1

Paul was called to the office of apostle, a word which means "sent one" or "messenger". In the New Testament,

*apostle* refers to those sent by Jesus Christ to preach the gospel message to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). The Lord's words in Acts 9:15, *he (Paul) is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles*, affirms that Paul was sent by Christ. Paul uses the designation *apostle* to establish his authority in writing.

##### a. *Called*

Paul had not volunteered to serve in the office of apostle. He had not exalted himself to the position, nor had he received the appointment by men. He had been called by God and he had obeyed. The call was effectual.

##### b. *Separated to the gospel of God*

Paul's call to apostleship separated him to the gospel. It resulted in his total commitment to preach the gospel and made him "a gospel man, who lived the gospel" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

#### B. Paul introduces the gospel - Romans 1b:6

The gospel of God is the good news from God. It is God's message of salvation for lost sinners.

##### 1. *Promised before* - 1:2

The gospel was not a new concept. God had promised the gospel beforehand.

##### a. Through God's prophets

The promise of the gospel came through God's prophets. *Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you...to them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you* (1 Peter 1:10-12).

##### b. *In the Holy Scriptures*

The promise of the gospel was set forth in the Old Testament. The New Testament gospel message is the fulfillment of God's promises of old.

##### 2. Concerning God's Son - 1:3-5

The promise and the gospel concern God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul presents Christ in his humanity, as the son of David, and in his divinity, as the Son of

God. He contrasts the humility of Christ's incarnate life (his human condition) and the triumphant power of His resurrection life. In both states, He was and is the Son of God, the mediator of God's grace and God's calling.

#### a. Christ's humanity - 1:3

The Son of God took on human flesh. He was born a descendant of David as prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 11:1,10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 34:23-24; etc.) *He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross* (Philippians 2:7-8).

#### b. Christ's divinity - 1:4

*He was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.* The resurrection revealed Jesus to be the one spoken of by God's prophets (Romans 1:2). *For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God* (2 Corinthians 13:4).

#### c. Christ the mediator - 1:5

It is through Christ that Paul had received grace and apostleship to minister among all nations. The word *grace* is related to the Greek word for "joy", referring to something which brings pleasure and delight. Grace cannot be worked for or earned. It includes the thought of being undeserved or unmerited. In this passage, Paul is referring to the grace of his calling as an apostle to serve the Gentiles.

### 3. The purpose of the gospel - 1:5-6

The purpose for which Paul had received grace and apostleship was for *obedience to the faith among all nations*. In other words, he was called to be a missionary; to take the gospel to the nations, so they might hear and submit to the gospel in obedience to the command to *believe on the name of God's Son Jesus Christ* (1 John 3:23). This would bring glory to His name.

Paul designates the believers at Rome as among those who have demonstrated obedience to the gospel, *among whom you also are the called*. The word *called* refers to God's effectual call which will be explained below. Thus they are the *called of Jesus Christ*. Paul explains this more plainly in his first letter to the Corinthians, *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord* (1 Corinthians 1:9).

### C. Greeting to Recipients of the Letter - Romans 1:6-7

Paul addresses the Roman believers and gives a warm greeting.

#### 1. The recipients - 1:7a

Paul is eager to include every believer in the great city of Rome. He addresses his letter to *all* (believers) *who are in Rome*.

#### a. Beloved of God

God had demonstrated His love toward them as described in Ephesians 2:4-5: *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

#### b. Called

This is the second time Paul has used the word *called* in reference to the believers in Rome. God has extended to them his effectual call, thus drawing them to Himself as among those chosen for salvation, *chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood* (1 Peter 1:1b-2a). John Murray ([The Epistle to the Romans](#)) refers to the calling as "the divine summons which ushered them into the status as saints." He points out that "God's effectual call carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and embrace Jesus Christ as He is freely offered in the gospel."

Note: There are three "calls" which need to be distinguished: the outward call, the inward call, and the vocational call. The outward call is the call of the gospel. The gospel message calls all sinners to repent and turn to Christ. The inward call is the sovereign call of God upon the sinner's heart which is always effectual by the power of the Holy Spirit through the word of God. This is the call referred to in Romans 1:7. The vocational call is illustrated by Paul's call to be an apostle (Romans 1:1). The life work and service of every Christian is under the authority of God. It is a calling from God for the purpose of His glory.

#### c. Saints

Those who are called by God are *called to be saints*. The Greek word Paul uses is "hagios" which means "holy," and has the connotation of being separated or

set apart. Believers bear the name saint because they are called by a holy God and are made holy by virtue of His calling. They are set apart for newness of life, separated to God.

## 2. The greeting - 1:7b

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* In using the word *grace*, Paul invokes the joy and delight of God's favor. Peace, or shalom, was the usual Hebrew greeting and means a bestowal of blessings. True grace and peace come only from God and are mediated through the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1-2 makes it clear that real peace comes only through God's grace.

## II. Paul Expresses His Longing to Preach the Gospel in Rome - Romans 1:8-15

Paul had a strong desire to visit Rome (Acts 19:21), surely heightened by the Lord's promise to him, *you must also bear witness at Rome* (Acts 23:11). Paul conveys his desire to the Roman believers, but first he thanks God for them.

### A. Paul gives thanks for the Roman believers - Romans 1:8

He gives thanks for all of them because *your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world*. Paul uses hyperbole here, but surely the news of whatever happened in a city as great as Rome would spread quickly through the whole Roman Empire and beyond. It was an occasion for joy and thanksgiving for Paul to see God's grace proclaimed abroad because of the faith of the Roman believers.

Paul's thanks are expressed to God through Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest and Intercessor. (See Hebrews 7, especially verses 17 and 25.)

### B. Paul prays for the Roman believers - Romans 1:9-10

Paul uses the phrase, *for God is my witness* as a form of an oath to assure his readers of his care and concern for them and to stress that his delay in coming to them is beyond his control. The fact that he serves God with *my spirit* means that he serves with all his heart. He puts his whole heart into the proclamation of the gospel of His Son, the message of Christ's atoning work. None of what Paul does is for show or for ulterior motive, but utterly sincere.

## 1. The manner of his prayer - 1:9

*Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.* They were constantly in Paul's prayers.

## 2. The purpose of his prayer - 1:10

Paul's request was made because of his desire to go to Rome, but also because of his commitment to the will of God.

### a. His personal desire

Paul's desire was to go to Rome. He made that desire known to God and continued to do so even though the desire had been thwarted up to this point (verse 13). He persevered in prayer.

### b. The will of God

Paul was clearly convinced that it was God's will for him to go to Rome. (See Acts 23:11.)

### C. Purpose of Paul's desired visit to Roman believers - Romans 1:11-15

Paul's desire was not self-centered. Verses 11-15 reveal four reasons which fueled Paul's longing to see the Roman believers.

## 1. *So that you may be established* - 1:11

It was Paul's hope to impart some *spiritual gift*, a gift bestowed by God's grace, which would confirm and establish the Roman believers in their faith.

## 2. Mutual encouragement - 1:12

Paul envisioned a spiritual blessing for both sides. Both he and the Roman Christians would be encouraged and strengthened by their mutual faith.

## 3. *To have some fruit among you* - 1:13

*Fruit* is probably a reference to new converts (to bring about *obedience to the faith* [Romans 1:5b]) among other Gentiles in Rome, through preaching the gospel.

## 4. Paul's readiness to preach - 1:14-15

These verses express that Paul considered it his obligation to preach the gospel to all Gentiles, to *Greeks* (those of the Greco-Roman culture), and to *barbarians* (the rest of the Gentiles, namely those who were uncultured). *The wise* refers to those who are wise in the ways of the world and the *unwise* to those lacking understanding because they had not been taught. "Christ had called him to this ministry and love of Christ constrained him to carry out his commission" (The Gospel of God, Romans, R. C. Sproul).

Paul was *ready* (the NASB reads *eager*) to preach the gospel to the Romans. His trip had been postponed

until now, but not because he wasn't ready. He was waiting on the will of God (Romans 1:10). Paul was always zealous to do his duty; at the same time, he always acknowledged his dependence on God. "This is an example which Christians ought to imitate on all occasions, never to deviate from the path of duty, but to leave events in the hands of God" (Exposition of Romans, Robert Haldane).

### III. Paul Presents the Grandeur of the Gospel Message - Romans 1:16-17

These verses explain why Paul was *not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*. They also present the theme of the Book of Romans.

The gospel is the *gospel of Christ* because He is the author (Hebrews 12:2) and the subject of the gospel.

#### A. The gospel gives no opportunity for shame - Romans 1:16

Paul's statement that he is *not ashamed of the gospel* is a reminder that there certainly is a temptation for Christians to be ashamed. This would have been especially true in the great city of Rome, the epitome of worldly power, because the world possesses an inherent hostility to God (Psalm 2:1-3). Furthermore, the world has contempt for the gospel. The message of the gospel seems weak and foolish from a worldly point of view. *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.....but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness* (1 Corinthians 1:18 and 23).

Paul knew about such opposition firsthand. He had experienced trouble many times as he preached the gospel. He was stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19-20), beaten and imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:22-24), and mocked in Athens (Acts 17:32). But the gospel is God's power for meeting the needs of hopeless, helpless sinners like himself and he was not ashamed of it. In fact, Paul boasted in the gospel—it was his only boast! (Galatians 6:14).

#### B. The gospel is *the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes* - Romans 1:16

##### 1. It is *the power of God*

The gospel is not advice to people, suggesting that they lift themselves. It is power. "It lifts them up....it is power, and God's power at that. When the gospel is preached,...the power of God is at work" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris). *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of*

*joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12).

##### 2. It is *the power of God to salvation*

The power of the gospel is directed toward salvation and results in salvation and the deliverance from sin and judgment. "The gospel is God's effective power active in the world of men to bring about deliverance from His wrath in the final judgment and reinstatement in that glory of God which has been lost through sin" (Romans, a Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield).

##### 3. It is *the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes*

The gospel is effective to save all who respond with faith (those who believe). There is no discrimination as to race, social standing, political affiliation, degree of sin, etc. The gospel has universal application.

##### 4. *For the Jew first, and also for the Greek* (or Gentile)

Historically speaking, the Jew came first. In the Old Testament, the Jews were chosen by God to receive the promise and the law of God. They were to be a witness and a blessing to the Gentile nations. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ took the gospel message to the Jews; it was to them first. Through Israel, salvation has come to the Gentiles also. But the gospel has equal relevance to all.

#### C. In the gospel, *the righteousness of God is revealed* - Romans 1:17

The gospel is God's saving power because in it God's righteousness is revealed. The gospel is a full and perfect revelation of God's righteousness. It reveals that God is a righteous God and also that men and women receive righteousness only from Him. The prophet Isaiah aptly says, *but we are all like an unclean thing, all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags* (Isaiah 64:6). The apostle Paul concurred in Romans 3:10, *There is none righteous, no, not one*.

"This is the glory of the gospel; as it is God's power operative unto salvation so is it God's righteousness supervening upon our sin and ruin." (The Epistle to the Romans, John Murray).

##### 1. *The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith* - Romans 1:17

The phrase *from faith to faith* (literally "by faith to faith") has been interpreted in many different ways. It may be taken to mean from the faith of one believer to another, from the faith of the Old Testament to that of



the New, from one degree of faith to another, or that the righteousness from God is totally on the basis of faith from beginning to end. However, it may best be viewed as meaning that the righteousness of God is by faith (received by faith) and that it is revealed to faith (to all who believe). This is especially true since the literal translation is not "from" faith to faith, but "by" faith to faith. Robert Haldane (Exposition of Romans) notes "this is also consistent with a later statement by Paul in Romans 3:22, *the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.*" This also parallels the second half of Paul's statement in Galatians 3:22, *The Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

2. *The just* (the righteous in NASB) *shall live by faith* - Romans 1:17

Paul's quote from Habbakuk 2:4 strengthens his prior statement. It also confirms that a person is proclaimed righteous by faith and that the one made righteous by faith shall live. The word *live* means "to be alive" and refers to spiritual life. "It is only by faith in the testimony of God, and receiving His righteousness wrought by the Messiah, that man can be just or righteous in His sight" (Exposition of Romans, Robert Haldane).

### Applications

1. Are you spiritually alive by faith in Jesus Christ? If you have any doubts, please ask your discussion leader for a copy of the Disciplers' Confidence Letter.
2. To what ministry has God called you? Are you obedient, as Paul was, in response to God's call? Is your service toward God rendered with all your heart in absolute sincerity with no ulterior motive?
3. Paul desired to go to Rome for the encouragement he could impart and also receive from the Christians there. Can you think of ways you have been encouraged by the faith of other believers? How has your faith helped to encourage someone else to be a stronger Christian?
4. Like Paul, are you persistent in your prayers? Do you seek God's will above all as you await His answers?



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## QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

**Day One: Read all notes and references.**

1. What impressed you most about Paul?
2. What did you learn about the gospel?
3. What did you learn about being *called*?
4. What did you learn about the power of God?

**Day Two: Read Romans 1:18-32.**

5. Write down all the statements you can find which say that God has made Himself known to mankind.
6. a. How many times do you find the phrase *God gave them up* (or *God gave them over*)? Give verses.  
  
b. In each instance, what prompted God to give them up or give them over?

**Day Three: Read Romans 1:18-20.**

7. a. What characteristic attitude of God is named in Romans 1:18? What is Paul's teaching concerning it in this passage?  
  
b. What more do you learn about this attitude in the following Scripture passages?  
Zephaniah 2:1-3  
  
John 3:36  
  
Colossians 3:5-6  
  
Revelation 6:16-17  
  
c. ? (Thought Question) What examples can you give from Scripture which show God's wrath revealed?
8. a. What does God call those who *suppress the truth*?  
  
b. In what ways do people *suppress the truth* today?

9. a. How has God made Himself known to all men?

b. How do the following Scripture passages further explain this?

Psalm 8:3

Psalm 19:1

Amos 4:13

Acts 14:17

c. Which of God's *invisible attributes* can be clearly seen in what He has made?

d. To what extent are all held accountable? Why? Give verse.

**Day Four: Read Romans 1:21-24.**

10. a. Even though they have known God, what have men not done?

b. What do you think it means to *glorify* God?

c. From the following verses, what is God's purpose for you and all of mankind?

Leviticus 10:3

1 Chronicles 16:28-29

Romans 15:6

1 Corinthians 10:31

11. What happened to those who failed to respond to God? Give verses.

12. a. What did God do?

b. How do Psalm 81:12 and Acts 14:16 help explain *God gave them up*?



**Day Five: Read Romans 1: 25-27.**

13. What further ungodliness did men display (verse 25)?
14. a. For this reason, what did God do?  
  
b. What was the result?
15. What do think is the meaning of *the penalty of their error which was due*? See Galatians 6:7-8 for help.

**Day Six: Read Romans 1:28-32.**

16. To what extreme did the ungodliness of men lead (verse 28a)?
17. What did God do?
18. a. List the sins that the ungodly were *filled with* and *full of*.  
  
b. What does it express to you that they were *filled with* and *full of* these sins? How does this explain the *debased mind* (verse 28)?  
  
c. What did the ungodly sinners know about their wicked deeds?  
  
d. What did they do anyway?
19. Reread Romans 1:21-32 and explain how this passage reveals a downward spiral of degradation in those who refuse to acknowledge a fully knowable God.
20. ♥ (Heart Question) What lesson(s) did you learn from the passage this week?