

CONTENTS

Publisher's Note	9
Preface	11
Introduction	17
Outline of Romans	25
1. The Opening	29
2. Humanity's Condition: Under the Judgment of God	41
3. The Good News: God's Righteousness by Faith	71
4. The New Situation: Freedom from the Wrath of God	91
5. The New Situation: Freedom from Sin's Captivity	107
6. The New Situation: Freedom from the Mosaic Law's Domination	121
7. The New Life of the Spirit	135
8. The Faithfulness of God: The Challenge of Jewish Unbelief and a Warning to Gentile Pride	169
9. The Christian Way	215
10. The Closing	261
Notes	273
Selected Bibliography	309



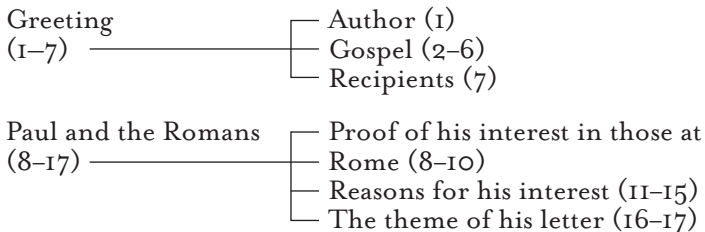
THE OPENING

1:1–17

.....

Ancient Greek letters in the first century, unlike ours, customarily began with the names of sender and recipient and a short greeting involving thanksgiving to God. Paul expands the usual address in an unusually long and highly significant form to express a brief statement of his Christian faith and his ministry (vv. 1–7) and to relate his genuine concern for those in Rome (vv. 8–17). Paul had not yet visited Rome. It is this fact that explains the length of the introduction—he is zealous to inform the church at Rome of his earnest desire and determination to go there. Since most of the key ideas occurring throughout the remainder of the letter are found in this introduction, we can profitably pay close attention to it in attempting to understand Paul’s thought.

The following overall view of the introduction may be helpful to refer back to as the details are discussed.



THE APOSTLE'S GREETING, 1:1-7

In verses 1-7 Paul identifies and describes himself, relates his calling, gives the essential essence of the gospel, and greets the Roman Christians. Paul, the author, describes himself in verse 1 in a threefold manner. The name Paul (Gk. *Paulos*) was his Latin surname, which became his friendly name. Paul also had the name of Saul, no doubt his Hebrew name. He possibly changed to being known most often by his Roman name as a reflection of his conversion to Jesus and his widespread ministry to Gentiles (Acts 9:1, 4; 13:1-2, 7; James D. Dunn, *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentaries, 2 vols. [Dallas: Word, 1988], 1:6-7). He is first of all a "bond-servant of Christ Jesus" (NASB). This term occurs as a frequent identification of the followers of Christ in the New Testament (Gal. 1:10; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1 NASB). In Greek usage the word "bond-servant"—*doulos*—denotes a slave and would not be used of a Greek citizen's relationship to his ruler or divine king. Although it is possible that Paul could be thinking of serving Jesus Christ as an actual slave in the Greek or Roman sense, it is more likely that he had the Semitic idea of a slave in mind. The Hebrew kings could be served, and the highest of his ministers might be regarded as his slaves (1 Sam. 8:11-14). Distinguished members and citizens of the theocratic kingdom of Israel were also called the servants of God (2 Sam. 7:19, Amos 3:7). Paul, then, appears as an outstanding member and chief minister, or slave, of God in His new divine program.

Second, he refers to himself as (divinely) "called as an apostle" (NASB). Again, Paul's idea probably goes back to the rabbinic Jewish usage of "apostle" (Gk. *apostolos*; Heb. *shaliah*) as a term to denote one who is legally authorized to act as the representative or proxy of another and who carries the full authority of the one who com-

missions him.¹ Thus Paul claims direct divine authority as a validly commissioned representative of Jesus Christ Himself (Gal. 1:11-12). One should not, then, hesitate to accept the teaching of Paul as having anything less than the very authority of Christ Himself.

Third, Paul declares himself to be “set apart for the gospel of God.” He may have the calling of the prophets of old in mind (Jer. 1:5) as he relates his peculiar experience of having God mark him out as a special missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-2; Gal. 1:15). He is set apart “for the gospel of God,” that is, in order to proclaim it. Paul’s word for “gospel,” *euangelion*, should be translated “good news” (i.e., something good has happened) to bring out its full sense.² It is this gospel, or message, of God’s salvation that burdens Paul’s heart throughout the whole letter (1:1, 9, 15-16).

In verses 2-6 Paul digresses briefly from his greeting to dwell upon the essential subject of the good news, “Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 4). For his Jewish readers he is especially eager to state that this gospel has historical continuity with God’s revelations to Israel in the promises given through the prophets in the Old Testament (Rom. 3:21, 31; 4:6; Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; 1 Peter 1:10-12). “Scriptures” designates the officially recognized body of temple writings that were considered divinely originated (inspired) and thus authoritative for teaching and conduct (2 Tim. 3:15-16). “Holy” (only used here of Scripture) further emphasizes its source as distinctively *divine* revelation (Rom. 3:2; 9:17; 15:4).

Paul now proceeds to identify the substance of his gospel as that which pertains to God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who as true man and true God in one mysterious Being bestows upon him whatever grace and authority he possesses (vv. 3-5). Here in two lines of antithetical parallelism (vv. 3-4) one finds a brief statement of the unique person of Jesus of Nazareth.³

First, in respect to His real humanity (“according to the flesh” NASB), Jesus was born a Jew (descended from Abraham) in the family line of David (Matt. 1:6; Luke 3:31; Acts 2:30; Rev. 5:5). Although Paul does not dwell upon the actual historical facts of Jesus’ life on earth, it is evident that he nevertheless considered that real historical life (as the Gospels relate) to be of the utmost importance to the validity of the gospel he preaches. He taught what the Gospels later confirmed, that according to the Old Testament (2 Sam. 7:16) and Jewish belief, the Messiah would be from Davidic descent.⁴

Yet something else must be said about Jesus, not contradictory to His true humanity but complementary. “According to the flesh” (Gk. *sarx*, flesh) in verse 3 stands in parallel to “according to the Spirit” in verse 4 (NASB). Although the expression “Spirit of holiness” may be a reference to the Holy Spirit,⁵ many commentators feel it is more appropriate to understand this expression as a reference either to Christ’s divine personality, which would, because of the parallelism, form a complement to the previous expression about His human nature, or to His human spirit, distinguished by an exceptional holiness.

The church has always taught that though the life Jesus lived on earth was wholly human (i.e., not lived by powers or resources unavailable to us), the personality revealed was God, the Son of the Father. It must be stressed that without this truth of the dual character of Jesus, not only is our concept of God affected, but the gospel becomes pointless.⁶

The word “declared” in the Greek (*horizo*) is related to our English word “horizon,” which “defines” or “delimits” the boundary between the sky and the earth. The early church Fathers taught that in God’s powerful deed of raising Jesus from the dead there lies irrefutable evidence clearly to mark out or distinguish this human

life as the divine Son of God and hence rightfully and solely our *Lord*. Recent interpreters argue that the expression means that by the resurrection Christ was “appointed” Son-of-God-in-power (in contrast to His being Son of God in apparent weakness and poverty in His earthly life).⁷

It is from this person that Paul claims to have received grace (gifts of enablement) and apostleship (commission as an ambassador) for the purpose of everywhere securing people to put their trust wholly in Christ and be obedient to Him. His mission for the sake of Christ’s name (i.e., for Christ Himself) brings him into contact with those at Rome who are Jesus Christ’s called ones like Paul himself.

Finally, in verse 7 he finishes the address by referring to the recipients in their earthly status as Romans and in their relation to God as loved by Him (for Christ’s sake) and called to a life of separation unto God as saints. They are not “called to be saints,” not “called because saints” but “saints (holy) because called” (Augustine). “The holiness is not primarily that of individual moral character, but that of consecration to God’s service.” Sainthood is “therefore ascribed to all Christians, who are, however, bound by this very consecration to personal holiness of life.”⁸ As “saints” they are to be separated from the world’s values and consecrated wholly for God’s use. “Grace” was customarily used in Greek letter addresses, whereas “peace” (Heb. *shalom*) was and still is the common greeting among Semitic peoples (Num. 6:24–26). Paul enriched these standard terms with added Christian significance.

Having now introduced his letter, himself, and his gospel (vv. 1–7), he will go on to explain further his interest in the Romans and the full meaning of God’s good news.

PAUL AND THE ROMANS, 1:8-15

In verses 8-17 Paul briefly relates his own genuine personal concern for those in Rome, giving proof of his feelings in his thankfulness for their faith (v. 8), in his unceasing remembrance of them in prayer (v. 9), and in his unrelieved desire to visit them and labor among them in preaching the gospel that he briefly summarizes (vv. 10-17).

Paul's thanksgiving to God (v. 8) reveals not only his own large heart of love, since many of those addressed were probably not his own converts, but also the virility of their witness to Christ in the non-Christian communities. "Your faith' does not mean 'the Christian faith which you, in common with all other Christians, hold' . . . but 'the faith as you hold it.'"⁹ Their zeal for Christ and their love for one another was so manifested that others announced everywhere that something had happened to the Romans (1 Thess. 1:6-8).¹⁰ This confirms Jesus' words that a city built on a mountain cannot be hidden (Matt. 5:14).

In his prayer and earnest desire to visit them he offers another proof of his sincere concern for their welfare (vv. 9-15). Note the expression, "serve with my whole heart" (v. 9 NCV). His service consists not merely in outward activity but, more significantly, in the service of worship to God in his inner person that issues forth in the outward labor of preaching the gospel of His Son. "Now at last by God's will" (v. 10) reflects the delicate, beautiful, and important relationship between praying expectantly to God for a specific matter and at the same time recognizing a submission to the will of God, knowing that what we earnestly desire may not be His will, at least at the present. Paul desires that by his coming and ministry the Holy Spirit would so use him that the Romans would receive the benefit of the presence and power of

God (v. 11), yet not themselves only but—in a beautiful touch of humility—that Paul himself also might be mutually strengthened in the practice of his faith by his interaction with them in this service (v. 12; 1 Cor. 12:7).

It may be asked why Paul, if he is so eager to go to Rome, had not gone before this. He answers by further assuring them of his love, explaining that he had repeatedly attempted to come, but saying that in each former case he had been prevented (Rom. 15:22–23). Paul was the author of his purposes but not of his circumstances (v. 13). He did not have a constant, unending series of successes!

Another reason for his burden to preach especially to the Romans relates to the universal character of the gospel message (vv. 14–15). Because of Paul's calling he is morally obligated to minister the gospel to all people without respect to their culture or social status. "Greeks . . . non-Greeks . . . wise . . . foolish" (v. 14) refers to those inhabitants of the regularly recognized Greek city-states (Greeks, "wise") and those outside these areas (non-Greeks, "foolish") such as the Gauls, Scythians, Celts, and Spaniards, who were considered by the Greeks as uncultured in that they were unable to speak Greek clearly (1 Cor. 14:11). Thus, because the relation in which we stand in Christ and His gospel is deeper and more essential than all national, racial, and personal distinctions, Paul, the Jew, stood eager and willing (if God permitted) to preach to those also in Rome, the capital of the whole world. How many of us today are ready to go (not wait for them to come to us) to the universities or to Washington, DC, to the senators of our country as well as to the culturally and economically deprived of Chicago's South Side?

But what really is the gospel? What would Paul preach in Rome and in Jerusalem? Why should he go to such trouble?

THE THEME OF HIS LETTER, 1:16-17

Initially, his first response to these questions lies in his statement in verses 16-17, and yet the whole rest of the letter does not exhaust the answers.

In the mention of Rome (v. 15), Paul no doubt is excited as he contemplates the capital and theater of the world where he would ultimately come face-to-face with the mighty power concentrated in that stronghold of heathenism and the multitudes of peoples gathered there from every nation of the Mediterranean world. He responds, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," even though for its sake he had been spitefully treated in other great cities, such as Athens, Ephesus, and even in Corinth, from which he now writes.

His confidence in spite of these hindrances lies in the true greatness of the reality discovered in the message he proclaims. *First* of all, the gospel itself is nothing less than the power of God. This expression "power [Gk. *dynamis*] of God" should not be overlooked. In Paul's usage, the power of God is often associated with the wisdom of God in contrast to human wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24; 2:4; 2 Cor. 6:7). It is also a resurrection life power (2 Cor. 13:4), always associated with God's action toward us in Jesus Christ resulting in salvation (1 Cor. 1:18) and actually manifested in some manner in contrast to mere words or ideas (1 Cor. 2:4). Beyond this, how can the decisive activity of God in the human life be analyzed? For Paul, no other expression could convey the reality of his own experience and that of others. In the gospel resides the living revelation of God Himself flowing forth to save men and women.

"Salvation" (Gk. *sōtēria*) probably conveys the thought of the widest possible inclusion of all God's benefits in Christ to believers. Although not a frequent word of Paul's, it certainly is central

to his thoughts.¹¹ In this epistle alone, salvation includes forgiveness of sin and acceptance before God (chaps. 1–4), as well as deliverance from the future wrath of God (5:9), the present new life in the Spirit of God (chaps. 6–8), and the future resurrection of the body (8:11).

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Peter teaches that the salvation from sin and darkness to peace and fellowship with God that began in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus will be completed in the future in those who believe. That future salvation is now presently at work in Christians through the power of the gospel (1 Pet. 1:3–5). To this Paul also agrees (Rom. 13:11).

The divine power in the gospel is not dependent upon any human wisdom or virtue or condition such as works done in obedience to any law or ceremony, however sacred. Paul declares that the saving power of God is effective alone by faith “to everyone who believes” (1:16). Faith can only be that response to the gospel of God’s saving power that is characterized by obedient trust in the God who has decisively acted in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection to provide for us what we could never do for ourselves (v. 5). It is this attitude of turning away from all self-effort and human achievement and casting ourselves totally upon the God and Father of Jesus Christ that effects the mighty working of God’s power resulting in our salvation. Salvation is something freely given rather than earned. God gives this grace without regard to merit or national origin, without regard even to special religious distinction. Why, then, “to the Jew first” (NASB)? Historically, the Jews were the first to hear from Jesus’ own lips this new thing God would do through Him (Heb. 2:3), and second, unto them were committed the covenants (Acts 3:26; Rom. 3:2; 9:4), and especially the Abrahamic covenant with the promise that “through your offspring [Christ] all nations on earth will be blessed [with

salvation]” (Gen. 22:18; see also Gal. 3:8, 16).

Second, Paul’s confidence is also related to the substance of the gospel, which is spelled out more fully in verse 17. It consists in the manifestation of “the righteousness of God.” It might be helpful to show the parallelism between verse 16 and verse 17 in the following manner:

<u>VERSE 16 (NASB)</u>	<u>VERSE 17 (NASB)</u>
gospel	in it (gospel)
power. . . for salvation of God	righteousness (life and salvation) of God
everyone who believes	faith to faith. . . the righteous. . . shall live by faith

In the gospel the “righteousness [*dikaïosunē*] of God” finds expression. But what is the “righteousness of God”? By the righteousness of God Paul may have meant that quality or attribute of God whereby He reveals Himself to be right or righteous and humans sinful. But, as Luther argued, this could hardly be “good news.” Or it could mean the righteousness that God requires of me. But again, how is this good news to me a sinner?

In our day, three chief interpretations are advanced, based on whether the expression “the righteousness of God” means “God’s (own) righteousness” or “a righteousness from God.” Or, to state the issue differently, does “righteousness” here mean the saving activity of God or a gift and status conferred on us?

Luther argued that the righteousness of God is that righteousness imputed to us by God by which we are accounted righteous (justified). Luther quotes Augustine favorably in this definition, “The righteousness of God is that righteousness which he imparts in order to make men righteous. Just as that is the Lord’s salvation by which he saves us.”¹² So in this view the righteousness of God

is that righteousness that He imparts or gives in order to make sinners righteous.

However, for Luther it was important that this righteousness is “alien” to us. In a fashion somewhat unlike Augustine, Luther denied that this righteousness ever becomes internal to us. It is *Christ’s* righteousness and not ours.¹³ This protects his emphasis on *sola gratia* (solely by grace). On the other hand, others argue that the term “the righteousness of God” means “God’s righteousness” and should not be confused with the similar expressions “righteousness” (4:13) or “righteousness . . . from [*ex*] God” (Phil. 3:9). In the Old Testament, the righteousness of God can be seen almost as a synonym for salvation in the same way Paul parallels the two in verses 16 and 17 (see also Isa. 46:13; 51:5; Pss. 24:5 [NASB]; 31:1; 98:1–2; 143:11). God’s righteousness is His own covenant faithfulness and trustworthiness whereby He fulfills His promise to Abraham to bring salvation to all people (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:7–8). In this second view, the righteousness of God refers to God’s activity in Christ by which He fulfills His covenant promises, effects the satisfaction of His own holiness in the death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins (Rom. 3:25–26), and extends to us guilty sinners a free, full pardon and restoration to Himself (justification).

A third view espoused by a number of recent commentators argues that we must combine these two above positions and see Paul’s term as including both realities. So Stuhlmacher states, “According to our reflections concerning the history and meaning of the concept, one should not establish a false alternative between the two. The expression incorporates both.”¹⁴

Although it is difficult to decide between these views, the commentary will follow the latter view of Stuhlmacher that sees both saving power and gift, at the same time recognizing there are also good reasons to adopt either of the former two views cited.

God's righteousness is "by faith from first to last" (1:17). Though a difficult expression with many interpretations, it seems best to relate this to the parallel in verse 16, "everyone who believes," and to understand the phrase to emphasize that salvation (God's righteousness) is solely (utterly) by faith.¹⁵ Paul's quotation of Habakkuk 2:4 stresses that the Old Testament taught that this salvation came (solely) by faith, and the one who has it (the just) also lives by faith (Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).¹⁶

These two verses contain a rich sampling of Paul's chief words: *gospel, power of God, salvation, faith, Jew, Gentile, and righteousness of God*. They have each been touched on briefly in this section, but it will be necessary to return again and again to them in this book as Paul does in his. The scope of the gospel is universal. It is God's saving power for all persons at all times. At the same time the gospel shows forth and interprets God's righteousness. It is this theme that Paul develops in Romans. God's righteousness is experienced by those who will respond to the gospel in obedient trust in Jesus Christ.

In the following lengthy section (1:18-11:36), Paul argues out the main kernel of his gospel. He first asserts that all—regardless of race, nationality, personal distinctions, or religious heritage—are under God's judgment and stand morally guilty before the Judge of the universe (1:18-3:20). Paul then turns to the provision of the gift of salvation in the sacrificial death of Jesus, the manner in which this provision is secured by faith, and the resulting new life with its abundance (3:21-5:21). He then proceeds to answer two major questions raised by his gospel: What is the relationship between God's grace and human freedom? (6:1-8:39); and, What about God's faithfulness in light of the Jews' unbelief? (9:1-11:36).