

# Introduction

**MAIN IDEA:** *Paul is identified by commitment to his calling, commitment to people, and commitment to the gospel.*

## The Address Chapter 1:1-7

**SUPPORTING IDEA:** *Truth is validated by its source.*

**I** Paul describes himself in the first instance as a slave of Christ Jesus. This is a common term with him (cf. especially Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1), imitated also by other New Testament writers (James 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1). It is particularly appropriate to an apostle, but can be used of any Christian (cf. 6:22); that is, Paul begins by describing himself as a Christian before he goes on to mention his special status and vocation.

- Paul is also, by divine call (cf. *v.* 6), an apostle. Compare *v.* 5, where Paul refers to his ‘apostolic commission’, again emphasizing its divine origin
- Paul himself, however, is not an apostle ‘of a church’ (cf. Gal. 1:1), but an apostle of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; cf. Gal. 1:1) from whom alone his mission and authority are derived.
- The apostle is set apart for the Gospel. Again the background of Paul’s thought is to be found in the Old Testament. The prophets were set apart by God for their work; for example, ‘Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations’ (Jer. 1:5). This passage is alluded to in Gal.



1:15, and may be in mind here also, as 'unto the nations' (cf. *v.* 5) suggests. 'Set apart' means much the same as 'sanctified', but may perhaps have further significance.

- The Greek word is not only similar in meaning to, but also has the same consonants as the Hebrew root *p-r-sh*, which underlies the word Pharisee. Paul had been a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5), supposing himself to be set apart from other men for the service of God; he now truly was what he had supposed himself to be—separated, not, however, by human exclusiveness but by God's grace and election.
- He was set apart for the Good News; that is, in order to proclaim it.
- Paul's Gospel is the eschatological event through which God brings salvation to men.  
See below on *v.* 16 f.

**4** Jesus, then, as a man was a descendant of David; but 'in the sphere of the Holy Spirit he was appointed Son of God'.

'The Holy Spirit' is literally 'spirit of holiness'

**5** It was Jesus the heavenly Lord who bestowed upon Paul grace and our apostolic commission

- Grace is the undeserved favour of God for sinful men, operative in the eschatological event of Jesus Christ (see further on Rom 3:24); for the 'apostolic commission
- The aim of Paul's apostleship is here defined as to win believing obedience. A literal translation is, 'unto obedience of faith'
- the faith' being 'the Christian religion'

- shorthand expression and means that the object of his apostolic work is that men should (a) become obedient to Christ, and (b) put their faith in him.
- It is perhaps better to recognize that there are different kinds of obedience; there is what may be called a 'works obedience', concerned to produce works that may win favour from God, and a 'faith obedience', arising out of the faith that gratefully accepts the favour that God has already spontaneously shown. It is the latter that Paul seeks.

**6** The next words, among whom are you, show that a majority of the Roman Christians were Gentiles

Christians are the property of Jesus Christ. Like Paul himself (v. 1), they are his slaves; he is their Lord (v. 4). And he and they stand in this relationship not because they have chosen it but because they have been called to it by God himself, just as Paul,

## Paul and Rome Chapter 1:8-15

**SUPPORTING IDEA:** *Truth has its ultimate application in the lives of people.*

**9-10** Paul, though submitting himself to God's will, wishes to visit Rome, even though it was not a church of his own founding and it was his custom not to build on foundations laid by others (15:20)

**13** Paul may be a stranger in Rome, and the church there another man's foundation; yet as an apostle he can write that I have often intended to come to you that I might get some



fruit among you. 'Fruit' is the result of apostolic labour—the winning of new converts, and the building up of the Church; and Paul might expect to find it in Rome, as I have among the other Gentiles (cf. v. 6)

**14–15** To Greeks and barbarians alike (the word Greeks is not to be taken in a strict racial sense; Paul means, Both those who inhabit the city states of the inner Mediterranean world, and those outside that cultivated circle),

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## The Gospel Chapter 1:16, 17

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**SUPPORTING IDEA:** *Truth produces conviction and courage in those who believe it*

**16** An obscure provincial, Paul plans to visit the centre of the world; a self-styled apostle, lacking the self-evident authorization of the Twelve, he approaches a church where his authority and even his credentials may well be questioned; yet—I am not ashamed (cf. Mark 8:38; 2 Tim. 1:8) of the Gospel.

- Paul's argument turns upon salvation. The word itself, even when the cognate verb 'to save
  - Thus the Gospel itself is the operation of God's power working towards salvation; not merely an announcement of the fact that salvation will at some future time take place, but a divine activity or power leading to salvation. Like the word of God in the prophets, the Gospel itself is a power which leads either to life or to death (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23 f.; 2 Cor. 2:15 f.)
  - It is *God's* power which is at work in the Gospel, not man's
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- The Gospel means salvation for *everyone* who has faith, but it was delivered to the Jew first, and then the Gentile too.
- No one insisted more strongly than Paul that the Gospel was for the 'Gentile too'; but it is important to see that for him the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles was the result not of easy-going charity but of theological conviction; nor did it contradict the election of the Jews (see on chs. 9–11). There is only one God (3:29), and therefore only one Gospel.
- **17** This short paragraph carries Paul's argument yet further in a second decisive step. *Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the divinely appointed means to salvation. It is this means because in it God's righteousness is revealed.*
- On God's side, salvation means the operation of his righteousness, which is not simply his property or attribute of being right, or righteous, but also his activity in doing right, and (as we say) seeing right done; thus his righteousness issues in his vindicating—those whom it is proper that he should vindicate.
- *This view of God's righteousness is brought out with special clarity in a number of passages in Isaiah and the Psalms (e.g. Isa. 45:21; 51:5; Ps. 24:5; 31:1; 98:2; 143:11), where righteousness appears to be almost a synonym of salvation; God manifests his righteousness by delivering his people.*
- On man's side, salvation requires that he be found righteous before God; that, when the great assize is held, he secure a favourable verdict. If the verdict is Guilty, punishment, not salvation, must be his fate.

- Thus, before salvation can be completed, righteousness must be manifested. God, the righteous judge, must do righteous judgement in his court; and, in this court, man must secure the verdict, Righteous
- When defined in this way, salvation seems remote—remote in time, for the last judgement has not yet taken place, and remote as possibility, for there seems no likelihood that man will ever attain any verdict other than Guilty. Paul, however, asserts that the righteousness of God (not salvation, for that remains future) is now being revealed (*ἀποκαλύπτεται*). The very word he uses (in the present tense) confirms that he is thinking of a preliminary manifestation of that divine righteousness which, in orthodox Jewish thought, could be vindicated only at the last judgement.
- Paul, the Christian, is convinced that this judgement (and in some measure its consequences) has been anticipated through Jesus Christ, and that in the paradox of grace God has manifested his righteousness by establishing man's. As a Jew, Paul had believed that man's status of righteousness before God was to be achieved by himself, through obedience to the law.
- As a Christian, he had come to believe that God, gracious as Jesus had shown him to be, justified men freely on the basis not of works done in obedience to the law but of faith. This revision of fundamental conceptions was not the result of the academic manipulation of theological counters; it took place because God had sent his Messiah to suffer humiliation and death and thereby to manifest his righteousness in a way accessible to faith, the only human attitude corresponding to grace on God's part.



- The righteousness of God refers to an activity of God analogous to that expressed in his deliverance of his people from bondage or exile and described by the same word (*δικαιοσύνη*; *tz<sup>e</sup>daqah* or *tzedeq*, e.g. Isa. 46:13; Ps. 98:2).
- The righteousness of God refers to ‘a status of man resulting from God’s action, righteousness as a gift from God’ (Cranfield, p. 96).
- The righteousness of God refers to his faithfulness to the covenant implied in creation and is an apocalyptic term describing God’s promised activity in setting his rebellious creation to rights.
- God’s righteousness, then, is revealed on the basis of nothing but faith; literally, from faith unto faith. Several formal parallels to this obscure expression can be adduced; for example, Ps. 84:7 (They go from strength to strength); 2 Cor. 3:18 (From glory to glory). These suggest the meaning, ‘from one level of faith to a higher’, ‘to ever greater faith’.
- Paul clinches his argument with a reference to the Old Testament: He that is righteous by faith shall live (Hab. 2:4).

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## Issue for Discussion

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Based on the amount of personal evangelism that takes place, many believers seem to be ashamed of the gospel. Why is this true? What must happen for believers to gain confidence in “the power of God” that will bring salvation?

# Judgement and the Gentile

## Chapter 1:18-32

**18** Wrath is God's personal (though never malicious or, in a bad sense, emotional) reaction against sin. Properly, wrath belongs to the last day (2:5), but the idea of its anticipation in divine judgements is common

- Wrath, like salvation and righteousness, is an **eschatological term**
- Paul's argument is developed in a clear and consistent way. The Gospel rests upon a manifestation of righteousness; to those who believe, it proves to be the power of God unto salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18) and is visible in the moral experience of conversion and in the gathering of churches, in which the Holy Spirit is at work; to those who do not believe, but are disobedient and rebellious, it means God's wrath (cf. 2 Cor. 2:16) and is visible in the terrible process of mental and moral perversion that Paul observes in the world about him. The revelation of wrath therefore is a clear signal of the revealing of God's righteousness.
- Wrath is revealed from heaven (that is, from God himself) against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who, by their unrighteousness, hold the truth imprisoned; that is, the truth about God as Creator, Judge, and Redeemer, is concealed by the fact that they are what they are

**19** At this point a serious objection might be made. 'This manifestation of divine wrath would be credible, and just, if the abandoned Gentile world consisted of men who had wilfully rejected the Gospel. But this is not so. The vast majority have never heard of the Gospel

**21** God manifested his power, and the fact that he was God, man's Creator and Lord, that men might be without excuse.

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- God may rightly visit men with wrath because, though they have not had the advantage of hearing the Gospel, they have rejected that rudimentary knowledge of God that was open to them
  - The root of the matter is that though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give thanks to him. Paul assumes that the raw materials of the knowledge of God exist among men. An awareness of this kind is in itself no great matter—it is God's knowledge of man that is really significant (1 Cor. 8:1–3; Gal. 4:9; cf. 1 Cor. 13:9, 12).
  - As God's creature, man was bound to render glory and thanksgiving to his Creator; this means not merely to acknowledge his existence, and to employ the words and rites of religion, but to recognize his lordship and live in grateful obedience—in fact (in the Pauline sense) to believe, to have faith. This men failed to do; instead they rebelled against God, and their fault lay not in lack of knowledge but in their rebellion. Man was unwilling to recognize a Lord; he chose to be Lord himself, and to glorify himself.
  - This is the universal state of mankind, and it follows that God's wrath is justly visited upon men because the race as a whole is in revolt against him
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- Their idolatrous minds and practices are themselves a punishment from God. When they failed to honour God, they grew vain in their thinking, and their senseless heart was darkened
- Once man had fallen from his true relation with God, he was no longer capable of truly rational thought about him.
- 'Heart' is one of Paul's most important psychological terms, and has a wide range of use. It is not necessarily good (1:24; 2:5), nor is it necessarily evil (2:15; 5:5; 6:17); it is the organ of thought (10:6), but also of feeling (9:2). It is essentially inward, hidden (2:29; 8:27).
- He has shown that this is no more than a just punishment of what is, ultimately, not unfortunate ignorance but culpable rebellion, in which man has sought to dethrone his Creator, and to render to himself the glory and praise which were due to God.
- The immediate result of this rebellion was a state of corruption in which men were no longer capable of distinguishing between themselves and God, and accordingly fell into idolatry, behind which, in all its forms, lies in the last resort the idolization of the self

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**24** By dishonouring God, men in the end dishonour their own bodies. Without reverence for God respect for creation suffers.

**25** Paul has now conducted his argument to its close, and made his point. In what follows, he adds nothing strictly new till v. 32, but contributes a number of practical illustrations of the ways in which idolators fall into sin.

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## Issues for Discussion

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1. What are some of the ways that unbelieving people suppress the truth about God? Is the church ever guilty of suppressing certain parts of God's truth? In what ways?
  2. Imagine yourself walking onto the stage of history with no prior knowledge of God, the Bible, or the gospel. What evidences of the existence and presence of God do you think you might discern? What do unbelievers say about those evidences that seem so clear to you?
  3. What are the biggest idols that the church is tempted to worship personally or corporately today? How many of those idols are also worshiped by the unbelieving culture that surrounds the church? What warning does Romans 1 offer about where idol worship leads?
  4. If homosexuality is the strongest evidence of the ultimate inversion of God's natural order, where do most Western cultures stand today in honoring God's designs? What does that say about the likelihood of the wrath of God being revealed against them?
  5. How can the power of the gospel affect the depraved condition of those described in 1:29–32? What hope could you offer one who has spent a lifetime suppressing the knowledge of God and failing to worship him (see 1 Cor. 6:9–11)?
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