

Greeting and Introduction (1:1-7)

Paul begins the epistle by identifying himself with his name and vocation. He is a **servant of Jesus Christ** who is **called to be an apostle** (1:1). To this church in the heart of the Roman empire that had enslaved the ancient world this great man of God identifies himself as a **servant** (from the Gr. word *doulos*—“slave,” BAGD). Later in this same epistle Paul explains that the real threat to human liberty rests in slavery to sin (6:16-18). It is in slavery to righteousness, as a servant of Jesus Christ that Paul and all men find liberty. Paul’s call to be an **apostle** (from the Gr. word *apostolos*—“one sent forth with orders,” Thayer) was unique. Paul recounted this call before King Agrippa II (Acts 26:16-18). In teaching the Romans, Paul fulfills his charge to teach the Gentile world.

He describes himself as **separated to the gospel of God** which Paul indicates God **promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures** (1:2). The prophets of Scripture had foretold the coming of the Messiah (Isa. 7:14; Dan. 9:25, 26); the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-33) and the forgiveness of sins that it would bring (Jer. 31:34). In these

Paul explains that the real threat to human liberty rests in slavery to sin.

Scriptures, God had declared the coming of **His Son Jesus Christ our Lord** (1:3a). Identifying Jesus as “our Lord” applied a divine epithet to Him, attesting to Paul’s

own belief in the Deity of Jesus.¹ He was the **seed of David according to the flesh** (1:3b),

i.e., a descendant of David (Matt. 1:1, 6) and also David’s Lord (Matt. 22:41-46). Although a descendant of David in the flesh, Jesus was **declared to be the Son of God with power**—specifically in the power demonstrated **by the resurrection from the dead** (1:4). Only Deity would have the power within Himself to raise Himself from the dead (John 10:17-18; Acts 2:25-32).

Paul goes on to say that through Jesus he had **received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith** (1:5). Faith does not exclude obedi-

ence. On the contrary, the gospel of Jesus Christ constitutes “the faith” (i.e., the system of faith) which one either obeys or rejects. Although in this text he is speaking of himself,

Lesson 2

Chapter One

To this church in the heart of the empire that had enslaved the ancient world Paul identifies himself as a *slave*.

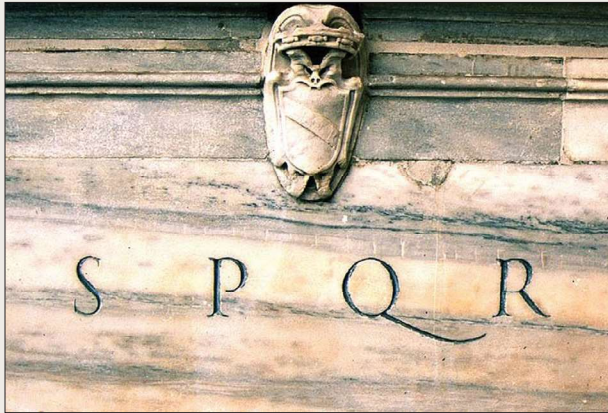
later speaking of the faith of the brethren in Rome he praises them for having “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered” (6:17). Having been obedient to the faith, just as he was called of God, they were also **the called of Jesus Christ** (1:6). Christians are “called” by the message of the gospel (2 Thess. 2:13-15).

Paul’s Prayer and Hope (1:8-15)

Paul lets the brethren know at the start of his epistle the joy he has over their faithfulness and his hopes to be with them. He thanks God that their **faith is spoken of throughout the whole world** (1:8). Christian faith in the heart of the pagan Roman empire was reason enough for news of their faith to be spoken of elsewhere. The Roman’s faithfulness was an even greater reason

¹ Although it was not uncommon to refer to human superiors as “lord,” the Jews developed the custom of substituting the Hebrew word for “Lord” (*’adon*) for the divine name YHWH (“Yahweh” or “Jehovah”). This was thought to be a way to avoid using God’s name in vain. In a religious context, to speak of a human being as “our Lord,” would have been blasphemous.

to rejoice. Paul, as was his custom with many congregations (1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:3), tells them **without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers** (1:9). Paul sets the wonderful example of prayer that is (1) constant; (2) specific; and (3) thoughtful. He is not



Senatus Populusque Romanorum “The Senate and People of Rome”—the official designation of Rome. Courtesy of FreeStockPhotos.com.

so singularly focused on the work where he finds himself that he fails to pray for brethren in other places.

Paul’s specific prayer was that he **at last could find a way in the will of God to come to them** (1:10). He had desired to come to them for many years (Rom. 15:23). He had in fact **often planned to come to them but was hindered until now**, that he **might have some fruit among them just as among the other Gentiles** (1:13). The hindrance to his coming had been the bountiful opportunities he had found to preach the gospel “where Christ was not named” (15:20). At the time of the writing of the epistle he no longer had “a place in these parts” (15:23), i.e., he no longer found the same opportunities to preach.

He tells them that he wanted to come to them to **impart to them some spiritual gift, so that they may be established** (1:11).

The word “gift” in Greek is *charisma*—“gift freely and graciously given” (BAGD), a “gift of grace.” Paul wanted to give, not just any gift, but a gift that was “spiritual,” in Greek *pneumatikos*—“pertaining to the spirit” (BAGD). Paul lists such “gifts of grace” elsewhere (see Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11). There is no indication that any apostle had yet been among them at the time this epistle was written. As a result, they had not yet received any miraculous spiritual gifts (i.e., tongues, prophecies, revelations) that would enable them to know the full revelation of the gospel. Prior to the completion of the

New Testament these gifts allowed the full revelation of the gospel to occur. The laying on of the apostles’ hands was the way that such gifts were bestowed (see Acts 8:5-18).

The Power of the Gospel (1:16-17)

After his introductory remarks, Paul makes the assertion that will serve as a theme for the entire epistle—the gospel is the **power of God to salvation** (1:16b). In the first fifteen verses, Paul speaks three times before this of the gospel. He spoke of himself as “separated to the gospel of God” (1:1); he served God “in the gospel of His Son” (1:9); and finally, he was “ready to preach the

gospel” to the Romans (1:15). The word rendered “power” is the Greek word *dunamis*, from which we get our word “dynamite.” The “spiritual dynamite” of God unto salvation resides in the simple message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The word translated “gospel” is the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning—“good message.”

The books that record the life of Jesus are often called “the gospels.” The book of Mark begins with the words, “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1). Mark tells us, through the Holy Spirit, that when Jesus began to teach he urged people to “believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). The same book ends with Jesus’ command to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Paul describes the heart of the gospel as the message of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4). In addition to this, Peter tells us that the gospel is something that must be obeyed (1 Pet. 4:17). On the day of judgment condemnation will come to those “who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:8). Quite simply, the gospel is God’s message about Jesus, His teachings while on earth and through His apostles when He returned to heaven. It must be believed, obeyed, and followed unto salvation.

The covenant that God made with Israel demanded that the hope which the Messiah would bring would come first to the Jews—**for the Jew first and also for the Greek** (1:16c). After it was first offered to the Jews, it then became accessible to all men (cf. Matt. 10:5; Acts 13:46-48). After the conquest of Alexander the Great, much of the ancient world adopted the Greek language.

The heart of the gospel is the message of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

In Scripture the term “Greek” often refers to all of the Gentile world.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed (1:17a). The gospel is both the means by which God makes man righteous and the standard which determines right conduct in this age. It should be the paramount concern of all human beings to be right with God. Only through the gospel can one be right with God. This has been revealed **from faith to faith (1:17b).** The Jewish system of faith outlined by the Mosaic law set the stage for the revelation of the system of faith outlined in the Law of Christ. Jude speaks of the “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

God’s Wrath Revealed (1:18-32)

To demonstrate the power of the gospel, the apostle offers a discourse explaining man’s need for the gospel. Paul declares **the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (1:18a).** God’s wrath is revealed in God’s promise of judgment and in His declaration of anger over man’s sin. Paul tells the Colos-

sians that because of sin “the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience” (Col. 3:6). Those in sin are “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) upon whom “the wrath of God abides” (John 3:36). It is only Jesus “who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10).

God’s anger with man’s sinfulness begins with man’s rejection of the knowledge of God. Paul says of mankind as a whole **although they knew God they did not glorify him as God, nor were they thankful (1:21a).** It is clear that God in times past has revealed Himself to mankind. Paul explains this declaring that **what may be known of God is manifest in mankind for God has shown it to them (1:19).** Apart from revelation, God’s **invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (1:20a).** Nature itself reveals to the honest, reasonable soul the **eternal power and Godhead of God (1:20b)** of the Creator. The very existence of the universe reveals an eternal power behind its creation. These facts of nature leave man **without excuse (1:20c)** for his condemnation.

What follows in the chapter is a systematic explanation of the origin of all apostasy, false religion, immorality, and unbelief. When mankind, having known God, fails to **glorify Him as God** nor be **thankful**, the consequence will be thoughts that are **futile** and **foolish hearts** that are **darkened (1:21).** Such

futility and foolishness of darkened hearts results in:

I. Foolishness counted as wisdom (1:22). If man refuses to acknowledge the obvious testimony of nature in recognition of the

The existence of the universe reveals an eternal power behind its creation. This fact leaves man “without excuse” for his sin.

existence of God, no matter how intelligent he may be, his wisdom is foolishness. Paul explained to the Corinthians that God has “made foolish the wisdom of this world” since “the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:20-21).

II. The glory of God exchanged for images of man and beasts (1:23). The Greeks and Romans worshipped deities with bodies with the same appearance as man. The Philistines worshipped Dagon—a fish bodied god. The Egyptians worshipped deities that blended human and animal characteristics together. Even today, Hindus worship Ganesh, a god with the body of a man and the head of an elephant. Such idolatry comes from the foolish imagination of man. “To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor, and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim. 1:17).

III. God giving man up to: 1. Uncleaness (1:24a). When man rejects God, He allows him to go to whatever depths of depravity his heart can imagine. One of the most common types of such “unclean-



Rome was filled with the idolatry Paul describes. In temples like this the Romans gave themselves to idolatry. Photo courtesy of FreeStockPhotos.com.

When man rejects God, the Lord allows him to go to whatever depths of depravity his heart can imagine.

ness” is immorality. Dishonoring their bodies **in the lusts of their hearts** (1:24b). There is a connection between sexual immorality and idolatry. If we do not see ourselves as spiritual creatures, made in the image of God, there is no reason to control the passions of the flesh. By choosing to reject God, we exchange **the truth of God for the lie** (1:25a). The pursuit of unlawful sensual gratification is, in fact worship of **the creature**

and female homosexuality involves “vile passions” that run **against nature** (1:26b). God has never approved of homosexuality (Lev. 18:22) but considers it **shameful** (1:27).

3. A debased mind (1:28a). All sin begins on the inside. The mind that rejects God grows “debased” (from the Gr. *adokimon*—“unapproved or unworthy”) and leads man to do **things which are not fitting** (1:28b).

rather than the Creator (1:25b).

2. Vile passions (1:26a). Male

This is not the result of Adam’s sin, but each person’s individual sin. Paul ends this section listing numerous sins that come from such a debased mind. Included among the more obvious sins like **sexual immorality** and **murder** are those that man often tolerates, such as **covetousness** or **strife** acting as **whisperers** (1:29), being **backbiters**, being **proud**, being **disobedient to parents** (1:30), acting in ways that are **untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving** and **unmerciful** (1:31). Paul shows us that these, in fact come from a corrupt mind that has rejected God.

Questions

1. What does Paul say that God had promised through His prophets in Scripture (1:1-2)? _____
2. How were the Romans (or any Christians) “called of God” (1:6)? _____
3. What did Paul hope to be able to impart to the Romans (1:11)? _____
4. What positive things had resulted from Paul’s hindrance to come to Rome (1:13)? _____
5. Define the word “gospel” (1:16). _____
 What does Paul say that the “gospel of Christ” is? _____
6. To whom does the term “Greek” refer in this text (1:16)? _____
7. What two “invisible attributes” of God does Paul say are seen in creation (1:20)? _____ and _____
8. What two things does man fail to do that allows his thinking to become futile (1:21)? _____ nor be _____
9. When human beings reject God, even though they may consider themselves wise, what in fact have they become (1:22)? _____

10. When people choose to practice immorality and “dishonor their bodies among themselves” whom do they, in fact “worship and serve” (1:24-25)? _____

11. List some of the negative references to female and male homosexuality in this text that indicate that God condemns it (1:26-27).
_____ passions; _____ nature (1:26);
committing what is _____ ; penalty of their _____ (1:27).
12. Does Paul consider things like “covetousness,” being “whisperers,” or being “disobedient to parents” more tolerable than “sexual immorality” and “murder” (1:28-30)? _____
13. What condition of mind does Paul say produces such sins (1:28)? _____

