

## 02. Romans 1:1-17



## Romans 1:1

Paul, a slave of the Messiah Jesus called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God

Paul describes himself as a ‘slave of the Messiah Jesus’ (see Galatians 1:10). In a city where it is estimated there were three slaves to every free person, the image conveys a clear message: Paul’s whole life is given over to doing the will of Jesus, his Lord. As he writes to the Philippians: ‘The Messiah Jesus has made me his own’ (Philippians 3:12).

However, there is even more to Paul's claim than this. In the Jewish scriptures, Abraham is called the slave of the Lord (Psalm 105:42), as is Moses (2 Kings 18:12), Joshua (Judges 2:8), and David (2 Samuel 7:5). Paul is claiming to belong to this line. We can also see a reference to the suffering slave (servant of the Lord described in the poetry of the temple singers in exile in Babylon.

Paul's introduction is a humble one, but since he intends to share with them the gospel which he proclaims on the authority of the risen Jesus, he immediately claims the title of 'apostle (ἀπόστολος) set apart for the gospel of God'. He makes the same claim in the opening address of his letter to the Galatians and in both his letters to the Corinthians. He writes as one who has been sent (ἀπόστέλλο) and commissioned for a specific task, not because this is something which he has chosen for himself, but because he has been 'called'.

‘God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles’ (Galatians 1:15-16).

## Romans 1:1-3

Paul, a slave of the **Messiah** Jesus called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh.

Paul's gospel is that Jesus, in offering himself in love through his suffering and death, fulfils the hopes and dreams invested in the anointed one (the 'Christ', the '**Messiah**') whom God promised to send to liberate his people.

## Romans 1:4

He was declared to be (ὁμολογῶ) **Son of God** with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus the **Messiah**, our **Lord**.

In the weakness of the flesh Jesus underwent crucifixion, but by the power of the Spirit, he conquered death and is now the one through whom our spirit, too, is made holy through sharing in the intimacy of his communion. Jesus is the **Son of God**. He is our '**Lord**', for it is in and through him that the God of Moses, the God of the Exodus, the redeeming God, is exercising his power to save.

## Romans 1:5-6

Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of **faith** among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus the Messiah.

The constant repetition of the word 'faith' in these introductory verses (1:5,8,12,16,17) is an indication of the importance which this theme will have in this letter.

They are called by God to '**belong to Jesus the Messiah**'. Belonging to Jesus means sharing with him in the same intimate communion of love with God, breathing the same Spirit, caught up in the same glory.



## Romans 1:7

To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

They are 'God's beloved', 'called to be saints'.

'All the congregation are saints (holy), everyone of them, because the Lord, the Holy One, is among them' (Numbers 16:3).

## ‘Grace to you and peace’.

The customary Greek greeting was χαίρειν (see Acts 15:23; 23:26). Paul uses a similar sounding word, χάρις (‘**grace**’) – a greeting that reminds the Christian assembly of God’s action in their lives in drawing them to share the life of the risen Jesus – a life of communion in love with his Father through the shared bond of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s prayer for the community is that they will continue to experience the graciousness of God pouring out his love upon them.

‘Grace to you and peace’.

The customary Jewish greeting was shalom (‘peace’ εἰρήνη). Paul repeats this greeting here, for his prayer is that they will experience the peace that is the fruit of grace: the fullness of life that happens when each member of a community contributes his or her gifts to the others in harmonious communion.

## Romans 1:8-12

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. For God, whom I serve (λατρεύω) with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – or rather, so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

## Romans 1:13-15

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians both to the wise and to the foolish – hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

## Romans 1:16

I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone believing, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

The gospel given to Paul to proclaim is that eternal communion with God in love is offered to ‘**everyone believing**’, everyone who welcomes it, everyone who welcomes love with love, thereby allowing Jesus’ Spirit of love to bear fruit in their lives. This welcoming of God’s offer of love is what Paul means by ‘faith’.

## Romans 1:17

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith' (Habakkuk 2:4).

In the gospel is revealed the 'righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) of God'. Paul is declaring that the gospel is about God who is righteous: that is to say, it tells us who God really is and also the way in which God has chosen to be faithful to the promise of drawing people into communion through Jesus who is our 'righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The gospel is also about the righteousness which we are given as a gift when we are received into this communion. It is in this second sense that Paul used the word in Galatians 2:21 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. In both senses, Paul can call his ministry a 'ministry of justification/righteousness' (2 Corinthians 3:9).



We find the ideas of the ‘**righteousness of God**’ (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) and ‘**salvation**’ (σωτηρία) together also in the following texts:

‘The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations’ (Psalm 98:2).

‘I bring near my righteousness, it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry’ (Isaiah 46:13).

The salvation for which we long is salvation from all that threatens human life and wellbeing. Ultimately, therefore, it is salvation from sin and from the death that is separation from God, the only source of life. This salvation can come only from God. The gospel is that God is offering salvation to everyone by inviting all to live in communion with the risen Jesus. Since salvation is offered by a God of love and cannot be imposed, our response is essential. The welcoming of God's love is what Paul means by faith; hence he states that this righteousness **'is being revealed through faith for faith.'**

the righteousness of God is revealed through faith  
for faith

It is through the faith of Jesus that God's righteousness and the way in which we are called to be in the right relationship with God are revealed.

Paul is saying that the revelation of the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus is for our faith; that is to say, that Jesus' faith bears fruit in ours.

Paul will develop both these points in the body of the letter.

‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’

(Habakkuk 2:4).

Paul concludes his introduction with a quotation from Habakkuk, a text he quoted in the letter to the Galatians 3:11. The setting is the triumph of Babylon. It seems to the people of Judah that all is lost. The prophet encourages them to remain faithful to God and they will live.

The Hebrew text reads: ‘the righteous live by his faith (the faithfulness of God? the fidelity to the covenant of the righteous person?)’. The Septuagint reads: ‘the righteous will live by faith (my faithfulness to God? God’s faithfulness to me?).’

Paul uses the text to sum up his gospel. Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, life – and he is speaking of communion with God – comes by faith; that is to say, it is a gift from the faithful God, given to us through the faithful love of Jesus, asking of us that we respond in faith.

## Romans 1:16-17

The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

Paul announces the theme of his letter. The **gospel of God** (1:1), the **'gospel concerning God's Son'** (1:3,9)

**'In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed.'**

I. The gospel reveals the righteousness of God, who, faithful to himself and to his promises, gave us his Son, Jesus, to heal us from sin and to set us in a right relationship of love communion with him (1:18 - 4:25).

The Gospel is the power of God for salvation

II. Through love, God shares with us God's Spirit.

The shared life is an assurance of salvation (5:1 - 8:39)



salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

III. God offers justification and salvation to everyone, whether Jew or Gentile, who welcomes God's gift in faith. Not only does this not contradict the promises made to Israel and found in the sacred scriptures. It is their magnificent fulfilment (9:1-11:36).

“The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

IV. Paul describes the righteousness that characterises the lives of those who welcome God’s gift in faith (12:1 - 15:13).