

Introduction/Background

Author: Paul, through a scribe named Tertius (Romans 16:22).

Date: probably end of third missionary journey, around AD 56, as he was preparing to go to Jerusalem with an offering for the saints there (Romans 15:25). Paul planned to head to Spain after stopping in Jerusalem and Rome was on the way (Romans 15:22-29)

Place of writing: probably Corinth because he mentions Phoebe (16:1), Gaius (16:23) and Erastus (16:23) who were all from Corinth.

Audience: According to 1:5-6 (and other passages), they were Gentile (or mostly Gentile) Christians in Rome, though clearly Jews were present in smaller numbers. The letter also indicates that they had never met Paul directly. It is generally held that the church(es) in Rome was/were established by Roman Jews who were visiting Jerusalem during Pentecost and then returned to Rome (Acts 2:10). This is supported by Ambrosiaster (church father from the 4th century). There is no evidence that Peter founded the Church there, contrary to the dogma of the Catholic Church or others.

Purpose for writing: There is no overt statement in the Biblical text indicating why Paul wrote to the Romans and there have been as many suggestions as there are commentators. The general feel of the letter, however, seems to indicate that one of Paul's purposes (maybe the main one) was to simply instruct the Christians in Rome on a proper understanding and doctrine of the Gospel. We have many examples of Judaizers disrupting the faith of believers by claiming that faith in Christ alone was not enough. Adherence to the Law, these men claimed, was also required. There were also many other Greek and Roman religious influences that pressed upon the Church (e.g. such as we find with a form of early Gnosticism in Colossae and sexual immorality at Corinth). This letter presents a treatise on the Gospel itself and might have served to protect, or possibly correct, the Christians at Rome.

Themes/Topics: the main theme is the Gospel (e.g. the righteousness that comes from God). The first 11 chapters are highly doctrinal focusing on topics like God's wrath against sinful man, divine judgment, universal sin of mankind, justification by faith alone, security of the believer, sanctification, election, and Israel. The final five chapters focus on practical application (e.g. living out the Gospel) and address topics like spiritual gifts, godliness, submission to government and Christian liberty.

A. Paul shares his calling with his readers (1): **"Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,"**

1. Paul understood that he was a slave to Jesus Christ:
 - a. Many translations read like the NASB, **"a bond servant of Christ Jesus"**, but there's a problem with this—it doesn't actually convey what Paul is saying
 - 1) There are at least six different Greek words in the NT for servant or servanthood and each one designates a certain kind of servant (diakonos, oiketes, heis, huperetes, leitourgos, paidiske)
 - 2) doulos, however, isn't one of the words for servant

- a) It refers to someone who is owned and completely subservient to or controlled by another
 - b) It comes from a root word meaning to tie or to bind
 - c) In nearly all of ancient Greek literature it refers to slaves, not those who serve of their own free will or choice
 - d) In fact, it appears that the only place it is translated as servant or bond-servant is our English translations of the Bible
 - e) However, it is best translated and understood as someone who was a slave and this is exactly how the Greeks and Romans, including the Apostle Paul, used it in the 1st century
- b. So, what do we know about slaves in the Roman world?
- 1) Under Roman law slaves were the property of their masters
 - 2) They had no freedom, no rights, could not be citizens, couldn't decide their occupation, and couldn't own anything
 - 3) Slaves accounted for nearly 1/3 of the Roman population, with another 1/3 likely having been enslaved at some point in their lives
 - 4) Unlike American slavery, Roman slaves were generally treated very well and often considered part of the family
 - 5) However, the Greeks and Romans prized their freedom and looked upon slaves with a certain amount of contempt or disdain
- c. John MacArthur has a great sermon on this subject available on the Grace To You website (<http://www.gty.org/resources/print/sermons/80-321>) and he highlights five things that define what it meant for Paul to consider himself a slave of Jesus:
- 1) It meant he was under exclusive ownership—Jesus was his Master because Paul had been bought with a price, the blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
 - 2) It meant that he was completely and constantly available and obedience to his Master
 - 3) It meant that he was subject on only one master, Jesus Christ
 - 4) It meant that he was completely dependent on his master for everything
 - 5) It meant that his master could discipline and reward him
2. He understood his unique calling as an apostle: **“called as an apostle”**
- a. A more literal translation is **“a called apostle”**
 - b. In a general sense, an apostle was an ambassador, delegate, special messenger or someone sent forth with orders
 - c. In the NT it is generally (though not exclusively) reserved for the Twelve and Paul
 - d. Paul refers to himself as an apostle on numerous occasions, but only twice does he use this specific phrase **“a called apostle”** (here and 1 Corinthians 1:1)
 - e. According to Louw and Nida, a slightly better rendering of this phrase would be **“urgently invited to be an apostle”** or **“summoned and commissioned to be an apostle”**
 - f. Paul's calling as an apostle was unique in that it was more like the calling of an OT prophet than what the Twelve experienced
 - 1) The Twelve met Jesus while he was alive on earth and invited to follow Him
 - 2) Paul was confronted by the risen and heavenly Christ in a supernatural way and pretty much drafted into service (Acts 9:1-16)
3. He was **“set apart for the Gospel of God”** -

- a. The word Paul uses here refers to removing or excluding something
- b. In other words, Paul was separated, pulled apart, and set aside by Jesus Christ for a specific purpose
- c. He identifies that purpose here as the **“Gospel of God”**
 - 1) This genitive here (“of”) can be understood as **“Gospel about God”** or **“Gospel from God”**
 - 2) The second meaning is clearly indicated considering v. 2ff
- d. This purpose was assigned to Paul by Christ at his conversion (Acts 9:15): **“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.”**

<p>B. Paul shares two important truths about the Gospel with his readers (2-6)</p>
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- 1. First, the Gospel was not new; it was promised beforehand in the OT (2): **“which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,”**
 - a. Some are under the false impression or belief that the Gospel originated in the NT with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
 - b. They see two different systems: a system of Law in the OT and the system of the Gospel and grace in the NT—as if God changed his plan halfway through the Bible
 - c. But God’s plan has always been the Gospel—**READ Peter’s sermon to the Jews in Acts 3:17-26**
 - d. In fact, there are over 350 prophecies about Jesus alone in the Old Testament!
 - e. Paul even wrote that the primary purpose of the OT was to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24)
- 2. Second, the Gospel is all about Jesus Christ (3-6): **“concerning His Son...”**
 - a. Jesus is fully human (3): **“who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh”**
 - 1) Jesus had a physical birth—this was prophesied in both the OT and NT (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Matthew 1:23) and witnessed by others (e.g. Mary and Joseph, Luke 2:7; Shepherds, Luke 2:15-20; and the wise men when he was a toddler, Matthew 2:1-12)
 - 2) He is a physical descendant of David (**“according to the flesh”**)—also prophesied in the OT (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5) and documented by Matthew and Luke’s genealogies:
 - a) There is some controversy because both Matthew’s and Luke’s genealogies appear to give the genealogy of Joseph who was David’s descendant, but Joseph wasn’t Jesus biological father
 - b) To “fix” this controversy, many scholars suggest that Luke’s genealogy is really that of Mary and they site the differences between Matthew and Luke’s genealogies
 - c) Others believe that both genealogies are of Joseph, but that they differ because one follows the royal/legal line and the other the physical line back to David
 - d) There are significant problems with both that are not easy to resolve hermeneutically
 - e) The simplest solution would be to take the Scriptures at their Word that Jesus would be (prophesied by the OT) and was (as claimed by Paul here) a physical descendent of David, even if we don’t have Mary’s genealogy
 - b. Jesus is fully God (4): **“who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

- 1) The NASB, NIV and ESV all read the same way here: **“declared [to be] the Son of God with (or in) power”**
 - 2) However, the Greek word, *horizo*, is used 8 times in the NT and every time it means appointed or determined, rather than declared
 - 3) It seems most translations are trying to avoid the controversy over the idea that Jesus was appointed or determined to be the Son of God at his resurrection
 - 4) The CSB and NET do a much better job by rendering the verse as **“who was established as the powerful Son of God”** and **“who was appointed the Son-of-God-in-power”**
- c. Jesus is the agent through whom we receive grace and apostleship (5): **“through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;”**
- 1) The **“we”** here refers to Paul and the other apostles
 - 2) Paul states that they had received through Jesus they had received **“grace and apostleship”**
 - a) Grace is the means by which God operates (Ephesians 2:8): **“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,”**
 - b) Apostleship refers to the unique role and purpose given to Paul and the twelve and was the method God used to establish His Church and spread the Gospel
 - 3) Paul then describes this apostleship with three phrases:
 - a) **“to bring about obedience of faith”**
 - b) **“among all the Gentiles”** (see Acts 9:15; Gal 1:16)
 - c) **“For His name's sake”—2 Timothy 1:9: “who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,”**

C. Paul greets his readers (7): **“to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

1. He addresses his letter to **“all who are beloved of God in Rome”**—so we know a number of things about his readers:
 - a. They were in Rome
 - b. They were believers: **“beloved of God in Rome”**
 - 1) Paul uses this term nine times in this letter alone
 - 2) It's used in 21 of the 26 NT books as a reference to Jesus and believers
 - 3) It comes from the Greek word *agape* and simply refers to those whom God loves
- c. His letter was intended for all the believers in Rome, not a single house church: **“to all who...”**--chapter 16 includes greetings to 26 different people and refers to the churches in some of their homes or the **“saints with them”**
2. Paul also refers to them as those who are **“called as saints”**:
 - a. As it was in 1:1, this is more literally **“called saints”** (no **“as”**)—both of these words (called and saints) are important because they identified who his readers were in Christ (and us as well)
 - b. The word translated **“saint”** is actually the Greek word for **“holy one”**

- 1) Believers are referred to throughout the NT as holy ones—in fact it appears to be one of Paul’s favorite ways to refer to believers
 - 2) Holiness is both positional and behavioral, which means we are both already holy in Christ, but expected to also live in a holy way
- c. The Greek term kletos (called) is an important one in Romans:
- 1) Paul refers to himself as a “**called apostle**” (1:1)
 - 2) He calls his readers “**the called of Jesus Christ**” (1:6)
 - 3) Here he calls them “**called saints**” (1:7)
 - 4) Finally, in 8:28 he refers to believers as “**those who are called according to His purpose**”

Conclusion
