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Romans

A Commentary

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INTRODUCTION

A Word of Orientation

Before readers turn to the commentary proper, they deserve to know the commitments that have guided this book and a few decisions that have shaped its writing. From my earliest study of the letter, I have been fascinated by the way Romans works, both at the macro level (How does each major portion of the letter contribute to the whole?) and at the micro level (How does this statement—even this word—follow from the one preceding it?). Along with most New Testament scholars, I am interested in what Paul hoped the letter might accomplish among its addressees in Rome. More recently, that question has shifted a bit, as I have pondered how Roman auditors might have heard the letter when read by Phoebe of Cenchreae.

The questions I bring are not only literary and historical in orientation, however. They are also theological. The two are not separable, given that Paul and Phoebe and the Roman auditors are involved in talk about God and God's doings in the world, which makes the letter inherently theological. Attention to the content of Romans necessarily involves attention to those claims. In addition, the letter remains theological for those today who hear in it Paul's witness to the "now time" of the gospel.[1] For him, these statements about God are quite literally matters of life and death, as becomes clear in chapter 6 in particular.

In keeping with these governing questions, my strategy has been to work through each passage on my own, drafting first with the Greek NT and the lexicons as resources before turning to the secondary literature. This is by no means a claim to objectivity, but simply a report on my priorities.

I have kept references to the vast secondary literature to a minimum. My goal is less to engage with the scholarly literature or report on scholarly debates (which in any case can only be a snapshot and inadequate even at that) than to offer a coherent account of Paul's letter, insofar as that is possible and within my capabilities. With unstinted admiration and gratitude for those such as

1. That is not to say that a systematic theology can be read off the pages of Romans, or that Paul is doing what would be recognized as systematic theology. Theology can and does take numerous forms.

Cranfield, Moo, Jewett, and Wolter who have written reference commentaries, my own is not intended as such. The notes I do include indicate places of indebtedness, occasionally to those whose conclusions differ enough from my own that they press me to clarify my reading of the letter. When I refer to important debates, I typically do so with only one or two representative references, so that readers who wish to can find an entry point into discussions. Yet nothing here purports to be an account of even recent scholarship on Romans, not to mention the long history of interpretation.[2]

Occasionally I also cite early interpreters, particularly the commentary of Ambrosiaster and the homilies of Chrysostom. For myself, reading these works offers a corrective to the temptation to engage with only the most recent spate of commentaries and counters a tendency to think our more distant predecessors have nothing to teach us. Attending to these commentaries, we quickly realize, for example, that Rom 13 posed concerns for even the earliest interpreters. When I cite their works, it is not because I think their views inherently superior by virtue of their date, but simply because I think they provide fascinating glimpses into the early appropriation of Romans. These early interpreters also offer some gems that need to be shared, as in Origen's observation that in 7:1–6 "Paul seems to be moving between unmarked rooms through hidden passages."

Readers will see that my translation and the accompanying notes attempt to give a sense of the Greek while occasionally incorporating more contemporary idioms. At 2:1, for example, I have used "you there!" instead of "whoever you are," as I think it better captures the jarring nature of the comment. And at 7:24, "I am utterly miserable" is more natural in contemporary English than "Wretched man/person that I am." My goal has been not to aggravate what John Winkler calls the "watchful schoolmaster" (1989, 171), while producing a translation that is not overly stilted. Having translated Romans again and again, I resonate with Kimon Friar's lament that "all translations of any kind are basically absurd" (1973, 651).

An orientation to some stylistic decisions may also be useful. First, I use the uppercase for "Sin" and "Death" at those places where I contend Paul is referring to powers instead of to acts of sin or to dying. The excursus on Sin and Death as powers explains that decision, as well as the decision not to use the uppercase for grace and righteousness. Second, when discussing Paul's treatment of personal pronouns, generally "I" or "we," I employ quotation marks to distinguish Paul's self-reference from my own or from contemporary readers of the letter. The hope is that this distinction will both draw attention to the roles those pronouns play in the text and remind contemporary readers that we stand

2. In keeping with this approach, the bibliography largely includes only publications I cite in the commentary.

at considerable distance from Phoebe's auditors. However important the letter is for many of us, it was not originally written to us.

In addition, when referring to Paul, those around him, and the auditors in Rome, I have sometimes used the word "Christian." This choice has become controversial because the term is anachronistic and, more specifically, because it implies that Christianity is somehow separate from Judaism. While I readily grant that Paul does not imagine the creation of a religion independent of Jewish traditions and practices, or the creation of a new religion at all (even the category religion is problematic), I find it important to have some term for those people—both Jews and gentiles—Paul himself identifies as "in Christ" or "called by Jesus Christ." The word "Christian" does appear in the NT (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16), and I find it preferable to some cumbersome alternatives. "Christ-followers" is better fitted for the discipleship language in the Gospels than for Paul's letters, and "Christ-believers" reinforces the notion that this is a movement restricted to ideas.

Finally, it will be clear that I read this letter with a hermeneutic of generosity: put directly, I attempt to read as I would wish to be read (Gaventa 2017a, 20–21). Having taught the letters of Paul in numerous settings throughout my career, I understand that many people approach Paul with distrust or disdain, even those who otherwise read Scripture generously. I also know that Paul's letters have provided fodder for a range of abusive readings, hateful readings, and willful misreadings. And there are, to be sure, elements in the letter that disturb me, particularly Paul's use of same-sex relations as evidence of humanity's refusal to recognize God as God. Yet I choose to give Paul the benefit of the doubt, in part because I fear the consequences if readers in general abandon generosity, and in part because I have long found in Paul a prime example of "a mass of strange delights," to use George Herbert's phrase for Scripture in general. To be quite honest, I do not think I could have labored so long to teach and understand a text in which I did not take delight.

The Distinctiveness of Romans

Romans is the longest of Paul's letters (at least of letters known to us) and arguably also the most influential. Its influence can be mapped through its best-known interpreters, as is often done, invoking such figures as Chrysostom, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley. That line of influence needs to be corrected and expanded by our knowledge, limited though it may be, of the importance of Romans in the lives of Christians whose names are unfamiliar or even unknown. Already within the first five or six centuries of the church's life, 1:16 was being used as an amulet invoking divine power (Calhoun 2019), and 8:31 was carved into the door lintels of Christian homes (Strawbridge 2017). Frustrated by male hierarchies as they pursued their vocations, African American

women such as Zilpha Elaw and Julia Foote invoked the precedent of Phoebe over a century before recent disputes about her roles (Bowens 2020, 86–87, 169–70; Schroeder and Taylor 2022, 154–55, 160). The influence of this letter persists in disputes regarding same-sex relations and the role of civil government, but it also persists as words of comfort in funeral liturgies, to say nothing of countless well-worn Bibles.

Romans is distinctive in other respects as well, most obviously in the fact that it is the only letter in which Paul addresses gatherings in a city he has never seen. He is not the one who "planted" the gospel in Rome, as he puts it in 1 Cor 3:6–8, where that reminder funds a claim about Paul's authority at Corinth. Elsewhere he can appeal to his addressees' experience with him (1 Thess 2), to his instruction (1 Thess 4:2; 1 Cor 11:23; 15:1), to their relationship (Gal 4:14–16). Paul recognizes the faith of his Roman addressees in 1:8 (however much he also corrects and expands it later), but he is not their "father" (1 Thess 2:11; 1 Cor 4:14–15) or "mother" (1 Thess 2:7; Gal 4:19) as he is with other groups to whom he writes. Although he has individual contacts at Rome, some of whom he regards as quite close to him (16:4, 7), he does not have an ongoing relationship to which he can appeal as he does in even the highly conflictual situation with the Galatians. He must proceed with caution.

That difference in the letter-writing context may account for some important departures from Paul's earlier letters. Romans is distinctive for its extensive engagement with Israel's Scriptures, its use of diatribal style, and what I will refer to as the rhetorical feint. These features of the letter may be related to Paul's status as an outsider who needs to proceed carefully and who does so by employing recognized bases for his appeals that will be shared by the auditors. He cannot draw on his relationship to them or on his apostolic authority.

The Gospel as Intrusion

In common with Paul's other letters, this one is occasional. It was written to address a particular set of people in a particular place, even if Paul was also concerned about other locations as well (notably Jerusalem and Spain). But behind and prior to that writerly occasion there is another, an occasion unlike any other: the occasion of Jesus Christ. The opening lines of the letter make that fact clear. Paul's commission is on behalf of God's good news, which Paul identifies with the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as actions of God's saving power (1:1–4, 16–17). This occasional character of Paul's letters is obvious, but it is easily forgotten, and that forgetting has serious consequences.

Characterizing this occasion, however, proves challenging. Karl Barth frequently called on the word *Krisis*, a term that is apt, though compromised by

its association with existentialism (32, 36, 41, and often elsewhere). J. Louis Martyn referred to the occasion of Jesus Christ as God's invasion of the world, a term that rightly captures the unilateral action of God and the resistance of the world to God, even if its violent overtones are disturbing (e.g., 1997a, 22, 105; 1997b, 82, 151, 154–56, 170, 258). "Intrusion" may be a suitable alternative, with its connotation of an unexpected event that has its origin elsewhere, enters uninvited, unmakes the world as it is, and produces results that are urgently needed, although they are not entirely welcome. The importance lies less in finding the right term than in keeping that dynamic character in mind: something—Jesus Christ—has happened, and it has left nothing untouched. That happening is behind and under everything else Paul writes.

This is perhaps the most obvious and the most frequently neglected feature of the letter, something that is understandable given that we operate two millennia forward from Paul. When Paul writes about the apocalyptic revelation of God's wrath (1:18), it is from the vantage point of this decisive event. When he claims that Israel stumbled (9:32), it is also from the vantage point of this event. When he observes that the reign of God is not about food and drink (14:17), it is also from the vantage point of this event.

The fact of this event makes it difficult to write about "the theology" of Romans, if by that we mean something that is fixed and solid, as in a doctrine of the church, for example. This is what drives Paul Meyer to observe that Paul's letters offer a "ringside seat" for observing what happens as the event of Jesus Christ "*forces* the revision and recasting of all the traditional language, concepts, convictions and categories, including the reading of scripture" (1997, 159; ital. orig.).

That "revision and recasting" has important implications for the extended controversy regarding Paul and apocalyptic or Paul and apocalypticism (on which see J. Davies 2022). The quarrel over whether Paul fits within certain preexisting features of apocalyptic thinking presupposes that those are fixed and can be observed and analyzed. More to the point, the quarrel misses the way *Paul's* understanding of God's action in Jesus Christ revises and recasts his notion of apocalypse.

This fact also complicates the recent scholarly discussion of the Judaism of Paul (as in, e.g., Eisenbaum 2009; Fredriksen 2017). Insisting that Paul remained a Jew is and should be utterly noncontroversial. At the same time, it is crucial to understand that this particular Jew has experienced an event and that event has left nothing untouched. It has not made him something other than a Jew, but it has produced a new way of thinking, assessing, and evaluating (2 Cor 5:16). For example, Paul does not necessarily read Scripture as his fellow Jews do; he does not necessarily perceive the law as his fellow Jews do. That is not because he has long harbored criticism of his people and their practices, but because he has been grasped by Jesus Christ (to use his language in Phil 3:12).

The Circumstances of the Letter

Assessing the Sources

The first and most important source for understanding the circumstances that produced Romans is obviously the letter itself, but in what form? We have no access to the letter (or any other biblical text) in its earliest form and are reliant on numerous ancient manuscripts, the earliest of which, the second-century $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$, is partial. The letter is fully attested, however, in several early uncial manuscripts, including Alexandrinus, Sinaiticus, and Vaticanus. In preparing the commentary, I have reviewed the evidence gathered in the most recent edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA^{28}), although I report in the notes only on those text-critical problems that are of particular interest or affect the letter's interpretation.

By far the most significant question regarding the text of Romans concerns the status of ch. 16. In 1962 T. W. Manson (1991, 13–14) proposed that the letter Paul sent to Rome initially consisted of what we know as chs. 1–15. At the same time, Paul sent a copy of that letter to Ephesus, attaching to it the greetings of ch. 16. That proposal would solve certain interpretive problems, most notably the apparent discrepancy between Paul's greetings to a number of people at Rome and the fact that he has never been to Rome. Although the proposal gained some adherents at the time, recent commentators have largely rejected it, and for good reason. To begin with, Paul's knowledge of individuals at Rome can be accounted for in other ways (see the commentary at ch. 16 for discussion). More significantly, although the doxology of 16:25–27 does appear in several locations in the manuscript tradition, including the end of ch. 14 and the end of ch. 15 (and I will comment on those at the appropriate places in the commentary), there is no textual evidence for a version of Romans without ch. 16. Given this evidence in the manuscript tradition (or the lack thereof), I will assume that ch. 16 is part of the letter Paul sent to Rome.

In addition to Romans itself, I draw freely on the six other letters whose authorship is undisputed (1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon), but I do not draw on the remaining letters (2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus) as primary evidence. Occasionally in the commentary proper I may cite a passage as evidence that reinforces Paul's usage of a term, just as I would look to usage in other contemporaneous texts, but I do not turn to the disputed letters for evidence of Paul's life or convictions.

The remaining source to be considered is Luke's account of Paul's endeavors in the Acts of the Apostles. Because that work, written at least some decades after Romans, primarily gives evidence of Luke's own commitments, it can only be used for historical reconstruction with great caution. I draw on Acts

largely when it confirms evidence drawn from the letters. This decision will be important in discussing the date of composition below.

Location

When Paul writes this letter, he is in or at least near Corinth. That location is certain if Erastus is to be identified with the so-called Erastus Stone, although there is considerable doubt about that identification (on which see the commentary on 16:23). Quite apart from Erastus, the identification of Phoebe with Cenchreae, the port city of Corinth, puts Paul in or near Corinth, since he is sending the letter to Rome with her. Reinforcing that location is the reference in 15:26 to the fact that Macedonia and Achaia have contributed to fellowship with Jerusalem. Since in 2 Cor 8:1–7 Paul employs the generosity of Macedonia by way of nudging a response from the Corinthians, the completion of the offering in Achaia correlates well with Corinth as the likely location of Paul as he writes.

Paul does not write alone. Phoebe, Timothy, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater are with him, along with Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus (16:21–23). These individuals, along with others in Corinth, may well have played a role in shaping the letter. Given the length and complexity of this letter, Paul would have written it over a period of time. Presumably he would have discussed its contents with those around him, probably even read sections or full drafts. This process is especially important regarding Phoebe. Before he entrusts it to Phoebe for delivery, reading, and circulation (see further on 16:1–2), Paul will have made sure that she understood what he wanted from the letter.

Date of Composition

Paul's discussion of the collection for Jerusalem also helps to place the letter relative to his other letters. He mentions it for the first time in 1 Cor 16:1–4, where he gives instructions about setting aside money and sending it by trusted figures to Jerusalem.[3] By the time he writes 2 Cor 8, contributions from Macedonia have been completed, and he takes those as leverage for urging completion by the Corinthians. Paul has the fund and anticipates delivering it in Jerusalem when he writes Romans (15:25–28). This slender thread places the composition of Romans after the Corinthian correspondence (so Campbell 2014, 37–39).

Paul's remarks about Prisca and Aquila also provide bits of useful information. In 1 Cor 16:19, Paul sends their greetings to the Corinthians, which means both that they are in Ephesus with Paul at the time (1 Cor 16:8) and they are already known to the Corinthians, presumably because they have been in

3. Gal 2 reports that Paul agreed with Jerusalem leaders to "remember the poor," but that commitment is not necessarily a reference to the collection as such (B. Longenecker 2010, 184–89).

Corinth itself. By the time Paul writes to Rome, however, he includes them among those to be greeted, along with the Christian group that meets in their residence (Rom 16:3–5a).

The narrative of Paul's work in Acts confirms this sequence and ties it to a datable event. Luke introduces Prisca and Aquila in Corinth with the comment that they had been driven from Rome by Claudius (18:1–2). Later, again according to Luke, they go with Paul to Ephesus (18:18–19). Admittedly, Paul himself makes no reference to Claudius's expulsion, but neither is there any strong reason to doubt it, especially as the movements of Prisca and Aquila align well with details in the letters, and Luke does not seem to have any animus toward Claudius, who appears only in this reference and in 11:28.[4]

The Claudius expulsion can be placed with modest confidence in 49 CE, although that dating is based largely on the much later word of Orosius that the event occurred in the ninth year of Claudius's reign (*Adversus Paganos* 7.6.15–16). A second potential anchor for the timeline of Prisca and Aquila comes with Luke's report that Paul appeared before the proconsul Gallio, since Gallio's proconsulship in Achaia can be dated to around 51 CE (again, with modest confidence; Barrett 1995, 51–52; Holladay 2016, 354). If Paul is in Corinth at that time, having been joined by Prisca and Aquila (as both Luke and Paul suggest), then they must have left Rome before 51.

Claudius's death in 54 CE means Prisca and Aquila could have returned to Rome at that point, although they could well have returned earlier, given the improbability of monitoring the city's borders. Paul's letter then would have been written after their return, presumably after they had had some time to reestablish themselves.[5]

These minimal details yield a composition date in the period of 55–58 CE, which is when most scholars place the letter (see the convenient list in Wolter

4. That is not to endorse Luke's notion that "all Jews" were forced from Rome or to attribute to Claudius any particular reason for this action (Barclay 1996a, 303–6; Gruen 2002, 36–41). It is enough to note that the expulsion could have included Prisca and Aquila.

5. This statement is not intended to support the theory of conflict between Jewish and gentile believers at Rome following the return of Jews from expulsion. According to that theory, the expulsion transformed Roman Christianity into an overwhelmingly gentile population. When it lapsed following the death of Claudius, returning Jewish believers found their leadership questioned or even rejected (Wiefel 1991, 92–101). The theory relies on a statement in Suetonius that Claudius took his action because the Jews "constantly made disturbance at the instigation of Chrestus" (*Claudius* 25.4; LCL). This "Chrestus" is a mistaken reference to "Christ," as the theory runs, and the expulsion came about because of disputes about Christian preaching. Problems abound with the thesis, however. Not only is the name "Chrestus" well attested in the period (Gruen 2002, 39), but Suetonius knew about Christians and would not likely have confused the name (Barclay 1996a, 304, citing *Nero* 16.2) Further, it is by no means clear that those Jews who were expelled returned to Rome, that they returned at a single time, or that their return would have prompted a rift of the sort this theory presupposes.

1:30), even those who rely much more freely on the chronology of Acts than I have done here.

Addressees at Rome

From the greetings in Rom 16, we may infer that Paul's letter addresses several distinct gatherings in Rome rather than a single Roman assembly. At the outset of the list, he greets Prisca and Aquila and the "assembly at their place" (16:2). Each of the succeeding admonitions to "greet" individuals could reflect a separate gathering. Phoebe will take the letter to each one, introducing, reading, and discussing the letter, accompanied perhaps by Romans who are assisting her as Paul requests (see the commentary on 16:3–5).

Within the greetings, Paul identifies Andronicus, Junia, and Herodion as his "kin," by which he means they are fellow Jews (as in 9:3). If Luke's account is correct, Aquila is also a Jew, and Prisca would likely be a Jew as well (Acts 18:2). The remaining individuals named may be gentiles. Identifying both Jews and gentiles in the greetings is significant, even if we do not know how representative the list is of Roman Christianity or what size the groups may be. Nor do we know whether there are Jewish gatherings separate from gentile gatherings, or how the gatherings may have evolved. Based solely on 16:3–16, then, Paul's Roman addressees include both Jews and gentiles.

This preliminary conclusion—that Paul's addressees include both Jews and gentiles—finds some confirmation in the body of the letter. To be sure, at the outset of the letter Paul identifies his own *apostleship* as addressed to gentiles (1:5–6, 13–14), but that statement does not mean the *letter* to Rome addresses only gentiles. The most unambiguous evidence about gentile presence comes in 11:13–24, where Paul admonishes gentiles in harsh terms about the dangers of boasting over that portion of Israel God has, at present, cut off from its root. The words "Now I am talking to you gentiles" intrude into Paul's discourse in a dramatic manner and demonstrate the presence of gentiles in these Roman gatherings (at least as Paul understands them). At the same time, this sharp turn to gentile auditors also undermines the notion that Paul addresses only gentiles, since, if the entirety of the letter addresses gentiles and only gentiles, then the shift at 11:13 becomes superfluous.

The preponderance of the gentiles in these Roman gatherings probably came from among the *sebomenoi,* worshipers of God attracted to Jewish customs and practices who did not become proselytes. Evidence for such attraction is considerable, including writers as diverse as Josephus (*Ag. Ap.* 2.282), Tacitus (*History* 5.5.1), and Juvenal (*Sat.* 14.96–106).[6] Extended exposure of

6. Tobin provides an instructive overview of the evidence and possible reasons for gentile attraction to Jewish practices (2004, 23–27).

these gentiles to Jewish life would explain how Paul can draw so confidently on Scripture in this letter. These auditors know that Abraham is "our" father, would be attentive to words from Isaiah, and would notice Paul's peculiar comments about the law, understanding its importance in the life of the synagogue. To conclude, however, that the auditors are exclusively gentile goes too far, given the names in 16:3, 7, 11, as well as the observation above about the shift at 11:13.

The Purposes of the Letter

There is widespread agreement that Romans is an occasional letter, but articulating the purpose(s) of the letter proves challenging, precisely because Paul writes carefully as he addresses gatherings largely unknown to him. He can recall for the Thessalonians the instructions he gave when they were together (1 Thess 4:1–2), and he can remind the Corinthians that he preached only "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2), but no such reminder is possible with the Romans, at least not a reminder based on their relationship with him (see Rom 15:15). Given the length and complexity of the letter, it seems wise to think in terms of purposes rather than a single purpose. In addition, proposals should account both for the specific details offered up in the letter frame (1:1–12; 16:1–23[27]) and for the subject matter of the letter body (1:13–15:33).[7]

Spain

The letter frame identifies three locations (Rome, Jerusalem, and Spain), each of which likely plays a role in Paul's goals. At the far end of Paul's intended travels lies Spain, where he plans to take the gospel in a new phase of his work. As he writes in 15:19, he has completed the gospel "from Jerusalem and around as far as Illyricum," and he intends now to go to Spain by way of Rome (15:24, 28). In addition to a commitment to extend preaching into territory quite unknown to him, such an undertaking would involve significant challenges and resources (on which, see Jewett 74–75). Paul does comment that he hopes the Romans will send him on his way (15:28), which could be a hint about the need for specific material support. Less convincing is the notion that the fruit Paul hopes for in Rome is a contribution for the Spanish mission (1:13, although see 15:28) or the claim that Phoebe's role in Rome centers on preparations for Spain (16:1–2; Jewett 89–91). If Paul is in fact hoping that the Romans will approve and support his work in Spain, then the repeated concern of the letter

7. Donfried's collection provides a snapshot of proposals available late in the twentieth century, and see the subsequent surveys by Das (2007, 26–52) and J. C. Miller (2001).

for all humans would serve that goal (e.g., 1:6, 16; 3:22; 5:18; 11:32). In general, however, tying the letter's purpose tightly to the Spanish mission is highly speculative, based as it is on two slender comments in 15:24, 28.

Jerusalem

The final lines of the letter body give more extensive and direct attention to Paul's upcoming journey to Jerusalem on behalf of the collection. He introduces the Jerusalem trip at the end of announcing his intent to visit Rome on his way to Spain. "But now," he writes, "I am going to Jerusalem," a journey that will take him some 700 nautical miles out of the way. He first explains why he needs to go to Jerusalem, introducing the collection as an act of fellowship by Macedonia and Achaia on behalf of the Jerusalem poor (15:25–29). Then he asks for prayer in strident language, acknowledging two problems: he is under threat from the "disobedient," which prompts him to ask the Romans to pray for his deliverance (15:31a), and he anticipates that the collection may be rejected in Jerusalem (15:31b). Both the importance of the collection for Paul and his anxiety are palpable in these lines. Placement of this appeal at the end of the letter body may also underscore its importance: this is the last thing the Romans will hear prior to the greetings.

These features prompt the hypothesis that the letter rehearses what Paul wishes to say in Jerusalem, and he sends it to Rome by way of soliciting their support (Jervell 1991, 56, 64). The notion that he composes and sends to Rome what he will say in Jerusalem seems far-fetched, but the genuine concern of 15:30–33 is undeniable. Perhaps Paul does fear that he will never reach Rome, that the trip to Jerusalem will produce complete rejection. In that case, he may hope that the letter to Rome serves as his interpretation of the unity of Jew and gentile. If things go badly, Paul wants this witness to the gospel to make its way to Rome. The churches of Macedonia and Achaia will already have responded to this message and acted on it with their contributions. In Paul's view, the Romans also need the letter's witness, perhaps precisely because their own unity is in doubt.

Such an understanding of the purpose fits well with a good bit of the letter, especially chs. 9–11 and the repeated language that draws Jew and gentile together. But it does less to account for the content of chs. 5–8 (although perhaps among the threats Paul itemizes in 8:38–39 is the threat he perceives at Rome). For that we need to turn to Rome itself.

Rome

Most recent theories regarding the purpose of Romans focus on some perceived need or concern at Rome, which is immediately appealing given that Paul's

other letters address their audiences directly.[8] Looking first to the opening of the letter, for the obvious reason that the letter opening may set the agenda, several details are at least curious. To begin with, Paul does not address the Romans as an *ekklēsia*, by contrast with his other letters (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1). The significance of that silence can be overstated, as with the notion that Paul withholds the word because there has been no apostolic foundation at Rome (Klein 1991, 39–43), but the silence is worth noticing nonetheless. Only when he solicits greetings for the gathering (*ekklēsia*) at the home of Prisca and Aquila does Paul use the term (16:5).

A second curiosity is the brevity of the thanksgiving. Paul gives thanks that their faith is known throughout the world (1:8), but he writes nothing further by way of appreciation. In Philippians Paul gives thanks for their partnership and expresses confidence in their perseverance (1:3–6), and in 1 Thessalonians he expands on their reception of the gospel (1:2–10). Even in 1 Corinthians, he expresses gratitude for the spiritual gifts they have received (1:4–8), although he will later challenge their handling of those gifts. In this situation, where he knows only some of the auditors and has not yet visited, he would seem to have ample reason to expand rather than to contract the thanksgiving, precisely so that he could secure their attention (see further on 1:8).

Perhaps most important, Paul announces that he intends to "proclaim the gospel to you in Rome" (1:15). Outside of Romans, Paul employs the verb *euangelizesthai* only to refer to initial declarations of the good news, as in 1 Cor 1:17; 9:16; 15:1–2; Gal 4:13; 1 Thess 2:9. He does not use it of subsequent instruction or encouragement or exhortation. That is consistent with the word's use elsewhere outside the NT (for evidence, see below on 1:14b–15 and especially the texts gathered by Dickson 2005). More to the point, late in the letter Paul again uses *euangelizesthai* when he describes his own labor as limited to preaching where Christ is not already named (15:20; and see 10:15).

This way of writing about the act of bringing the good news—announcing it to people who have not yet heard it—may indicate that Paul suspects there is some deficit among the auditors at Rome. Although he comments on their faith (1:8) and later will characterize the letter as a reminder (15:15), he nonetheless appears to regard Rome as in need of hearing the good news. That is why he can characterize his reminder as an act of boldness (15:15).

8. Proposals range widely and include the notion that with this letter Paul anticipates the work of the Jewish Teachers (Campbell 2009a, 495–518), that he addresses misapprehensions the Romans have formed about Paul himself by virtue of news from the Galatian congregations (Tobin 2004, 98–103), that he undertakes to bring Roman Jews into his own gentile church (Watson 2007, 163–91), that he wants to unite Jews and gentiles as preparation for the western mission (N. T. Wright 2018, 324), and that he writes to show gentile believers (only) how it is that they are now right before God (Johnson Hodge 2012, 170).

What is it that the auditors need to hear for the first time (as Paul understands the situation)? They know already that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah of God. That initial identification is not in doubt, nor presumably the character of his death and resurrection. Paul begins from those elements of the kerygma (1:3–4). They also know that the arrival of God's Christ initiates the inclusion of gentiles among God's people, although some of them may have misconstrued the significance of that inclusion (as in 11:13–24). There may also be differences over implications of the Christ event for the continuance of the Mosaic law (as in 14:1–12).

What Paul announces as news in Romans is not simply the arrival of Jesus as God's Christ, but what that arrival reveals about the situation of humanity—Jew and gentile alike—and what that arrival reveals about the whole of creation. In 1:16 Paul announces, he *identifies*, the gospel as God's power to bring about salvation. Beginning in 1:17 he explains why that power is necessary, first establishing the captivity of both Jews and gentiles to Sin (3:9), tracing that captivity finally to Adam and the world-encompassing powers of Sin and Death (5:12–21). Christ's death and resurrection mean nothing less than the defeat of these powers (6:12–21) and the hope of the liberation of all creation (8:18–25), although the powers persist in their resistance to God's love brought about in Christ Jesus (8:31–39).

Much is left aside in this brief synopsis (and left to the commentary that follows), but it may suffice by way of proposing that Paul offers this good news at Rome in the hope of expanding his auditors' understanding of the gospel.[9] The gospel is not, as some of his auditors may have thought, only a matter of bringing about the inclusion of the gentiles or of fulfilling the promises to Israel, however urgent those goals are. It is nothing less than the reclamation of a cosmos in thrall to Sin and Death.

An Overview of the Letter

1:1–12. The conventions of letter opening introduce Paul as the letter writer and certain Romans who are beloved and called of God, but the focus is on neither of those parties.[10] Immediately Paul's introduction of himself gives way to a terse introduction of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who belongs to the human line of David and whose resurrection discloses publicly that he is God's Son. Paul gives thanks for the faith of his addressees and explains his long-held desire to visit them.

9. This understanding of the letter's purpose aligns well with proposals that Romans belongs in the rhetorical classification of protreptic, given its desire to gain Roman adherents for Paul's interpretation of the gospel (Aune 1991; Guerra 1995).

10. The table of contents provides the letter structure. Here I am sketching the contents to provide an overview of the letter's discourse.

1:13–4:25. The body of the letter begins with the disclosure formula "Now I do not want you to be uninformed" in 1:13 (as in 2 Cor 1:8; Phil 1:12; see below on 1:13). This first major section of the letter initially announces that the gospel *is* God's saving power. It apocalyptically reveals both God's righteousness and God's wrath. Taking up divine wrath first, Paul contends that both Jews and gentiles, however different their history, are under the power of Sin (3:9). They violated the Creator-creature relationship by withholding worship from God (1:18–32; 3:10–18). They have different histories with God in that gentiles have not been gifted with the law (2:14) or with Scripture (3:2) as Jews have, and yet the action of God in Jesus Christ reveals that they have arrived at the same place: both are "under Sin" (3:9). In the "now time," God has put Christ forward to liberate both Jews and gentiles, acting through the faith-generating faithfulness of Christ (3:21–26). The story of Abraham, here retold without reference to his legendary obedience, serves as a prototype of God's initiative, God's inclusion of gentiles, and especially God's creative power in the birth of the promised child, but now in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (4:17, 24–25). Unlike the ominous "they" of 1:21, and by distinction from the withering indictment of human impiety in 3:10–18, Abraham did glorify God (4:21), anticipating the glory of Jew and gentile together in 15:6, 7–13.

5:1–8:39. With the declaration in 5:1 that "we have been rectified," and the ensuing summary of the present situation of peace, hope, and love, Paul seems to be rounding off his earlier introduction and exposition of God's rectifying action (1:16–17; 3:21–26). What follows is no conclusion, however, but a radical recasting of the rectifying act into universalizing and even cosmic terms. While ethnic language has preoccupied chs. 1–4, it disappears entirely in chs. 5–8, where there is no reference to Jew or gentile, to David or Abraham or Israel. The Christ event is nothing less than Adamic in its extent. Adam's disobedience unleashed Sin and Death on the whole world, such that they became its powerful rulers; Christ's obedience instituted a new rule, that of God's righteousness, once again for the whole world (5:12–21). Those who are baptized into Christ belong to his death to Sin; they belong to new life, liberated from the grasp of Sin and Death (6:1–7:6). Confronting the disturbing remarks he has made about the law, in 7:7–25 Paul contends that Sin's power is such that it has taken captive even God's good law, making obedience to that law impossible. With God's action in Jesus Christ, however, Sin is condemned, and the Spirit of Christ is at work to bring life, adoption, and even inheritance (8:1–17). That new life does not remove humans from the present. To the contrary, life in the "now time" brings about identification with the longing of all creation for God's final redemption (8:18–30) and confidence that God's love will triumph even over persistent anti-God powers (8:31–39).

9:1–11:36. The promise that no created thing "will be powerful enough to separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord" ushers in the lament of 9:1–5: Where is Israel in this God-generated intrusion that is the gospel? Paul addresses the question of Israel's relationship to God in a dense, difficult passage, replete with Scripture and also with possibilities for misunderstanding. He establishes at the outset that the only Israel that exists is God's creation, brought about and sustained unilaterally by God (9:6–13). By extension, Israel's future also depends entirely on God (9:14–29). In the present time, the "now time" of the gospel, however, God has tripped Israel, raising the possibility that God has actually turned away from God's own people (10:1–21). Paul invites gentile auditors to conclude that God is finished with Israel, only to turn in ch. 11 to show how the present division between the "remnant" and the "rest" is itself God-generated, intended to bring about the salvation of gentiles and the saving jealousy of the "rest" of Israel. The apocalyptic mystery is that "all Israel," that is, the whole of the Israel God created, will be saved (11:1–27). God's word, God's promises, are reliable (9:6; 11:28–32). The universalizing claims of 5:12–21 are here reinforced. A doxology that limns God's ways and God's inscrutability cautions against overconfidence in human speculation and concludes the section (11:33–36).

12:1–15:13. Having invited the auditors to join in the "Amen!" of 11:36, Paul turns specifically to the "now time" of the Roman communities. He invokes their gratitude for God's mercies to urge their own bodily sacrifice, which is their life in Christ (12:1–8). He then sketches that life in a series of statements with parallels both in his other letters and in other ethical traditions. Concern for life within the boundary of faith combines with concern for those outside (12:9–21). In a particularly difficult passage, Paul urges recognition that what we would call civil authorities were put in place by God and only by God (implicitly cautioning against the overestimation of their importance) and urging the payment of taxes and other obligations (13:1–7). Two brief passages in the second half of ch. 13 reveal Paul's notion that real obligation is the obligation to love, which fulfills the law. For Paul, however, that love is not an end in itself, but one that knows what time it is, wrapped up as it is in the Lord Jesus Christ (13:8–14). Chapter 14, for which Paul seems to have been preparing throughout this section, addresses conflicts at Rome, arguing both for the integrity of both sides in the discussion *and* for the obligation to act for the good of all. The goal is not uniformity of judgment but harmony in doxology, as the *telos* is the glorification of God (15:1–6). Paul reiterates that point in 15:7–13, which calls on Scripture once again to interpret the event of Jesus Christ as having its goal not simply in the uniting of Jew and gentile, but in their shared and joyous glorification of God's eschatological triumph.

15:14–16:23[27]. The closing of the letter both reflects on the letter in relationship to Paul's vocation and anticipates the next stage in that work (15:14–33). Eager as he may be for his work in Rome, Paul nonetheless prioritizes Jerusalem, where the very doxology he has just celebrated may encounter a severe challenge. Chapter 16 commends Phoebe, who will deliver the letter (vv. 1–2), requests greetings to be shared among various gatherings in Rome (vv. 3–16), promises once more the triumph of God (vv. 17–20), and concludes with greetings from Paul's companions at Rome (vv. 21–23). The additional doxology in vv. 25–27 is likely a later addition.

The Place of Scripture

No overview of Romans is complete without attention to the place of Scripture. Israel's Scriptures thoroughly saturate Paul's letter to the Romans, as is obvious even from the most superficial reading. A single fact tells the tale: over half the scriptural citations in all of Paul's letters are to be found in Romans (Wagner 2011, 155–57). More impressive than sheer quantity, however, is the range of ways in which Paul calls on Scripture. There are general references to Scripture, such as the opening identification of the promised gospel coming through "his prophets in holy Scriptures" (1:2) and the later assertion that God's righteousness is "confirmed by the law and the prophets" (3:21). There are citations of single lines, as in the citation of Hab 2:4 in Rom 1:17 and that of Exod 9:16 in Rom 9:17. Most of ch. 4 is a reworked account of the scriptural story of Abraham, drawing especially on Gen 15 and 17, and Rom 9:6b–18 crafts a story of God and Israel from a variety of texts. Several lengthy catenae serve important functions, as when 3:10–18 encapsulates and reinforces the conclusion of 3:9 that all are "under Sin" with a series of quotations drawn largely from psalms, and when 9:25–29 calls on Hosea and Isaiah to give voice to Paul's understanding of the contemporary situation of Israel. In ch. 10, the stunning midrash on Deut 30:12–14 reads Christ in the place where the law has stood. There are even claims for Scripture's pertinence in the present time, such as the brief note that the words "[faith] was regarded for him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6) were written not only about Abraham but also about "us" (Rom 4:22–24). A more capacious statement appears toward the end of the letter, when Paul claims that "whatever was written previously" was written "for our instruction" (15:4).

This rich diversity in the way Scripture plays through Romans has produced a lively and complex research agenda in recent decades (set in motion by Hays 1989). I will draw on numerous studies in the commentary, while of necessity giving little attention to some of the more specialized debates, such as whether Paul worked from memory or had access to written manuscripts. While such matters are important, my approach as a commentator is to pay attention to what Paul does with Scripture, being open to the possibility that his auditors knew

those same lines and *also* to the possibility that they did not. If Phoebe's gentile auditors at Rome did come from the synagogue, they would have been familiar with Scripture, although that does not mean they followed every scriptural resonance in the letter, especially not at first hearing.[11]

For example, the treatment of Abraham in Rom 4 would be intelligible to anyone even slightly familiar with the narratives of Genesis. Hearers need not have deep acquaintance with the psalms in order to make sense of the catena in 3:10–18, although they may not have associated particular lines with particular psalms or the context of lines within those psalms. Some other passages may have been lost on Paul's auditors or at least have required explanation by Phoebe and others. When Paul turns Elijah's prayer *for* Israel into a prayer *against* Israel in 11:2, he may well have left some auditors behind, to take only a single example. My assumption is that those addressed at Rome were generally familiar with Scripture in its Greek form (for which I will use the customary if inadequate word *Septuagint* [LXX]), but not that they could follow every small change Paul introduced.

As for Paul's own reading of Scripture, the comment in 15:4 is revealing: "For whatever was written previously, it was written for our instruction." This statement not only provides Paul's guidance for the Roman gatherings in their own reading but may also suggest how Paul himself reads Scripture. He assumes that it was written for "our instruction," that is, for those who live in the "now time" (and see 1 Cor 9:9–10). In the context of his apostolic vocation, he reads from the present backward. On the face of it, of course, that is obvious; no one can stand inside the past and read forward. But the intrusion of God in Jesus Christ shapes Paul's reading such that he can hear a witness to Christ even in Deuteronomy's witness to the law (Rom 10:5–8) and can find gentiles among the beloved unloved of Hos 2:25 (Rom 9:25). The gospel has intruded even into Paul's reading of Scripture.

Literary and Rhetorical Features

Romans is also replete with literary features and strategies of persuasion. For example, Paul makes use of alliteration (as in the series of alpha-privatives in 1:31), *synkrisis* or comparison (as in the contrast between Adam and Christ in 5:12–21), and a fortiori arguments (i.e., arguments from the lesser to the greater, again in 5:12–21; 11:12).[12] His use of diatribal style in Romans has received

11. In an oral culture, they may well have understood more than contemporary hearers would on first hearing.

12. A particular strength of Jewett's commentary is his extensive discussion of literary features of the text.

widespread scholarly attention.[13] This feature of the letter is especially important, since without recognition of it interpreters have recklessly assumed, for example, that the direct address in 2:1 singled out actual individuals or groups (all Jews) for attack (as in the "typical Jew" of Sanday and Headlam 54; and see Nygren 115–18). Read as diatribal, however, statements of this sort become part of a larger pattern of persuasion, typical of that employed by teachers in a variety of settings.

Such features of the letter display Paul at work, leading his auditors to see things, or at least attempting to do so. In addition to these acknowledged literary features of the text, at several points Romans leads its audience to draw conclusions that prove to be erroneous, engaging in what I have called a practice of rhetorical feint (Gaventa 2008b, 392). In 3:10–18, for example, the catena draws on numerous psalms that critique the unrighteous *before* turning to extol the good standing of the righteous speaker, so that Paul invites the audience to expect a celebration of those who do keep the law, who do honor God. Instead, with 3:19 he shuts the door on any such conclusion, insisting that the law closes every human mouth (see on 3:10–20 for explication). Similarly, in ch. 10, Paul prompts the audience to conclude that God has rejected Israel, only to turn in 11:1 and insist that God has not forsaken Israel, God's own people.

Paul's treatment of the law provides the most developed example of this practice. Throughout the first six chapters of the letter, Paul both affirms the law of Moses (e.g., 3:21, 31) and makes highly provocative claims about the law (e.g., 4:13, 15). This pattern escalates in chs. 5–7, where the law "slips in" (v. 13), where Paul joins it to Sin as a ruler over humanity (6:14–15), and where it lords over people (7:1). This pattern drives to the question of 7:7: "Is the law Sin?" The answer he *seems* to be driving toward is "Yes, the law itself is sin," inviting that judgment. Instead, he answers emphatically, "Of course not." The law is holy, right, and good (7:12), *but* Sin has nevertheless made use of it.

A final feature, of which Paul himself is likely unaware, is the way the letter enacts the dynamic character of the gospel itself, prompting the audience to experience the gospel as it is heard. Having depicted the work of Sin and Death in ch. 5, using language associated with kingship, slavery, and violence (see the excursus on the powers of Sin and Death), Paul characterizes that as the time of slavery to Sin and urges instead obedient slavery to God (righteousness; 6:16, 19–23). Although the two enslavements carry contrasting outcomes (death and life), Paul allows the language of slavery to stand unchallenged—at that point. Later, however, having discussed God's sending of the Son to defeat Sin and having introduced the work of the Spirit, Paul writes, "You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fear again. Instead, you received a spirit of adoption" (8:15). By contrast with the fear, the utter terror, associated with

13. Stowers 1981; for a helpful review of recent research, see J. King 2018, 103–28.

slavery, Paul interprets slavery to God's righteousness as a slavery without fear. More important, it is a "spirit of adoption." What began as slavery to Sin and Death became slavery to the righteousness of God, which then became adoption into the family.

A second example of the dynamic character of the gospel, both depicted and performed within the letter and perhaps even within the Roman gatherings, has to do with the corruption and redemption of human speech. An important feature of 1:18–32 is that humans withhold praise from God, both in their distorted worship of things that are not God and in withholding of glorification and thanksgiving (1:21). The catena in 3:10–18 reinforces that statement, generalizing it with the charge that no one fears God (3:18) and that human speech is vile and bitter (3:13–14), and prompting the conclusion that the law has shut up every mouth (3:19). In the account of the Spirit's work in ch. 8, however, adoption means that "we" cry out to God as father (8:15). And in 15:6 Paul prays that those previously closed mouths will pray together in unison, glorifying God. Reinforcing this notion of speech that is corrupted and redeemed, at key moments in the letter Phoebe will pronounce the word "Amen!"—calling on the auditors at Rome, along with her, to perform her praise for God's action in Jesus Christ (9:5; 11:36; 15:33). By doing so, they do not simply assent to Paul's words. They become with him and with Phoebe a chorus of praise.

COMMENTARY ON THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Romans 1:1–12 Opening the Letter

The letter opens with a prescript (1:1–7) and a thanksgiving (1:8–12), both standard features of ancient letters. Paul expands the customary identification of the sender with a concise summation of the gospel that orients the whole of the letter. The thanksgiving, while short on details regarding the Roman addressees, introduces Paul's long-standing desire to be in Rome.

1:1–7 The Prescript

Introductions of the apostle Paul abound. Artists introduce him visually, whether alone in contemplation (as in Rembrandt's paintings of Paul in prison or at a desk) or addressing a crowd (as in Raphael's rendering of Paul preaching in Athens). Systematicians and ethicists introduce his teachings and their implications. Biblical scholars introduce him through reconstructions of his life and work. Different lenses are brought to bear, but always the focus remains on Paul, and understandably so. Yet when Paul introduces himself, as he does in the opening lines of Romans, writing to Christians in a city he had never visited, he points away from himself and toward God's action in Jesus Christ.[1] That single redirection says much about Paul, about his letters, and about this letter.

All of Paul's letters expand on the standard conventions of Greek letter prescripts, but Rom 1:1–7—a single sentence in Greek—constitutes the most elaborate prescript found in any NT letter. Rather than beginning with the mere necessities of prescript ("X to Y, many greetings," as in, e.g., Acts 15:23;

1. The term "Christian" is admittedly anachronistic, yet it is preferable to cumbersome alternatives (see introduction). In addition, I sometimes use the word "church" for the Greek term *ekklēsia*, on the assumption that readers understand that Paul refers to gatherings or assemblies rather than to buildings or to the structured organizations of later centuries. In no way does this practice endorse the view that Paul himself is no longer Jewish or that Christianity is, in Paul's time, a phenomenon separate from Judaism.

23:26), Paul regularly extends the prescript to identify himself and his addressees in terms of the gospel. Even 1 Thessalonians, with its bare naming of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, addresses "the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). But nowhere else does Paul's prescript extend to encompass a summary of the gospel. Such a significant departure from his own typical pattern may well have perplexed the auditors at Rome (so Byrskog 1997, 37–38) and presumably also provoked them to close attention. The expansion could reflect the fact that Paul has not been to Rome and does not have extensive acquaintance with Christians in this city, although the greetings to specific individuals in ch. 16 suggest that Paul knows more about the situation in Rome than might be anticipated (see the introduction). The proclamation of the gospel contained within this extended prescript forcefully reminds all these gatherings in Rome that the gospel has to do with God's action, not their own; further, any point of commonality between the apostle and the Romans, or among the Romans themselves, is generated by the gospel.

Not only does the prescript include a pithy summation of the gospel, but the prescript itself is notable for redundancies of expression that intensify its claims.[2] In v. 1 Paul identifies himself in three distinct ways. He also uses intensification when he claims that God's promise of the gospel comes through *his* prophets and in *holy* Scriptures. Further, he describes Jesus as coming from David's line, then adds that he is such *physically.* The resurrected Jesus Christ is associated with a/the spirit *of holiness*. As becomes clear to anyone who wrestles with the Greek, the work of some of these expressions is more allusive than explanatory. Shared assumptions are announced, but they are announced in a way that anticipates their projection onto a far larger canvas.

1:1 Paul, slave of Christ Jesus,[a] called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God— **2** the gospel God promised earlier through his prophets in holy Scriptures,[b] **3** the gospel about his Son who came from David's lineage, considered physically, **4** who was also publicly identified as Son of God in power, considered in terms of the spirit of God's own holiness, at his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, **5** through whom we received grace and apostleship to bring about among all the gentiles the obedience that comes from faith for the sake of his name, **6** among whom you also are called to belong to Jesus Christ— **7** to all of God's beloved who are in Rome,[c] who are called to be holy people. May you have grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. Some important manuscripts (𝔓^{26} ℵ A G K L P Ψ) reverse the order, reading *Iēsou Christou* (as in 𝔓^{10} and B). The variant may reflect harmonization to the word order found in vv. 4, 6, 7, and 8.

2. Rhetoricians would label this *interpretatio* or *synomyny* (Ps.-Cicero, *Rhet. Her.* 4.28.38).

b. Editions of the Greek NT as well as translators disagree over whether a comma should follow *hagiais* at the end of v. 2. With the comma (as above), v. 2 modifies "the gospel of God," and *peri tou autou* ("about his [Son]") refers back to "the gospel of God" (the end of v. 1). Without the comma, *peri tou autou* specifies that the promise found in Scriptures concerns God's Son (so Hays 1993, 129). Although the latter reading is grammatically possible, Paul does not elsewhere speak of Scripture or Scriptures "about" Jesus Christ. (For additional arguments, see Cranfield 1:57.)

c. A few manuscripts omit the words "in Rome." Evidence for this reading is slender, but the omission is noteworthy because it reflects an understanding of Romans as a letter intended for the whole church rather than addressed to specific communities of believers. See the similar omission of "in Ephesus" in Eph 1:1.

[1:1] Paul introduces himself with three phrases, each of which has parallels or near parallels in his other letters, but nowhere else do all three phrases appear together as they do here. This abundance of self-description could imply that Paul anticipates some resistance to his authority on the part of Roman Christians, but the letter offers little else to warrant that interpretation. Taken together, these three phrases state Paul's credentials (Byrskog 1997, 37), and yet they are a peculiar form of credentialing. Paul has not earned or achieved these designations; instead, they have been imposed from the outside.[3] In addition, all three phrases of v. 1 point away from Paul himself and toward the one who commissioned him. Instead of reinforcing Paul's own authority, then, this verse asserts forcefully that Paul is known by reference to the gospel.

First, Paul identifies himself as a "slave of Christ Jesus" (see Phil 1:1; Gal 1:10; see also 1 Cor 7:22; 2 Cor 4:5).[4] English translations often adopt the word "servant" as a way of avoiding the understandable objections to the connotations of slavery (as in NIV, RSV, NRSVue, and NJB), but that translation misleadingly implies that Paul volunteers for this role, that he labors for Christ Jesus as a result of his own decision or his own will.[5] The involuntary character of this role is implied by the usage of the term *doulos* elsewhere (e.g., Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253b–1254a; Lev 26:13; Josephus, *J.W.* 5.443; Philo, *Creation* 85) and is confirmed by Paul's other comments about his vocation as an apostle (Gal 1:11–17; Phil 3:2–11).

Because Scripture refers to Samuel, David, and other central figures in Israel's history as the "slaves of the Lord" (e.g., Josh 24:29 [24:30 LXX]; Judg 2:8;

3. A glance at the opening paragraphs of Josephus's *Life* is instructive. Josephus goes into considerable detail about his priestly and royal lineage, his father's outstanding character, and his own educational accomplishments (*Life* 1–10). Josephus is writing a *bios*, of course, and Paul is not. Yet both are involved in self-presentation.

4. The practice of referring to human beings as God's slaves occurs not only in Paul's letters but widely in NT literature; see, for example, Luke 1:38; Acts 16:17; Eph 6:6; Col 4:12; 2 Tim 2:24; Titus 1:1; Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 2:16; 2 Pet 1:1.

5. See Lettsome 2021, especially pp. 11–13, for a suggestive proposal about Mary's "slave song" in Luke 1:38, 48.

1 Sam 3:9; Ps 89:3 [88:4 LXX]), Paul's reference is sometimes regarded as a straightforward application to himself of an established honorific term, and for that reason the context of Paul's self-reference has been sought in ongoing discussions about Jews as God's slaves.[6] Yet slavery was ubiquitous in the Roman Empire; by some estimates as much as 20 percent of the population was enslaved.[7] Such a statistic makes it difficult to imagine that Paul would use the language of slavery, or that his audience would hear it, without connecting it to the inescapable evidence of human slavery all around them. Paul's self-identification as "slave" may convey some notion of status because of the exalted status of Jesus Christ (just as some slaves of elite figures acquired certain forms of status; Harrill 2006, 86–87, 103–13; Bradley 378–79), but that status nonetheless also connotes being under the control of another person rather than voluntary submission.

Indeed, as Phoebe read the letter in the assorted Christian gatherings around Rome, a number of slaves may well have found themselves elevated by hearing the term. At least we might ask how they would have responded, even if nothing by way of source material helps us with this question. For the auditors, Paul's self-identification as *doulos* may function as a *captatio benevolentiae* in that Paul's self-acknowledged status as Christ's slave brings him closer to the audience.

Taking seriously the compulsory character of slavery undermines the argument that Paul identifies himself this way because of his humility (as found in Pelagius 59). Similarly, it is not at all clear that this is, at least in Paul's usage, an assertion of his leadership or authority. Paul begins by admitting that he is not his own. That admission is consistent with later parts of the letter, particularly ch. 6, which contrasts slavery to the power of Sin with slavery to God's righteousness. Paul does not appear to have thought of himself or anyone else (individual or corporate) as free from constraint, as self-determined.[8] All are enslaved to some power.[9]

Standing at the opening of the letter, Paul's self-depiction as "slave of *Christ Jesus*" simultaneously connects and disconnects his slavery from that of Joshua or David, figures identified by tradition as the slaves of *God*. By naming himself as the property of Christ Jesus, Paul connects himself intimately with the new event of the gospel. Nevertheless, the lines that follow make it clear that to be the slave of Christ Jesus is also to be the slave of God; the two cannot be separated. Perhaps the order here—Christ Jesus instead of Jesus Christ, the order

6. For a helpful discussion of the various proposals, including proposals that Paul is influenced by the Roman institution of slavery, see Byron 2003,1–16; 2008.

7. Madden (1996, 109–28) estimates that the percentage of the population enslaved empire-wide in the first century CE was 20 percent, rising in Italy to 30 percent.

8. See further on 6:12–23 and on 8:15–17, where slavery language gives way to language about being part of God's household (Gaventa 2015, 203–5).

9. Bob Dylan captures Paul's assumption with his song "Gotta Serve Somebody." For the lyrics, see https://bobdylan.com/songs/gotta-serve-somebody.

more customary for Paul (e.g., Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:1)—draws attention to the claim that God's anointed, God's messiah, has come in the person of Jesus. That term, messiah, plays various roles in Jewish texts, and what Paul intends by it can best be understood when he unpacks it, first in vv. 3–4 and then throughout the letter.[10]

Second, Paul is "called to be an apostle." Contemporary readers may find themselves drawn immediately to the word "apostle" because of its accrued connotations of office or leadership, but it is important not to overlook the statement that apostleship arises from a calling from outside oneself (*klētos*). Paul uses the language not simply for his own calling or for special ministerial roles but for all those who are called into the gospel (e.g., Rom 1:6–7; 8:28; 1 Cor 1:2, 26, 28). Here and elsewhere, Paul forthrightly asserts that he is an apostle, often linking that apostleship directly to Jesus Christ or to God (1 Cor 9:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; 1 Thess 2:7). An ordinary word for a messenger or agent of another person, "apostle" later becomes a special term for one charged with the urgent task of presenting and re-presenting the gospel.[11] Unlike Luke, who limits the ranks of the apostles to those who were witnesses of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:21–22; although cf. 14:4, 14), Paul's letters assume that the group is not closed or fixed in number (1 Cor 9:5; 12:28–29; 15:7; Gal 1:17; Phil 2:25); neither is it limited to males (note the apostle Junia in 16:7).

Third, Paul describes himself as "set apart for the gospel of God." In Gal 1:15 Paul claims he was "set apart" before his birth for the work of declaring the gospel among the gentiles. Luke employs the verb similarly of the Holy Spirit's designation of Paul and Barnabas as those to be "set apart for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2; cf. 19:9). Here Paul describes his "set-apartness" with the bare phrase "for the gospel of God," the emphasis falling on the gospel itself rather than on the special task assigned to one set apart. Like the word "apostle," "gospel" (*euangelion*) also is an ordinary term for "good news," and the exact nature of that good news Paul will introduce in the lines that follow and then unfold in the letter as a whole. The only specification is that the gospel comes from God. The genitive is one of authorship; this is not simply an announcement of good news about God or even a disclosure of news from God but God's own action that is being revealed in the present. Paul seldom describes the gospel with this phrase, "gospel of God" (although see Rom 15:16; 2 Cor 11:7; 1 Thess 2:2, 8, 9),[12] but the emphasis on God's

10. Novenson ably traces both the pitfalls in earlier notions of a single "messianic idea" and the range of work "messiah" does across Jewish literature (2012, 34–63).

11. For an introduction to the term and its usage, see Betz 1992; Donaldson 2006.

12. The parallels are not exact, however, since elsewhere the phrase employs the article, which does not appear here.

authorship is consistent with the emphasis on God's role in the lines that follow and throughout the whole of the letter.

[2] As Paul expands on the phrase "gospel of God," the focus of the prescript shifts to the gospel itself, so that the identification of the letter writer falls out of sight. God promised the gospel "earlier through his prophets in holy Scriptures." The reference to the prophets is distinctive, as Paul nowhere else identifies the prophets collectively as the speakers or writers of Scripture.[13] Pelagius attempted to distinguish the two, as if the wording were "through his prophets *and* in holy Scriptures" (59), but the Greek does not support that distinction. That they are "his" prophets also stands out, underscoring God's direction of events, especially as Paul nowhere else refers to the prophets as "his" (i.e., God's).[14] Nor does Paul use the expression "holy Scriptures" elsewhere, customarily referring simply to "Scripture" (as in Rom 4:3; 1 Cor 15:3–4; Gal 3:8, 22). The adjective "holy" may serve to reinforce the promise as coming from God; it is not the prophets or even Scripture itself that makes promises about God's gospel, but the God who is served by both.

The more difficult question is what Paul intends when he says that God's promise of the gospel may be found in Scripture. As is the case also in 1 Cor 15:3–4, nothing here ties the promise to a particular text or section of Scripture. Instead, the force of the statement is to connect God's promise to agents (the prophets) and sources (Scripture) that are recognized as reliable. This unusually full reference to Scripture and prophetic agency anticipates the content of the letter to follow, since Paul draws on Scripture more extensively and explicitly in Romans than in any other of his letters. This early description of the gospel as previously promised in Scripture underscores the relationship between what God has already done and what God is even now revealing, but that is not to say that the gospel is "in complete continuity with God's earlier revelation to Israel" (Dunn 1:10). Certainly some of Paul's claims about Scripture would not have appeared to his fellow Jews to stand "in complete continuity," such as his claim that the "not my people" of Hos 2:25 referred to gentiles (Rom 9:25). Paul declares that the gospel was promised in advance, not that it was already explicated or understood or accomplished (similarly Calvin 15).

[3–4] "About his Son" resumes the phrase "for the gospel of God" at the end of v. 1 and identifies that gospel, authored and promised by God, with "his Son." The remainder of vv. 3–4 unpacks what it means to say that the gospel is about that Son, explicitly named at the end of v. 4 as "Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul may here employ an early creedal formula, although the extent, origin,

13. Romans 3:21 refers to "the law and the prophets," but that expression denotes sections of Scripture rather than its human agents (as also in Matt 5:17; Luke 16:16; Acts 13:15; 24:14). Note also Rom 16:26.

14. In Rom 11:3, however, Paul does cite 1 Kgs 19:10: "Lord, they have killed *your* prophets."

and function of the formula are by no means certain.[15] A number of expressions in these verses are not found elsewhere in Paul's undisputed letters: the identification of Jesus as David's offspring, the verb *horizein* ("publicly identified"), and the phrase *pneuma hagiōsynēs* ("spirit of God's own holiness"). Another unusual feature is the absence of reference to the death of Jesus, since Paul typically refers to Jesus's death when he summarizes the gospel (e.g., Rom 4:25; 1 Thess 4:14; 1 Cor 15:3–4). In addition, the parallel expressions are thought to reflect the careful composition characteristic of liturgical texts:

who came (*tou genomenou*)	considered physically (*kata sarka*)
who was publicly identified (*tou horisthentos*)	considered in terms of the spirit of God's own holiness (*kata pneuma hagiōsynēs*)

Paul may well be employing shared Christian language here, but the case for a pre-Pauline creedal formulation is not as strong as is often assumed. If Paul does not elsewhere connect Jesus with the Davidic line, he does identify him as a physical descendant of Israel (Rom 9:5; and see Gal 4:4). Paul does not elsewhere use the verb *horizein*, but he uses the closely related *proorizein* in Rom 8:29–30 (and see 1 Cor 2:7). And notice that there are unusual expressions also in v. 2 ("*his* prophets" and "in *holy* Scriptures"). That a word or phrase is distinctive (even that there are several such unusual expressions in the same passage) does not require the conclusion that it originates elsewhere.

Closer examination also reveals some flaws in the identification of "parallel" expressions. Both phrases open with the combination of genitive article plus participle ("who came"; "who was publicly identified"), but the second has "Son of God" as its object ("who was publicly identified as Son of God"), while the first has no noun complement. To be sure, there are parallel *kata* phrases, but they are not parallel in meaning (as discussion below will clarify). Instead of drawing on and perhaps modifying an earlier creedal formulation, Paul appears to be crafting a definition of the gospel, incorporating some expressions he anticipates will be familiar to the Roman congregations, and anticipating explication of the summary in vv. 16–17 and much more elaborately in the body of the letter to follow (Calhoun 2011, 85–142).

The summary opens with the assertion that God's Son "came from David's lineage, considered physically." As noted earlier, this is an unusual statement in the context of Paul's letters. David's name appears only two other times in the Pauline corpus (Rom 4:6; 11:9), and in both instances David appears as a speaker of Scripture rather than a progenitor. Specifics of Jesus's biography are likewise rare

15. On the formula, see Schlier 23–25, Dunn 1:5–6, Jewett 97–98, 103–4. The latter discussion summarizes the more extended review of the debate in Jewett 1985.

(Rom 9:5; Gal 4:4). Associating Jesus with the Davidic line is not at all unusual in other NT writings (e.g., Matt 1:6; Luke 1:27; John 7:42; 2 Tim 2:8; Rev 22:16), however, where it reflects a strand of Jewish expectation that God would send Israel a savior from the line of King David (as in Isa 11:1, 10; Jer 23:5–6; 33:14–18; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–28; Pss. Sol. 17.21; 4QFlor 1.10–13; 4QpGen^{a}49).

The parallel phrases concerning "flesh" ("physically" in my translation) and "spirit" prompt some interpreters to play these two phrases off against each another, understanding them as referring to the humanity and divinity of Jesus respectively (e.g., Calvin 15–16; Hodge 7). Occasionally, the further suggestion is made that the words "according to the flesh" carry a negative connotation (so Dunn 1:13). Yet Paul never elsewhere distinguishes between a human Jesus who lived and worked in Galilee and Judea and a divine Jesus who rose from the dead. Further, the suggestion that the two phrases have contrasting connotations assumes that *kata sarka* and *kata pneuma* function analogously to their use in Rom 8:4–5, where Paul contrasts living in a way that conforms to the flesh (i.e., merely human standards) with living in a way that conforms to the spirit (cf. Gal 5:16–21). But Romans 1 does not refer to human action or thought that is "fleshly" or "spiritual." Instead, the two phrases underscore and intensify what has already been said. That Jesus is from David's lineage already establishes that he is a biological descendant of David. The phrase *kata sarka* ("physically") intensifies the connection between Christ Jesus and the royal line of David, the line historically associated with God's eschatological intervention on Israel's behalf.

Verse 4 makes a second claim about Christ Jesus, one that extends the traditional promise about the royal offspring of David in a cosmic direction. Almost every word in this verse challenges interpreters, either because of inherent ambiguity (e.g., does "in power" modify the verb "identified" or the title "Son of God"?) or because of their distinctiveness in Paul's letters. Although some observations about individual expressions are necessary, the force of this statement only emerges by taking the whole of it into account, culminating as it does with the resurrection. Because of the emphasis on Jesus's descent from David in v. 3, it is understandable that interpreters have regarded the two statements as contrasting two ways of conveying Jesus's status (Augustine 59; Luther 5) or as indicating a change in Jesus's status. Verse 4 is then read as implying that the resurrection made Jesus into something "he was not before," or that he "took on a role which was not previously his" (Dunn 1:14). Yet a change of status ill fits with Paul's language elsewhere; as already noted, the letters do not distinguish between Jesus as a historical figure and Jesus following the resurrection. His discussion of the resurrection always has to do with the intrusion of God's power as a harbinger of God's final triumph (as in 1 Cor 15), not with some change in Jesus's status or role.[16] The reference to the exaltation of Jesus ("at

16. One possible exception appears in Phil 2:9–11, but that language is of exaltation rather than of resurrection.

God's right hand") in Rom 8:34 may provide a helpful clue to the interpretation of v. 4; that is, 1:4 also implies Jesus's triumphant accession to the right hand of God, awaiting the completion of God's cosmic triumph.

To summarize, vv. 3b and 4 are not in conflict with one another. Neither are they separable stages in Jesus's existence. Verse 4 interprets what the kingship of Jesus looks like, which is later developed in the "reign" of grace in 5:21 and in the reference to the kingdom of God in 14:17.

The verse's claim about the cosmic consequences of Jesus's resurrection opens with the phrase *tou horisthentos huiou theou*, "publicly identified as Son of God." Since Paul does not use *horizein* elsewhere, discerning the particular nuance of the verb becomes a challenge (although see the related *prohorizein* in 8:30). Luke uses it twice of Jesus, both times in kerygmatic speeches and both times closely connected with the resurrection (Acts 10:42; 17:31). There, as here, the implication seems to be that the resurrection demonstrates something about Jesus rather than that the resurrection brings about a change in Jesus. Consistent with that understanding, Chrysostom explains that the verb means "being shown, being manifested, being judged, being confessed" (*Hom. Rom.* 1.4; *NPNF*[1] 11.340).

One further indication that *tou horisthentos* implies no change of status or ontology (much less an early form of adoptionism) is that the title "Son of God" is already conveyed in the introduction (so Cranfield 1:58). By introducing this entire summary of the gospel with the phrase "about his Son" and concluding it with "Jesus Christ our Lord," Paul suggests that the formula has to do with what human beings are able to acknowledge about the gospel, rather than with stages in the development of Jesus Christ.

The public identification of Jesus Christ as God's Son is said to be *en dynamei*, "in power." It is grammatically possible that "in power" modifies the verb *horisthentos* (i.e., "identified powerfully" or "designated powerfully"), but the context requires that the phrase "in power" modifies "Son of God" rather than "identified." The question is not about the nature of the identifying act (whether or not it is powerful), but the identification of Jesus Christ's own power. What is asserted here is that Jesus is "Son of God in power." Language of power and discourses involving power figure importantly in Romans, where the question of who is really in charge of the cosmos is either in plain sight or just beneath the surface. In a few lines, Paul will identify the gospel with God's own power (1:16; and see 1:20; 9:17; 15:13, 19), a statement that sets the agenda for the entire letter. That Jesus Christ partakes of divine power proves crucial, since there are other powers that threaten to undermine humanity, seeking to separate humanity from its rightful Lord (8:38–39; Gaventa 2022c).

The two phrases that follow intensify the identification of Jesus as God's Son in power. My translation ("considered in terms of the spirit of God's own holiness") aims at the general sense of the terse literal expression "according to a spirit of holiness." The phrase *pneuma hagiōsynēs* has been found in only

two other places. In T. Levi 18.11 the phrase appears among the blessings that characterize humanity when redeemed from oppression. In an amulet from the second or third century CE, it refers to the divine glory or divine presence (Kotansky 1994, 126–54).

Without the term *pneuma* ("spirit"), the noun *hagiōsynēs* ("holiness") refers to God's own holiness in Pss 30:4 (29:5 LXX); 96:6 (95:6 LXX); 97:12 (96:12 LXX); and 144:5; otherwise it appears only in 2 Macc 3:12 in reference to the holiness of the temple. Given the frequency of language in the prescript that intensifies Paul's claims, "spirit of holiness" likely serves to emphasize the sacred character of this powerful Son of God. In that sense, it loosely parallels the emphatic function of the earlier *kata sarka* phrase in v. 3: just as Jesus Christ is genuinely from David's family line, he is also genuinely God's powerful Son.

In order to grasp the import of the phrase regarding holiness, it must be taken together with the one that follows: "at his resurrection from the dead." This holy, powerful Son of God is publicly identified as such from God's act in the resurrection. The expression *ex anastaseōs nekrōn* ("at the resurrection of the dead" [pl.]) occurs nowhere else in Paul. In 1 Cor 15, however, Paul several times employs the phrase "resurrection of the dead" (*anastaseōs nekrōn*) without the addition of the preposition (1 Cor 15:12, 13, 21, 42). Consistent with his usage there (and see Acts 26:23), Paul appears to have in mind not only the fact of Jesus's own resurrection, but Jesus's resurrection as the inauguration of the general resurrection that signals God's final triumph over all God's enemies (see Rom 8:38–39; 1 Cor 15:27–28). The Greek leaves unclear whether the preposition *ek* designates the time of the resurrection (i.e., since the time when it happened) or whether it designates the resurrection as the cause of Jesus's powerful and public identification (i.e., because it happened). Since time and cause are inextricable, however, I prefer "at" as a way of signaling the pivotal character of that occasion,

The summary culminates with the words "Jesus Christ our Lord," which stand in apposition to "his Son" at the beginning of v. 3. Together those two designations enclose the identifying expansions in vv. 3–4. That Jesus Christ is "our Lord" is axiomatic in Paul (Rom 4:24; 5:1, 11, 21; 7:25; 15:6; 16:20; and often elsewhere), yet its frequency does not suggest that it is mere formula, here or elsewhere. The affirmation that Jesus Christ descended from David as the fulfillment of promises and that Jesus Christ is God's powerful Son, sign of God's victory over Death itself, does not remove Jesus from human life; on the contrary, the affirmation acknowledges him as Lord of human life (as in Phil 2:5–11).

Taken as a whole, vv. 3b–4 constitute a terse and allusive summary of the gospel. Some of the phrases would be familiar to Roman Christians, who know of David and the work of the spirit and the resurrection. They could not, however, anticipate how Paul would develop these terms in the letter that follows.

[5–6] Although Paul now turns (or, perhaps more accurately, returns) to what he and others have received, Jesus Christ remains the actor in v. 5. Both "through whom," which links v. 5 with what precedes, and "we received" point away from human initiative and toward Christ. Since the opening words of v. 1 identify Paul alone as the writer of the letter (by contrast to Paul's other letters; e.g., 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:2; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:2; Phlm 1), it is striking that he shifts briefly to first-person plural, perhaps anticipating the plural "all" introduced and repeated in vv. 5, 7, and 8.

What "we received" is "grace and apostleship" (v. 5). "Grace" (*charis*) encompasses all that Paul has written since he introduced the expression "the gospel of God" in v. 1; all that God has done both in the past and particularly in the Son constitutes grace. Similarly, in 6:14–15 Paul will speak of people being "under grace," a shorthand way of referring to the grasp of the gospel, humanity as delivered from the tyranny of Sin and Death (see further below on v. 7). The extent to which this gift is made independent of human deserving is not yet clear, as it will become later in the letter.

"Apostleship" likewise reaches back to v. 1, explicitly recalling Paul's self-identification as "called to be an apostle." Interpreters regularly suggest that the words "grace" and "apostleship" comprise a hendiadys in v. 5, so that they constitute a single concept, "the grace of apostleship," instead of standing as coordinated nouns (e.g., Cranfield 1:65–66; Fitzmyer 237; although see Schlier 28). My translation distinguishes them, because apostleship is not the only manifestation of grace to which Paul has referred in these verses. Nevertheless, these are not distinct events for Paul; he cannot reflect first on the arrival of the gospel and then on his own vocation (see Gal 1:11–17; Phil 3:2–11). The calling to faith and the calling to apostleship are inseparable, just as the measuring out of faith and the distribution of gifts are inseparable (Rom 12:3, 6).

"Grace and apostleship," then, encapsulates vv. 1–4, but the phrase is more than recollection and celebration. It points ahead to the activity described in the remainder of the verse: "the obedience that comes from faith," "among all the gentiles," and "for the sake of his name." "The obedience that comes from faith" (*hypakoē pisteōs*) is a striking phrase, one that might be rendered "the obedience that springs from faith" or "the obedience which is faith" (Dunn 1:17–18; Fitzmyer 237; Moo 448–51). In Paul's letters *hypakoē* has less to do with conforming behavior to a specific command or set of commands or even a standard than it does with living in a way that is coherent with one's allegiance or location. The several instances of obedience language in Romans 6 bring this point to expression, as obedience is assumed to be coordinated with lordship, whether the lordship is that of Sin or that of God in the gospel (6:15–23). "The obedience that comes from faith," then, is behavior that reflects the realm of faith—not in an abstract sense of believing as opposed to doing, but faith, reliance, and trust in the gospel of Jesus Christ, from which conduct springs.

Paul's apostleship, therefore, involves cultivating this integrity of life in the realm of the gospel "among all the gentiles." Literally what Paul writes is "among all the nations," but the translation "gentiles" reflects the fact that this is a conventional Jewish designation for non-Jews (as in, e.g., Matt 6:32; Mark 10:42; Acts 11:1, 18). Paul's use of this "insider" term raises interesting questions about how it is heard by the Roman audiences that undoubtedly contain gentiles—indeed, likely a majority of gentiles (see the introduction and on 16:3–16). A number of these gentiles may be former "Godfearers" who are presumably familiar with this "outsider" label.[17] Galatians 1–2 explicitly identifies Paul's vocation with taking the gospel to the gentiles (see also Rom 15:16), however much that specification may collide with stories in Acts in which Paul repeatedly preaches in synagogues (e.g., 13:13–16; 14:1; 17:1–2, 17). The "all" deserves notice, since it returns in vv. 7 and 8, as well as often in the chapters that follow (e.g., Rom 2:1, 9, 10; 3:4, 9, 12, 19, 20, 22, 23). Paul is writing to a specific group of people who have been overtaken by the gospel of Jesus Christ, but the gospel is not for them alone.

"For the sake of his name" points to the doxological goal of apostleship. Not only is apostleship received as a gift from Jesus Christ ("through whom we received"), but it also returns to him. Paul's letters seldom refer to the "name" of anyone apart from God or Jesus (2:24; 9:17; 10:13; 15:9), a fact that is unsurprising in a context where the "name" somehow embodies the person, where Jesus's name itself conveys miraculous healing (as in Acts 3:6, 16) and is invoked at baptism (as in Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38; 10:48). Labor "for the sake [or on behalf] of his name," then, is not simply a matter of enhancing Jesus's honor or reputation but acknowledges the transcendent power of God (compare Phil 2:9–11). This is no trivial point in Romans, where withholding praise from God is a prime symptom of humanity's enslavement to Sin and Death and where the culmination of God's triumph is associated with praise of the name (15:9; see Gaventa 2008a).

Grammatically, v. 6 continues the identification of the letter writer, since "among whom you also are called" specifies the gentiles of v. 5, who are themselves recipients of the gospel for which Paul was set apart (v. 1). The transition to the letter recipients takes place only at the beginning of v. 7. Those who contend that the audience of the letter consists only of gentiles emphasize this phrase, but that notion overinterprets Paul's wording. The stress here falls on the end of the verse, with its emphatic "you also" identified as "called to belong to Jesus Christ." Paul understands that all Christians are such because

17. Despite controversy about whether the term "Godfearer" was employed in the first century, there seems little doubt that some gentiles in Rome frequented synagogues and identified themselves with Jewish life. On the attractiveness of Judaism in the city of Rome, see Barclay 1996b, 282–319.

of a summons from outside themselves; they do not so much "decide" as they are "decided upon" (see, e.g., 8:30; 1 Cor 1:9; 1 Thess 2:12).

[7] With v. 7 Paul turns at last to address the audience, which consists of "all of God's beloved who are in Rome." A glance at other prescripts reveals several distinctive features of this way of addressing the Romans. Paul does not refer to this audience with the word "assembly" or "church" (*ekklēsia*), as regularly in other greetings except in Phil 1:1; instead, he opens the prescript with "all" (*pasin*), which is not used in this way in other prescripts.[18] Although Paul frequently addresses his audiences as "beloved" or "my beloved" (e.g., Rom 12:19; 1 Cor 4:14; 2 Cor 7:1), only here does he identify an audience as "God's beloved." Concluding the identification of the Romans is the phrase "called to be holy people," reinforcing the call language of vv. 1 and 6 and once again the divine action of calling these holy people into being. The Romans do not become holy out of their own resources any more than Paul becomes an apostle by his own initiative.

Although brief by comparison with the preceding elements of the prescript, the distinctiveness of this identification of the addressees prompts some observations. The relative fullness of the identification may simply reflect the fact that Paul is unknown to these Christians and wishes to acknowledge, from the very beginning, his awareness of what God has done in their midst. Yet the absence of the word *ekklēsia*, coupled with the presence of *pas,* may hint at another feature of Christianity at Rome, namely, the existence of several gatherings instead of a single congregation (note the reference in 16:5 to the church in Prisca and Aquila's residence). Further, those gatherings may be divided in more than a geographical sense, so that the repetition of "all" serves rhetorically to draw them together.

The words that bring the prescript to a close, "grace and peace," appear in all of Paul's letters, replacing the term "greetings" (*chairein*), which was ubiquitous in ancient Greek letters (as in Acts 15:23; 23:26; Jas 1:1). Each word recurs importantly in the letter. Paul has already referred to the reception of grace, and grace emerges significantly in ch. 3, when Paul will explain how God's free action in the death of Jesus brings about the liberation of humanity. In chs. 5–6 Paul treats it as a metonym for God's action in Jesus (as in 5:20; 6:1, 14–15). Peace with God serves in 5:1 to signal humanity's release from hostile powers and restoration to the rightful lordship of God (and see 2:10; 8:6; 14:17, 19; 15:13). So important is peace that Paul names God "the God of peace" in the letter's closing lines (16:20). The grace and peace extended here to the congregations at Rome originate not with Paul but with God and Jesus Christ.

These opening verses play a highly conventional role in ancient letters. To say that the prescript merely identifies Paul as letter writer and some residents of

18. The word *pas* ("all") does appear in 1 Cor 1:2 and in 2 Cor 1:1, but the usage differs, since in those cases the word links believers in Corinth with those outside Corinth and does not refer to the Corinthians themselves.

the city of Rome as his audience would be a considerable distortion, however, since the prescript in Romans repeatedly points in the direction of God's initiative as the one who calls, who promises, and who sends. In other words, Paul is not locating his authority as apostle within himself but within the gospel. In the center of this prescript he includes a summary of the gospel, at least elements of which are familiar to the Roman auditors. Already in these lines the cosmic scope of the gospel comes into view: it is discerned in God's promise long ago, it extends to all the nations, and it concerns power, even to the extent of power that raises the dead.

1:8–12 The Thanksgiving

The letter opened with the ancient convention of the prescript, although in a protracted form, and convention continues with the thanksgiving. Most of Paul's letters include a thanksgiving, with the exceptions of 2 Corinthians, which employs the form of blessing instead, and Galatians, which notoriously omits the thanksgiving altogether. Curiously, the thanksgiving in Romans contains little detail about the addressees, as Paul moves quickly from a single statement about them (v. 8) to an extended statement of his long-standing desire to be with them (vv. 9–12; cf. 1 Cor 1:3–8 and Phil 1:3–11). What comes to expression here is Paul's concern for the well-being of the Romans in the gospel and his sense of responsibility before God for that well-being, rather than a recollection of the gifts or accomplishments of the audience.

Verse 8 clearly marks the opening of the thanksgiving, but identifying its conclusion is challenging because the statements that follow connect tightly with one another. Many analyses understand the thanksgiving to consist of vv. 8–15, with vv. 16–17 set apart as the introduction of the letter's theme (e.g., Käsemann 16–17; Jervis 1991, 89–90; Moo 31). Separating vv. 16–17 out as a distinct unit is highly problematic, however, since Paul's other letters do not begin with a thesis statement. More important, it is difficult to imagine that three statements connected only by the repeated word *gar* ("for" or "because") constitute an independent unit (see especially Holmstrand 1997, 14). Other analyses of Romans identify the thanksgiving and theme as a single unit that runs through v. 17, marking v. 18 as the beginning of the letter body (e.g., Stuhlmacher 14; Byrne 47–48). Yet the statement about God's wrath in v. 18 follows directly on the end of v. 17, resulting in parallel announcements of the revelation of God's righteousness and God's wrath; more to the point, it is hard to justify excluding vv. 16–17 from the body of the letter, and the content of v. 18 is scarcely satisfying as an introduction to the argument of the letter.

Rather than identify the unit as either vv. 8–15 or 8–17, I have marked its conclusion as v. 12 and identified v. 13 as opening the body of the letter. The body begins with a disclosure formula ("Now I do not want you to be uninformed . . .") similar to those appearing in 2 Cor 1:8 and Phil 1:12 (see further below on 1:13 as the introduction to the body of the letter). As in other

thanksgivings, Paul here hints at concerns he will address in the letter that follows (Schubert 1939, 24, 27). Those concerns include the faith of the Roman Christians, its implications for the whole world, and the strengthening required of all of them in anticipation of God's final triumph. When the body of the letter opens in vv. 13–17, Paul will return to these concerns more explicitly.

> **1:8** To begin with,[a] I thank my God through Jesus Christ concerning all of you, because your faith is announced in the whole world. **9** God is my witness—God whom I worship in my spirit, in the gospel of his Son—how I remember you constantly. **10** Always[b] in my prayers I plead that, if possible, now finally I might succeed, by God's will, in coming to you, **11** because I long to see you, so that I can share with you a spiritual gift for your strengthening. **12** What I mean is this: so that I can be comforted along with you through our mutual faith, both yours and mine.

a. Lit., *prōton men* is "first, on the one hand," suggesting that a series of points will be enumerated, but in this case no series follows. Instead, the usage in v. 8 is classical, meaning "from the very outset" or "of first importance" (BDF §232). Paul employs the same expression in Rom 3:2 and in 1 Cor 11:18.

b. *Pantote* ("always") may modify either "I plead," as in the translation above, or "I remember." The decision is insignificant, since Paul's pleading and calling to mind are one and the same action: he remembers them as he prays to be able to be with them. I have connected "always" to "I plead" simply because there is already an adverb of time in v. 9 modifying "I remember."

[1:8] Following the transitional phrase "to begin with" (*prōton men*), the opening words of the thanksgiving repeat exactly the thanksgivings of 1 Corinthians, Philippians, and Philemon: "I thank my God."[19] More than habit is at work here. The personal pronoun "my" reaffirms Paul's earlier claims of being bound to God (see on 1:1); it also introduces a series of such references: "my God," "my witness," "my spirit," "my prayers." This personal language stands alongside numerous second-person plurals: "all of you," "your faith," "remember you," "coming to you," "long to see you," "share with you," "your strengthening," "with you," "yours" (of faith).[20] Rhetorically Paul is beginning to draw the Roman auditors alongside himself as shared recipients of the gospel's power (1:16–17).

Paul thanks God "through Jesus Christ" (*dia*), using a phrase that compactly calls up the whole of God's actions in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This

19. 1 Thessalonians 1:2 is cast in the first-person plural: "We thank God . . ." Some roughly contemporaneous letters similarly begin with thanks to the gods; see 2 Macc 1:10–2:18; the First Letter of Apion (BGU II 423); P Lond. I 42; UPZ I 60,5–8; BGU XIV 2418, 2–10; SB VI 9017 Nr. 23,2; see Arzt 1994; Klauck 2006, 9–14, 267–70.

20. Jewett (117–18) notes the "carefully developed" "interplay" of personal pronouns in these lines.

is not only a mediatorial role (contra Dunn 1:28; Hultgren 63). Instead, God is thanked through the entire event of Jesus Christ. Similarly, Paul will later write: "in the same way grace might rule as king through righteousness . . . through Jesus Christ our Lord" (5:21). Jesus Christ is not simply an instrument of the workings of "grace" or "righteousness"; his death and resurrection becomes the event as a result of which grace and righteousness triumph over the powers of Sin and Death.[21]

The remainder of the verse tersely states the cause of Paul's thanksgiving. First, he gives thanks "concerning all of you." A phrase identical to this one opens the thanksgiving of 1 Thessalonians, and Phil 1:4 differs only in its preposition (*hyper* instead of *peri*). The presence of "all" here anticipates a significant thread in the letter. Paul has already written of "all the gentiles" (v. 5) and "all of God's beloved who are in Rome" (v. 7), and he will frequently in the letter refer to "all" people or "everyone" (as in, e.g., 2:9–10; 3:4, 9, 12, 19–23; 5:12, 18; 10:11–13; 11:32). Given the fragmentation of Roman Christians into multiple small gatherings separated not only by the realities of urban life but also perhaps by convictions and practices (see the introduction; 14:1–15:6), this repetition brings together rhetorically what is not together in fact.

Paul goes on to specify that their "faith is announced in the whole world." "Faith" (*pistis*) stands unqualified, leaving it unclear whether Paul refers simply to the fact of their faith or to some particular qualities or characteristics of their faith. The absence of such remarks indicates that Paul refers simply to the beginning of faith (as in "when we began to believe," 13:11) rather than to its quality, especially since other thanksgivings do remark on particular aspects of the community's faith (1 Cor 1:4–8; Phil 1:3–6; 1 Thess 1:2–5). (Verse 15 will underscore this possibility.)

The "entire world" (*en holō tō kosmō*) knows of faith at Rome. Here some hyperbole is involved, not unlike that of the evangelists who report that "all" of Jerusalem and Judea went out to be baptized by John the Baptist (Matt 3:5; Mark 1:5). In an earlier letter, Paul reports that "all" believers in the geographic regions of Macedonia and Achaia know about developments in Thessalonica (1 Thess 1:7), but here nothing less than the whole world is watching. In 1 Corinthians, the "world" sometimes carries negative connotations, characterized by corrupt epistemology and immorality (e.g., 1:20–21; 5:1), and it is to be avoided by believers (7:31; E. Adams 2000). In Romans, however, the "world" is the whole of humanity (as in 3:6, 19; 5:12–13; 11:12, 15).

More can be said, however. Paul might have referred to the whole of humanity with the term *oikoumenē*, which Luke uses in similar contexts. Caesar's census requires the participation of the whole *oikoumenē* (Luke 2:1; and

21. A similarly expanded notion of the phrase "through Jesus Christ" seems to be at work in Rom 7:25; Phil 1:1; 2 Cor 5:18 ("through Christ"); see also Rom 2:16; [16:27]; Gal 1:1; Phil 1:11.

see also, e.g., 4:5; 21:26; Acts 11:28). Josephus similarly identifies Cyrus as God's appointed king over the *oikoumenē* (*Ant.* 11.3) and the Romans as "lords of the *oikoumenē*" (*Ag. Ap.* 2.41; see also *Ant.* 19.193; *J.W.* 4.656). When Paul refers to the whole human population, however, he emphasizes not its existence under particular human rulers but its creation by God. At the outset of the letter body, he will contend that human beings knew of God from "the creation of the cosmos [*kosmos*]" (1:19–20). Abraham and his heirs receive the promise of inheriting the *kosmos* from the God who "calls into being that which does not exist" (4:13, 17; Gaventa 2011a, 266–69).

This claim about the widespread awareness of faith at Rome flatters the audience, to be sure, but this is more than an instance of *captatio benevolentiae*. Later in the letter Paul will contend that the faith of the gentiles plays a role in God's salvation of Israel (11:11–12); further, 15:22–24 and 30–32 seek the support of Roman Christians for Paul's reception in Jerusalem and his eventual work in Spain. What happens in Rome is important not primarily because of the power and status of this capital city, but because these communities may be a catalyst for Paul's work elsewhere, notably in Jerusalem and in Spain. The use of the verb *katangellō* ("announce") elsewhere reinforces this point, since in Paul's letters the gospel itself is the object of announcement (as in 1 Cor 2:1; 9:14; 11:26; Phil 1:17–18).

Formally, the thanksgiving continues through v. 12, but nothing more is said about the Romans themselves, as vv. 9–12 will turn to Paul's desire to be in Rome. The brevity of comment about Christians at Rome stands out in contrast with other letters. The Thessalonians, for example, Paul praises for their "work of faith and labor of love and endurance of hope" and for their mimetic reception of the gospel (1 Thess 1:3, 6), as well as for the way in which their own faith served as proclamation (1 Thess 1:7–10). Even the Corinthians, who later receive sharp reprimands, he initially praises for their spiritual gifts (1 Cor 1:4–8). The fact that Paul has not yet been to Rome does not altogether account for this relative brevity, since the greetings of 16:3–16 suggest at least some awareness of the constituency and the leadership of Roman congregations. To the contrary, if Paul's knowledge of Roman Christians is limited, it would seem all the more important to draw attention to their strengths by way of inaugurating the relationship and securing a sympathetic hearing for the letter that follows. Paul works to gain their favorable attention in other ways (the interweaving of personal pronouns noted above and the effusive claims of vv. 9–12 about his desire to be with them). The brevity of reference to Roman Christianity, alongside the absence of the term *ekklēsia* (see above on v. 7), may indicate that Paul has concerns he must introduce with some delicacy.

[9–10] As the subject shifts to Paul's ardent desire to be in Rome, the language intensifies. The reiteration of this longing in 15:22–24, where Paul announces his plan to go first to Jerusalem and then to Rome before traveling to Spain,

prompts the suspicion that he has some genuine concern about the situation at Rome. First, he solemnly calls upon God as witness to the statement that is to follow (Novenson 2022). By contrast with some other NT texts in which the notion of witnessing plays an important role (e.g., Acts 1:8; John 1:7, 19; Rev 1:5), Paul seldom uses the word *martys* ("witness"), and when he does it most often involves the witness of God regarding Paul's apostolic activity. Philippians 1:8, as here, concerns Paul's desire to be in Philippi (similarly 2 Cor 1:23). First Thessalonians 2:5 and 10 invoke God's corroboration of the integrity of the work Paul and his colleagues carried out in Thessalonica.[22]

Paul amplifies his claim about God's witness with an unusual addition characterizing God as the one "I worship [*latreuō*] in my spirit, in the gospel of his Son." The verb *latreuō* conveys something more specific than the rather vague translation "serve" found in NRSVue, NIV, NASB, and elsewhere. In a range of texts it specifically refers to liturgical service.[23] In addition, in 15:16 Paul describes himself as a priestly servant (*leitourgos*) of Christ Jesus. Such language scarcely restricts Paul's role; on the contrary, it interprets his apostolic labor as a kind of worship.

Yet worship is not simply an apostolic function; it pertains to all human beings. The question of who or what is worshiped returns powerfully later in this chapter, where Paul castigates humanity for its service of things that are created instead of serving the Creator (again *latreuō,* 1:25). And in 12:1 he urges the reasonable service (*latreia*) of God (see also 9:4; 15:27). In those instances, as with the self-reference here, worship has to do with the reverence for God that expresses itself in right conduct, and with right conduct that reflects genuine reverence for God (see further on 1:18–32 and 12:1–2).

Two brief prepositional phrases further identify this worship. It is both "in my spirit" and "in the gospel of his Son." Elsewhere Paul speaks of those "[who] are the circumcision, *who serve God in spirit* and have confidence in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:3), but the addition of "my" is distinctive to Rom 1:9. The fact that Paul has just in the preceding lines offered thanks to "my God" and called on God as "my witness," and that he will next refer to "my prayers" and "my faith," at least raises the possibility that "my" here largely serves to underscore the importance of the utterance.

Paul's service is also "in the gospel of his Son," a qualifying phrase that recalls once again the opening words of the letter and their relentless focus on Paul's obligation to the gospel (and see vv. 14–15 below). Because the phrase does not introduce anything new by way of content, its presence is largely for

22. Only in 2 Cor 13:1 is there a "witness" other than God, and that occurs in a citation from Deut 19:15.

23. E.g., Exod 3:12; Deut 10:12; Matt 4:10; Luke 2:37; Heb 9:9; Rev 7:15; Philo, *Migration* 132; Plutarch, *Mor.* 405C.

emphasis. It reveals just how seriously Paul takes the assertion he is about to make regarding his prayers to be in Rome. The significance of prayer for Paul's work he reiterates at the end of the letter, when he asks the Romans to "contend along with" him in prayer for his rescue and the reception of the collection in Jerusalem ("my ministry/service," 15:30–31).

With the remainder of vv. 9–10, Paul reaches the assertions he has been anticipating by his invocation of God: he constantly remembers the Romans in prayer. Specifically, he always prays that he may finally succeed in reaching them. The language of unceasing memory and prayer recalls Phil 1:3–4 and 1 Thess 1:2–3. What follows in v. 10 is a bit awkward syntactically, since it combines two idioms, *ei pōs* ("if possible" or "perhaps") with *ēdē pote* ("now finally" or "now at length"). The additional stipulation that Paul's travel plans rest on the will of God clarifies the reason for uncertainty: Paul is not in charge of his own apostolic agenda. Elsewhere he stipulates that Satan interfered with his travel plans (1 Thess 2:18), or that he reconsidered them because of difficulties (2 Cor 2:1), but here God's will alone is cited. Since Paul returns in chapter 15 to his desire to be in Rome and there outlines his plans in more detail, it is easy to imagine that he has been criticized for not having already traveled to this capital of the *kosmos*. Nonetheless, even with the relative ease of travel in the Roman Empire, a journey of this sort was not undertaken lightly, and it is somewhat difficult to understand why Roman Christians would think Paul obligated to make them a travel priority. (Indeed, it may be that some of them did not imagine themselves in need of instruction from Paul or anyone else.) This emphasis on his desire to be in Rome may not so much sound an apologetic note as underscore Rome's importance for the next stage of Paul's labor.

[11–12] The thanksgiving concludes with an explanation of Paul's hope for his time in Rome, first stated in terms of what he hopes to bestow (v. 11), and then in terms of what he hopes he and the Roman Christians might share with one another (v. 12). Because v. 12 begins with *touto de estin* ("what I mean is this"), it can be read as a correction of v. 11, even a sort of embarrassed reformulation, which Paul hastily offers for fear of being perceived as overbearing or presumptuous (so, e.g., Dunn 1:35). That interpretation does not consider the probability that Paul's letter, dictated to Tertius (16:22), was almost certainly corrected and copied at least once (Richards 2004, 25, 31, 43, 55–56, 82–84) before it was handed over to Phoebe, the bearer and reader of the letter. Had Paul seriously regarded v. 11 as a kind of misstep, he would have recast it, particularly given the importance he attaches to the letter and the delicacy of his situation. He does not have the sort of relationship with Roman congregations that allows for mid-course correction.

If v. 11 is not a diplomatic mistake corrected by v. 12, then how do these two statements stand in relation to each another? Verse 11 opens by repeating Paul's

desire to see the Romans, then offering as his reason that he wants to share a "spiritual gift" for their strengthening. Elsewhere in the letters such gifts (*charismata*) are depicted as being bestowed by God (e.g., Rom 6:23; 11:29; 12:6; 1 Cor 1:7); sharing here is scarcely a unilateral act in which Paul of his own will grants the Romans something they do not have. Instead, his sharing with them in a "spiritual gift" that is divinely granted contributes to their strengthening. Verse 12 amplifies this point, making it clear that in this way all of them, both Paul and the Romans, are comforted, but here the emphasis falls on what they have in common. The difficulty Paul faces is not anxiety about maintaining his own authority (contra Käsemann 19); the difficulty is that circumstances make it impossible for him to indicate further what his relationship is to these groups of believers.

The spiritual gift Paul anticipates is not specified, but the goal of that gift is named: it is their strengthening, their establishment. Isolated from its context, such strengthening would be a reference to internal life, either that of the individuals or that of the community. That connotation is not to be excluded, but it needs to be contextualized in light of the cosmic horizon of this letter. The verb *stērizō* ("strengthen") appears in a variety of early Christian texts concerned with the standing of believers in the face of eschatological conflict. As early as 1 Thess 3:2, Timothy's assignment in Thessalonica is to "strengthen" (*stērizō*) Christians against the likelihood of tribulation and the activity of the "tempter" (*ho peirazōn*, 3:5) in anticipation of the *parousia* (3:11–13). Second Thessalonians 3:3 similarly invokes the role of "the Lord" in strengthening (*stērizein*) believers and guarding them against "the evil one." The eschatological context for "strengthening" is explicit in Jas 5:8 and Rev 3:2. This eschatological concern recurs importantly in Rom 1:16 with Paul's claim about not being "ashamed" over the gospel, later in 8:31–39 with reassurance about God's protective role in the face of the powers that wish to separate humanity from its rightful Lord, and finally in 16:20 with the concluding declaration that God will crush Satan.

The language of 1:8–12, with its emphasis on God as witness, God's will, human faith, and the gospel, signals what lies ahead in this letter. Although not a systematic theology or dogmatics, Romans is nonetheless an explication of God's action in the gospel on behalf of the world. The energy with which Paul declares his desire to be in Rome further suggests that he regards this enlarged understanding of the gospel to be an urgent need at Rome where (as we shall see) the gospel has been reduced to gentile inclusion, even gentile inclusion at the expense of Jews.

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