

*“Welcome One Another  
Just as Christ Has Welcomed You”*

Diocese of West Texas, Fall 2009

Study and Reflection Session 1

“The Gospel is the Power of God for Salvation”

(Rom 1:1-17)

*The Passage: New Revised Standard Version Translation*

NRSV Romans 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

7 To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. 9 For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, 10 asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – 12 or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I

have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish 15 – hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

### *A Translation for Study, with Commentary*

**Romans 1:1 Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel [*euangelion*] of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh [*kata sarka*] 4 and was designated to be son of God with power [*dynamis*] according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faithfulness [*pistis*] among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,**

**7 To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be holy ones [*hagios*]:**

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

*In the opening paragraph (1:5-6), Paul writes both to Gentiles (or, “nations,” which is the same word in Greek) and Jews (“to all God’s beloved in Rome” in 1:7 incorporates a phrase that Paul uses later to describe God’s view of Jews in 11:28). This sets a tone for the entire letter, which will be a defense of God’s impartiality toward both Jews and Gentiles alike and an extended exhortation for both groups to live in harmony in the same community as united followers of Jesus.*

*In 1:1 Paul provides an introduction, characterizing himself as a “slave of Jesus Christ” (see also 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1). In calling Jesus the “Christ,” he acknowledges him as the Jewish messiah (“Christos” is the Greek word for messiah). In calling himself a “slave,” Paul acknowledges the first-century point of view that every human being lives in service to some greater power, whether to God in Christ or to worldly powers such as Death, Sin, Flesh, etc. The way a person acts signifies the power to whom that person is enslaved. Here, Paul affirms that he submits himself to Jesus as the Lord who directs his life. He also calls himself an “apostle,” a role derived from the Greek word apostolos, meaning one who is sent on a mission as an agent representing the sender. As one “set apart for the gospel of God,” Paul imagines himself as a Jewish prophet set apart and sent by God “to gospel” to the Gentiles (see also Gal 1:13-16). The verb “to gospel” will be discussed below.*

*In this opening section of the letter, Paul introduces two different, but associated Greek words that are common throughout his authentic letters. He uses both the noun euangelion (Rom 1:1, 9, 16; often translated as “gospel” or “good news”) and the related verb euangelizomai (1:15; often translated as “proclaim the gospel” or “preach the gospel”). In this letter, the “gospel” or “good news” describes what God has done through God’s “son” in three ways.*

*First, the son was descended from David “according to the flesh” (Grk. kata sarka), a phrase Paul will use in this letter to denote either a literal human lineage, as here, or a pattern of behavior that conforms to the world’s standards rather than God’s as revealed in Jesus (see, for example, Rom 8:4, 5). Paul’s claim that Jesus is descended from the great Jewish King David will authenticate his messianic status for the Jewish Christians in the Roman churches.*

*Second, the “good news” is that, through God’s “power” [Grk. dynamis, from which we derive the word “dynamite” or “dynamic”], God “designated” Jesus to be God’s “son” by raising Jesus from the dead (Rom 1:4). It is important to focus on what Paul says and does not say here. Paul does not present Jesus as the pre-existent, divine one who is sent into the world and will be worshiped as part of the eternal, Triune God in later centuries. Nor does he emphasize the “crucified Christ” or the “cross” that is so central to Paul’s understanding of the gospel as it*

is presented in his other authentic letters (see, for example, 1 Cor 1:18; 2:1-5; 2 Cor 13:4; Gal 2:19-20; 3:1; 6:14; Phil 2:8; 3:18). Rather, Jesus is simply designated as God's "son" after his death, when he is raised from the dead through a divine act – an exercise of God's creative and life-giving power.

Third, the "good news" is that, through the risen Christ, Paul, too, has received grace and apostleship (he is one who is "sent" by the risen Lord) to bring about the "obedience of faithfulness (*pistis*) among all the Gentiles" (Rom 1:5). The Greek word *pistis* is most frequently translated as "faith" in Paul's letters, but it can also be rendered in English as "faithfulness," "belief," "trust," or "confidence." As we will see in our next Study and Reflection Session 2, for Paul it is the "faith" or "faithfulness" of Jesus Christ (rather than "faith in Jesus Christ") that has become the means by which God is revealing God's "justice" (or, "righteousness") in the world (see Rom 3:22, 26; compare Phil 2:6-11). By raising from the dead the faithful, obedient Jesus – a crucified criminal cursed under the Jewish law (see Gal 3:13) – God demonstrated God's power in a way that shows God's "justice" to the world. Thus, the "obedience of faithfulness" that is the focus of Rom 1:5 should be understood as the obedience of the Gentile followers of Jesus, patterned on the obedience and faithfulness of Jesus himself. "Faithfulness" on the part of Jesus' followers becomes the means of their access to that same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead and brings them newness of life.

As we will hear later in the letter, as an apostle sent by God, Paul proclaims this "good news" by words and deeds (see Rom 15:18). Thus, for Paul, the verb *euangelizomai* (more accurately translated "to gospel") signifies the words and actions by which he makes the "good news" known to his audiences (compare Gal 1:16; 3:1; 1 Cor 2:2; 11:1; Phil 1:20). .

**8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faithfulness [*pistis*] is proclaimed throughout the world. 9 For God, whom I serve [*latreuō*] with my spirit in the gospel of his son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, 10 asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual [*pneumatikon*] power for new life [*charisma*] to strengthen you**

– 12 or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged through one another's faithfulness [*pistis*], both yours and mine. 13 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been hindered), in order that I may reap some fruit [*karpos*] among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish 15 – hence my eagerness to gospel [*euangelizomai*] to you, who are in Rome.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel [*euangelion*]; it is the power [*dynamis*] of God for salvation to everyone who is faithful [*pisteuō*], to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it [the gospel] the justice [*dikaïosynē*] of God is being revealed [*apokalyptō*] from faithfulness [out of *pistis*] for faithfulness [into *pistis*]; as it is written, “The one who is just [*dikaïos*] will live from faithfulness [*ek pistis*].”

*Paul “serves” or “worships” God (the Greek word latrueō can mean either) “in” the gospel of Christ. The Greek latrueō is a cultic word. In the “worship” of the synagogue, everyone participated from time to time, whether by reading and interpreting scripture or some other offering. Thus, the verb latrueō embraces both “worship” and “service.” This is another way of saying that Paul “gospels” Christ – he makes Christ known – through words and actions. Later, in Rom 12:1, Paul will call on all the Roman Christians to offer their bodies as a sacrifice – living, holy and well-pleasing to God – which is their reasoned “service” or “worship” (Grk. latreia, the noun form of the verb latrueō).*

*In Rom 1:15, Paul describes his eagerness “to gospel” (Grk. euangelizomai) to the believers in Rome, something he does not only through his words, but through his actions. His anticipated visit to Rome will provide him the opportunity to demonstrate to the believers in the house churches his own “obedience of faithfulness” – his embodied interpretation of the “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” in the circumstances of his own life (see Gal 2:19-20; compare 1 Cor 4:16-17).*

*In this regard, in 1:11 we encounter two more important words in Paul's theological, experiential vocabulary. He hopes to come to Rome to share with them some "spiritual" (Grk. pneumatikon) experience of "power for new life" (Grk. charisma). Rooted in the Greek word charis, usually translated as "grace" throughout Paul's letters, the Greek word charisma is customarily translated as "gift," "spiritual gift" or "free gift." We suggest, however, that when charis is translated simply as "grace" it misses the full force that Paul intends the word to convey. More specifically, charis signifies God's life-giving power – a power that brings newness of life to followers of Jesus. It is the same divine power that raised Jesus from the dead, bringing him newness of life in the most radical way possible.*

*Similarly, then, charisma refers to a specific event or experience of God's charis that becomes visible in the life of the Christian community. God's "grace" (charis), understood as the outpouring of God's power for newness of life, and the experience of that "grace" as an experience of power for newness of life (charisma), are indeed "gifts" from God. They are freely given by God. But, more importantly, a charisma is an experience shared by the community when God acts powerfully and effectively on earth through a person's faithfulness as he or she embodies Jesus Christ in the world. When Paul visits the Romans, he will "share" with them an experience of God's power for new life that they will encounter through Paul's faithfulness. Similarly, since the faithfulness of the Romans is also known throughout the world (1:8), Paul makes it clear in Rom 1:11-12 that he and they will be mutually encouraged through their reciprocal acts of faithfulness when they are together.*

*Later, in Rom 12:1-8, Paul builds on the theme introduced here by telling the Romans that even though there is only one body, the members of that body have many different practices. And by means of these different practices – such as teaching, prophecy, encouragement, leadership, etc. – God's power for newness of life is manifestly poured out into the world and experienced by the community (see also 1 Cor 12:4-7). This is a "spiritual" experience (pneumatikon), says Paul in Rom 1:11, because the Spirit is the divine agent that reveals to the community what is happening in their midst for their common good (see 1 Cor 2:6-12; 12:4-7).*

Finally, in Rom 1:16-17, we arrive at what has often been called the “thesis statement” of the letter. The connecting word “for” links these two crucial verses with the preceding one, where Paul states his eagerness “to gospel” the Christians in Rome. Paul says he is “not ashamed of the gospel” that he proclaims to Gentiles (are some suggesting he should be?). Some Jewish followers of Jesus (maybe even in Rome) often complained that Paul did not require Gentile followers of Jesus to obey the Jewish law (Torah) or Gentile males to be circumcised as a sign of covenant obedience to God. Instead, Paul says here, the gospel is “the power (Grk. *dynamis*) of God for salvation to everyone who is faithful” (Grk. *pisteuō*). The Greek verb *pisteuō* is often translated as “to believe.” It can also mean “to have faith,” “to trust,” or “to have confidence in.” It is related to the noun *pistis* (“faith” or “faithfulness”) we discussed above and the adjective *pistos*, meaning “faithful,” “believing,” or “trusting.” Understanding the range of semantic possibilities for this word group is important for understanding Romans (and other letters of Paul, for that matter). In English, however, there is a significant difference between someone who is “faithful” through their actions and someone who is “believing” (Grieb, 11). There is no such distinction conveyed by the Greek verb *pisteuō*. Thus, to acknowledge the intimate connection between belief and practice communicated by the verb *pisteuō*, we have translated 1:16 as follows: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who is faithful, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Notice that Paul does not talk about the “gospel” or “good news” as a **message about** God’s power or **information about** Jesus. Rather, it is an **event or experience** of God’s power that brings new life. This newness of life – whether it be resurrection from the dead, as in the case of Jesus, or the newness of life experienced by his earthly followers in their community life together – is the essence of “salvation” as Paul understands it. For Paul, salvation is a social and community reality rather than an individual one. It represents the experience of eternal life, whether in its fullest, resurrected form after physical death, or in its temporary and incomplete earthly form, after metaphorical “death” with Christ in baptism (see Rom 6:1-11, discussed in Study and Reflection Session 5). Equally important, this salvation experienced through the power of God in the gospel is for

*Jews and Greeks alike – anyone who “believes” by putting their faith or confidence in the power of God for new life and acting faithfully (see also 1 Cor 2:5).*

*According to 1:17, what is being revealed (apokalyptō) “in the gospel” is the “justice” (Grk. dikaiosynē) of God. The Greek verb apokalyptō refers to something once hidden that is now being seen and experienced in the world. The verb is in the present tense in 1:16, suggesting that God’s justice is being disclosed each time an event or experience of God’s power (i.e. the “gospel”) takes place. The Greek word dikaiosynē has many different aspects to its meaning. Paul uses the word here to characterize a virtue or attribute of God. God is “just” in God’s relationship with humanity. God shows no partiality in judging humans – whether Jews or Gentiles (see Rom 3:9, 22-23). In this context in Rom 1:17, Luke Timothy Johnson helpfully suggests that the “righteousness of God”(what we are translating the “justice of God”) is “God’s will to ‘do justice’ on the earth by intervening actively in human affairs to establish right relationships where they do not yet exist because of human sin or folly.” (Johnson, 28). In other words, doing justice is a central component of “righteousness” in the eyes of God. Consequently, throughout the rest of this study of Romans, we will interchange “justice” and “righteousness” as equally applicable translations of dikaiosynē.*

*Finally, each time the gospel takes place as an event or experience of God’s power, the “justice” (or “righteousness”) of God is revealed “from faithfulness for faithfulness.” What Paul means is this: God’s “faithfulness” to humanity was revealed when God raised the “faithful” Jesus from the dead. God thereby affirmed the obedient pattern of life lived by the faithful human being named Jesus (see also Phil 2:6-11). It is what God did with the “faithfulness of Jesus Christ,” in raising him from the dead, that enables other Jews and Gentiles to have confidence in responding to God through the same faithful and obedient pattern of Jesus’ life. This, in turn, leads to their experience of the gospel – the power of God for salvation – i.e. the power of God for new life.*

*Paul grounds this interpretation of the gospel in scripture, citing the prophet Habakkuk (2:4): “The one who is just (or, “righteous”) will live from faithfulness*

("out of pistis")." *The Greek version of Habakkuk 2:4 in the Bible used by Paul (called the Septuagint) reads "the just (or "righteous") one will live from **my** faithfulness," referring to God as the source of human life. The Hebrew version (called the Masoretic text) of the same passage reads "the just (or "righteous") one shall live by **his** faithfulness," referring to the actor's faithfulness. We will never know whether Paul intentionally created this ambiguity by leaving out the pronouns "my" and "his" entirely! If he did, however, what he seems to be saying in his interpretation of Hab 2:4 is that the just one will "live" through the faithfulness of God **and** the faithfulness of the believer. This conclusion follows from Paul's insistence that the faithfulness of the human Jesus was affirmed when the faithful God raised him from the dead. Similarly, any human who truly places their confidence in the power of God will experience new life for themselves by entrusting themselves, body and soul, to a faithful embodiment of the pattern of living revealed in Jesus Christ.*

### *Questions for Reflection*

1. Paul calls himself a "slave of Jesus Christ," as a way of talking about how Christ is Lord of his life. Slavery does not have life-giving connotations in our time, so how would you try to explain to a non-believer how it is that Jesus is Lord of your life? What is the effect of Jesus' Lordship on your daily life?
2. Identify some recent, specific aspects of your congregation's faithfulness that you think should be proclaimed throughout your world. What is it about such action that leads you to conclude that the specific things done were faithful? Identify some recent, specific aspects of *another* congregation's faithfulness that are being "proclaimed." Why do you

recognize these actions as faithful? Why might it be important to recognize the actions of *others* that might appear to be faithful, even if they are actions that *you* would *not* take?

3. Tell the story of a recent event or experience that Paul would call a “gospel” moment, when the power of God that brings newness of life was revealed?
4. Can you tell a story about a recent time when you or someone you know “gospelled” Christ by words and/or deeds? Be specific!
5. What is the difference between “faith” and “faithfulness”? Do you find the translation of the Greek noun *pistis* as both “faithfulness” and “faith” to be a helpful one for you? If so, why? If not, why not?
6. Describe a recent event or experience when you and someone else were mutually encouraged by one another’s acts of Christian faithfulness. Be specific!