Romans 1

Paul and the Gospel of God

Romans 1

Paul and the Gospel of God

(Sample)

Black

Published by LitExplorers.au

Scripture quotations in Greek are from Aland, K. et al. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.

Version: 3.6.0
Compiled on Mon 26 Jan.

Contents

Introduction

Rhetoric

What is rhetoric?

The Lexham Bible Dictionary introduces "Rhetoric" as: *"The art of composing an oral or written presentation by using style, argumentation, and arrangement of language to persuade an audience to a particular inclination... In present-day English, the word 'rhetoric' often carries the negative connotation of empty words, biased agendas, and propaganda. In the Graeco-Roman world, however, where the oral word carried great authority, rhetoric was a respected and honoured ability that public speakers cultivated and audiences cherished."*

Classical rhetoric began with *ethos*—expression to establish authority, trustworthiness and shared values.

(See the Discussion on Classical Rhetoric.)

Author

The letter to the Romans is from Paul.

Paul (Saul) had been a Pharisee. (See A Pharisee.)

As a Pharisee he had been a "separated one".

(See also the Discussion on Paul.)

Location

Assume that Paul writes from the region of Greece during his "third missionary journey".

His circumstances correspond with Acts 20:2-3 (ESV), *"When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia."*

Assume that Paul writes from Greece, possibly Corinth (Cenchreae), during this three-month period.

(See also the Discussion on Paul's Location and Mission.)

As Though Agrippa

In the introduction of the letter, Paul echoes the Roman historical figure Marcus Agrippa.

Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa (c. 63 B.C.–12 B.C.) was a naval commander and a friend since youth of Octavian.

Paul alludes to Agrippa during a corresponding occasion in Roman history, c. 30 B.C..

(See also the Roman Context and Story section on Marcus Agrippa.)

The Corresponding Occasion

Paul is as though Agrippa *after* The Battle of Actium and *before* Octavian's Triple Triumph in Rome.

On the 2nd September, 31 B.C., Julius Caesar's adopted heir Octavian confronted Antony and Cleopatra in the Battle of Actium. The naval battle represented the climax of more than a decade of escalating tensions and propaganda, in which Octavian (Caesar) was depicted as the defender of Roman tradition and values, and Mark Antony as having been bewitched by the Egyptian Queen and her strange gods. Marcus Agrippa was the naval commander in the foundational victory for Octavian.

It would be almost two years before Octavian's triumph in Rome, which was not until mid-August, 29 B.C..

(See also the Roman Context and Story, A Roman Story of Apostleship below.)

Tensions in Italy

Despite the outcome of the battle there were ongoing tensions in Italy.

The tensions were heightened by the situation of the returning veterans gathered at Brundisium.

The veterans wanted demobilisation, and that meant land.

(See also Rome, the Contested Dynamic below.)

Sent to Italy

Soon following Actium, Octavian sent Agrippa to Italy to deal with the tensions. (Octavian soon also arrived, yet proceeded no further than Brundisium.)

Paul writes as though Agrippa having already been sent to Italy, and having then departed.

The Corresponding Audience

For the moment, the reader may wish to entertain a corresponding audience—that Paul, as though Agrippa, is writing to *all* in Rome.

The ongoing tensions had concerned the troops, the elite, and the Roman populace.

Main Interpretation

1:1-7 — The Salutation

Overview

Paul introduces himself as though Marcus Agrippa.

As he summarises the gospel, he:

- calls to mind king David's adulterous affair (of 2 Sam 11); and
- seems to boast about *his* having personally installed Jesus Christ into power!

Then with prompt word of apostleship and with Rome within the scope of apostleship, he addresses Rome with—

"… grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Roman Context Overview

Paul writes As Though Agrippa from Greece, possibly the eastern port of Corinth (Cenchreae).

It is after the Battle of Actium of 31 B.C. and before Octavian's triple triumph in Rome.

Despite the outcome of the battle there were Tensions in Italy. Paul writes as though Agrippa having already been sent to Italy and having then departed.

(See the Introduction above.)

1:1a

Paul the servant of Christ Jesus,

Paul introduces himself as the servant of the Christ (Messiah), Jesus.

Notes

The opening words could have been heard as: "A small Roman slave of the Messiah, Jesus." (See also the Additional Notes, A slave.)

1:1b

the called apostle having been set apart for the gospel of God,

Paul introduces himself further.

Marcus Agrippa was *the* Roman "apostle". As though Agrippa, the called apostle would evoke Graeco-Roman notions of divine favour, fate or appointment by a higher authority.

As Octavian's deputy, Agrippa could furthermore have described himself as having been set apart—in the sense of distinguished—culminating in his wearing the naval crown in the Battle of Actium. As the naval "apostle" in the famed battle, Marcus Agrippa had featured within the gospel of Rome. Agrippa was, in a literal sense, into—personally featured within the content of—the gospel of ancient Rome.

Except, Paul is presently referring to the gospel of God.

Roman Context

Octavian had already *"summoned"* Marcus Agrippa to Italy. (See the Introduction, Tensions in Italy, Sent to Italy, above.)

The opening clause then suggests more about The Corresponding Occasion. Octavian may have then furthermore *"separated"* Agrippa:

- *"because of"* opposition to *"the gospel"* (opposition that may have *"excluded"* both Octavian and Agrippa), and
- *"for"* the ongoing labour of *"the gospel"* in the eastern Mediterranean.

Discussion

The opening clause also functions as a riddle. (See the Discussion on Paul's Having Been Separated, below.)

Roman Context and Story

Note: Text with a light blue background, such as this example, were generated by Grok, an AI developed by xAI.

A Contextual Understanding of Apostleship

The Ancient Word "Apostle"

The ancient Greek word "ἀπόστολος" (apostolos), translated "apostle", could denote a fleet and the commander of the fleet.

Consider for instance:

- The Liddell & Scott lexicon has "ἀπόστολος" as equivalent to *"στόλος, a fleet ready for sea, a naval squadron or expedition"*.[1]

- J.B. Lightfoot writes, *"The word ἀπόστολος in the first instance is an adjective signifying 'despatched' or 'sent forth...'"* He continues, *"... Its special sense denoting 'a naval expedition, a fleet despatched on foreign service,' seems to have entirely superseded every other meaning in the Attic dialect; and in the classical Greek of a later period also, except in this sense, the word appears to be of very rare occurrence."*[2]

- The Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich (BDAG) lexicon reveals that the Greek term "ἀπόστολος" initially denoted a naval expedition or potentially the commander of such in classical Greek literature, as evidenced by its use by Lysias in the 5th-4th century BC and Demosthenes in the 4th century BC. This maritime context persists in later periods, with references by Posidonius in the 2nd-1st century BC and Strabo around the turn of the era, indicating that the seafaring or expeditionary sense of "ἀπόστολος" was well-established and continued to be relevant well into the 1st century AD.[3]

- The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT) further corroborates the maritime roots of "ἀπόστολος," highlighting its initial role as an adjective linked to ships prepared for voyage, as noted by Plato. Over time, "ἀπόστολος" not only signified the vessel or fleet itself but also extended to describe military expeditions and the leaders of these naval ventures, like admirals, illustrating its integral connection to ancient Greek naval terminology.[4]

---

[1]Per the second definition in Liddell and Scott (*A Greek-English lexicon*, p. 200). See also the detail on "στόλος" (stolos). (ibid., p. 1433)

[2]Lightfoot (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: A revised text with introduction, notes, and dissertations.* The name and office of an Apostle). For the complete opening paragraph, see the Additional Notes.

[3]Per Arndt et al. (*BDAG*, p. 122) *"ἀπόστολος, ου, ὁ (s. ἀποστέλλω). In older Gk. (Lysias, Demosth.) and later (e.g. Posidon.: 87 Fgm. 53 p. 257, 21 Jac. [Strabo 3, 5, 5]) ὁ ἀ. is a naval expedition, prob. also its commander (Anecd. Gr. 217, 26)."*

[4]See Kittel and Friedrich, *TDNT*, Vol. I, 407.

A Meaning Forefront to Romans 1

Granted Paul's allusion to Marcus Agrippa (see the Discussion on The Poetic Sequence below), then the ancient Greek naval sense of "apostle" and "apostleship" is forefront to the introduction of the letter to the Romans.

And since Agrippa had epitomised the "apostle" identity and role in the public sphere as *the* Roman "apostle", then Agrippa's example as "apostle" is forefront to the introduction of the letter.

Marcus Agrippa

Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa stands as one of the most pivotal figures in the transformation of Rome from a republic to an empire, a man whose contributions to the rise of Augustus and the stability of the Roman state were both profound and enduring. Born in 63 BCE, Agrippa emerged from modest origins to become the indispensable ally of Octavian, later known as Augustus, Rome's first emperor. His life, as detailed in F.A. Wright's *Marcus Agrippa: Organizer of Victory*, exemplifies a rare blend of military prowess, administrative genius, and unwavering loyalty, qualities that cemented his legacy as a cornerstone of the Augustan era. While Octavian's name dominates the narrative of Rome's imperial founding, Agrippa's role as the architect of many of its successes—military, political, and cultural—cannot be overstated. His ability to operate effectively behind the scenes, coupled with his public prominence, made him a unique figure in Roman history, embodying the practical and strategic underpinnings of the new imperial order.

Agrippa's significance lies not only in his achievements but also in his embodiment of the Roman virtues of discipline, duty, and pragmatism. Unlike many of his contemporaries, whose ambitions often led to rivalry and betrayal, Agrippa remained steadfastly loyal to Octavian, serving as his trusted lieutenant through the turbulent years of civil war and the consolidation of power that followed. His contributions spanned multiple domains: as a general, he secured critical victories, most notably at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, which decisively shifted the balance of power in Octavian's favor; as an administrator, he reshaped Rome's urban landscape with monumental building projects like the Pantheon and the Aqua Virgo; and as a diplomat, he helped stabilize the empire's provinces through strategic governance. Wright emphasizes Agrippa's organizational genius, portraying him as a man who preferred results to personal glory, a trait that set him apart in an era of self-aggrandizement.

Yet Agrippa's story is not merely one of service to Octavian. His rise from a relatively obscure background to a position of immense influence reflects the fluidity of Roman society during the late Republic, where talent and loyalty could elevate even those outside the traditional aristocracy. His marriage to Julia, Augustus' daughter, and his role as a potential successor underscored his integration into the imperial family, even as he maintained a public image of humility. Agrippa's life thus offers a lens through which to view the broader dynamics of power, loyalty, and innovation in the Augustan age. As we explore his early years, military campaigns, and lasting legacy, Agrippa emerges not only as Octavian's right-hand man but as a figure whose vision and labor helped forge the foundations of imperial Rome.

Discussion

Classical Rhetoric

Classical rhetoric, as taught by figures like Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, rested on three primary modes of persuasion:

- **Ethos**:
  The speaker's credibility and character. By establishing authority, trustworthiness, and shared values, the speaker wins the audience's respect before advancing the argument.

- **Logos**:
  Logical reasoning, supported by evidence, structure, and clear argumentation.

- **Pathos**:
  Emotional appeal, stirring the audience's feelings to motivate action or alignment.

A fourth concept, **kairos**, emphasised the importance of timing and fitting the message to the opportune moment—the right word at the right time in the right context.

Paul

The letter to the Romans is from *Paul*.

Concerning 'Pauline' authorship, Cranfield writes for instance, '*Today no responsible criticism disputes its Pauline origin.*'.[1] Moo writes, '*Romans claims to be written by Paul (1:1), and there has been no serious challenge to this claim.*'[2]

For an introduction to Paul in his ancient context, see for example N.T. Wright's popular-level book, *Paul: A Biography* (2018).[3]

A Pharisee

Paul (Saul)[4] had been a Pharisee. In Phil 3:4b-6 he writes for instance, '*If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*' (ESV) See also Acts 23:6; Acts 26:4-5; Gal 1:13-14.

As a Pharisee, he had been a '*separated one*'. ('*The Semitic words mean 'the separated ones, separatists'.*[5])

A Separated One

> *"You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine."* (Lev 20:26, ESV)

The Jewish self-identity was of having been separated by God:

- from uncleanness, including from the unclean nations and their idolatries;
- as God's own possession—as the people of God;
- to be holy as God is holy.

Judaism

The Pharisees had a heightened sense of Jewish identity.[6] The Torah-works of sabbath, circumcision and food laws had *separated* the Jewish people from their

---

[1] Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 2.

[2] Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, p. 1.

[3] Wright, *Paul: a biography*.

[4] Paul, who was also called Saul, is referred to as Paul from Acts 13.

[5] Per Φαρισαῖος (Pharisaios) in Arndt et al. (*BDAG*, p. 1049).

[6] For a brief statement on the *"Pharisees, legal experts, lawyers, rabbis"*, refer to the glossary of N.T. Wright's '*for Everyone*' series, per for instance Wright (*Hebrews for everyone*): *"The Pharisees were an unofficial but powerful Jewish pressure group through most of the first centuries BC and AD..."*.

pagan neighbours.[1]   And the Pharisees practised observance of the Torah in a particular and intensified way.

---

[1]See for instance, *The Theology of a Pharisee* in Wright (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, pp. 179–193). For an extended introduction to the first centuries BC and AD in general, see his *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series beginning with Wright (*The New Testament and the People of God*).

The Poetic Sequence

Let the "poetic sequence" refer to *the flow of thought in the text itself*, or *the order of things as they appear in the text itself*.[1]

The "poetic sequence" of the introduction of the letter features Paul as though Marcus Agrippa writing to the Romans. Per the Introduction, The Corresponding Occasion is *following* The Battle of Actium and *before* Octavian's Triple Triumph in Rome. So Paul is As Though Agrippa at a particular moment in ancient Roman history,[2] and this first sweeping *allusion*[3] informs the surface meaning of the text.

---

[1]On the term "poetic sequence", see for instance Wright (ibid., pp. 403–04), referencing Norman Peterson's work. Or, see the multiple references in Wright (*Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013*), for example *"In what follows I shall regularly distinguish between the actual argument of the letter, which has its own rhetorical force, and the wider worldview and belief system on which Paul draws. I shall refer to these two hypothetical entities, in Norman Petersen's terms, as the 'poetic sequence' and the 'narrative sequence' respectively"* (pp. 94-95).

[2]As set within the "narrative sequence" of Rome and her gods.

[3]See for instance Beetham ("Quotation, Allusion, and Echo") on 'Allusion'. This book presents the case that Paul, with *sufficient explicitness*, *intends* the allusion to the *single identifiable source* of Roman history, creating an *essential interpretive link*.

Additional Notes

Main Interpretation Notes

A Slave

- The Greek word *δοῦλος doulos* (translated the servant) can also be translated, a slave.
- Since the Latin surname or 'cognomen' Paul meant '*small*' or humble, the opening words could also have been heard as: '*A small Roman slave of the Messiah, Jesus.*'
- Cranfield notes, '*For the Greek in the classical tradition it was well-nigh impossible to use a word of the δοῦλος group without some feeling of abhorrence.*'[1]
- In the Old Testament, the phrase, '*the servant of the Lord*', is honourable. '*The expression ʿeḇeḏ YHWH, δοῦλος κυρίου, or an equivalent, is a title of honour accorded to Moses, Joshua, David and the prophets (e.g. Josh 14:7; 24:29; Judg 2:8; 2 Kgs 17:23; Ps 89:3).*'[2]

---

[1] See Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 50.

[2] Ibid., p. 50.

Bibliography

A: Primary Sources

Bible

Aland, K. et al. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.

Swete, H. B. *The Old Testament in Greek: According to the Septuagint*. Cambridge University Press, 1909.

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. Crossway Bibles, 2016.

The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989.

Other Jewish Texts

Josephus, Flavius. *Antiquities*. Trans. by W. Whiston.

Other Early Christian and Related Texts

Pagan Texts

B: Secondary Literature

Arndt, W. et al. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. 3rd. University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Beetham, Christopher A. "Quotation, Allusion, and Echo". In: *The Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Ed. by G. K. Beale et al. Baker Academic, 2023.

Cranfield, C. E. B. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Vol. 1. T&T Clark International, 2004.

Harvey, John D. *Romans*. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2017.

Kittel, Gerhard and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Stuttgart: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1972.

Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott. *A Greek-English lexicon*. Eighth. American Book Company, 1882.

Lightfoot, J. B., ed. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: A revised text with introduction, notes, and dissertations.* 4th. Macmillan and Co., 1874.

May, D. M. "Rhetoric". In: *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Ed. by J. D. Barry et al. Lexham Press, 2016.

Moo, D. J. *The Letter to the Romans*. Ed. by N. B. Stonehouse et al. 2nd ed.; New International Commentary on the New Testament. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018.

Wright, N. T. *Hebrews for everyone*. SPCK, 2004.

– *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Christian Origins and the Question of God. Fortress Press, 2013.

– *Paul: a biography*. New York: HarperOne, 2018.

– *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013*. Fortress Press, 2013.

– *The New Testament and the People of God*. Christian Origins and the Question of God. Fortress Press, 1992.