

A LIFE TRANSFORMED BY THE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1:1

INTRODUCTION

Paul's letter to the Romans is **the greatest letter ever written because it explains, applies, and exults** in the greatest message ever proclaimed—the gospel.

As we begin to study the text of the letter today, **we'll be introduced to the letter's author**—the apostle Paul.

I am convinced that not only is Romans is **the greatest letter ever written**, but its author, Paul, is **the greatest of all Christ's apostles and followers.**

That is a bold claim, **but I am not alone** in my admiration for the apostle Paul.

Reginald White wrote in his exceptional book, ***Apostle Extraordinary***, that Paul was the—

“greatest of Christians, profoundest of teachers, staunchest of friends, most intrepid of adventurers, most dauntless of sufferers, [and] most winsome of saints.”¹

I think that Paul was the **greatest apostle and follower of Christ** because of the **nature of his conversion, the impact of his ministry, and the legacy of his writings.**

¹ Reginald E. O. White, *Apostle Extraordinary: A Modern Portrait of St. Paul*, i.

However, whatever greatness Paul may have achieved was **because of the gospel** that transformed his life.

The transformation of Paul's life and ministry is the **greatest illustration of the gospel message** he proclaimed.

His conversion and commission to serve as an apostle is the **most compelling demonstration** that the good news **“is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”**

Therefore, both **Paul's life and message** compel us to **focus on God** and the display of His glory in His work of saving sinners.

In other words, as we consider the life of the greatest apostle and follower of Christ, **we should not focus on a great man**, but on his great God **because Paul's greatness came from the gospel** which transformed his life.

The gospel compels us to **focus on God** and the display of His glory in His work of saving sinners, which was Paul's **emphatic focus** as he wrote the letter of Romans.

Commentator **Leon Morris** highlighting this as he observes—
“*God is the most important word in this epistle. Romans is a book about God. No topic is treated with anything like the frequency of God. Everything Paul touches in this letter he relates to God. In our concern to understand what the apostle is saying about righteousness, justification, and the like we ought not to overlook his tremendous concentration on God.*”²

² Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 40.

Elsewhere **he writes** that—

“No book in Scripture is as God-centred as [Romans].”³

“Romans is ultimately a book about God: how **He** acted to bring salvation, how **His** justice is preserved, how **His** purposes are worked out in history, how **He** can be served by **His** people.”⁴

As **John Piper** argues in his book, **God is the Gospel**—

“The ultimate aim of the gospel is the display of God’s glory.”⁵

So as we will come to learn through our sermon series, **both Paul’s life and message compel us** to **focus on God and the display of His glory** in His work of saving sinners.

Today in particular we are going to focus on the life and ministry of the apostle Paul, but **not so that we can make much of the man**—great as he may be.

Rather, our study of Paul will **help us make much of the God** who saved him and called him into His service to proclaim His gospel.

So let’s then consider the **life of Paul which was transformed by the gospel**, in order to **magnify the God of the gospel who saves sinners like Paul**—and like you and me.

³ Leon Morris, “The Theme of Romans,” *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Exeter, 1970), 249–63.

⁴ Cited in Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 41.

⁵ John Piper, *God is the Gospel*, 56.

With that purpose in mind, I would like to **spend a fair amount of time on the first word of the letter** to the Romans before we study the remainder of the first verse today.

This will be an **extended introduction**, expositing the first word and laying the foundation for our study of the first verse.

So then, look at **verse 1** and the first word—**Paul**.

As a word, this **proper noun** refers to the name of the letter's author, but that name is one of **incredible significance**.

Therefore, **in order to understand this significance**, I'd like to introduce the apostle Paul to you under **four headings**—

- I. Paul, the Roman
- II. Paul, the Jew
- III. Paul, the Pharisee, and
- IV. Paul, the Christian

I. Paul, the Roman

The earliest point in Paul's life that Scripture refers to is **his birth**.

In **Acts 22:3**, Luke records a speech of Paul's in which he states, "**I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia...**"

The city of Tarsus lay on the **fertile Cilician plain** in the southeastern corner of **modern Turkey**.

It was located in a key area for **trade**, but it was its **political history** that gave it more prominence.

The Roman general Mark Antony—the same one who is famous for his romance with the Egyptian queen Cleopatra—declared Tarsus a “**free Roman city.**”

This status of a “free city” brought **many privileges** with it, including **local law, self-government, and exemption** from the heavy provincial taxes.⁶

As the city enjoyed both the favour of the Roman government and economic prosperity, it became **renowned for its love of philosophy and education.**

As **one historian** recounts—

“According to the geographer Strabo... the people of Tarsus... applied themselves to the study of philosophy, the liberal arts and ‘the whole round of learning in general’—the whole ‘encyclopaedia’—so much so that Tarsus in this respect at least surpassed even Athens and Alexandria...

Tarsus, in short, was what we might call a university city.”⁷

That is doubtless why Paul referred to the place of his birth with **such esteem** when in **Acts 21:39** he described himself as, “**A citizen of no insignificant city....**”

Paul was thus **born in a Gentile city** as part of what is called **the Jewish Diaspora—the dispersion of Jews** who lived outside of Palestine.

⁶ John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 8.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1977), 34–35.

In God's providence, there were at least **three benefits** that Paul enjoyed **as a result of his birth in Tarsus**.

The first was that he shared the **love for education and knowledge** that his birthplace was famous for.

We don't know exactly what opportunities he had to pursue education in Tarsus, but it is more than likely that he gained a **world-class education** there.

He certainly proved to be an exceptional and zealous student of religion when he pursued his studies later in Jerusalem.

The second benefit was that he gained a **keen insight into Gentile culture**.

As **White** noted, "*Both for his evangelistic approach, and for his illuminating criticism, Paul's insights into Graeco-Roman culture were invaluable to Christianity.*"⁸

As Paul went on his **missionary journeys** to proclaim the gospel and plant churches, he did so **strategically in key cities** throughout the Roman Empire.

As **White** observed, "*Paul consistently planned his missionary journeys with something of the acumen and vision of a Roman military campaign, though health, circumstances, and persecution often interfered.*"⁹

⁸ White, *Apostle Extraordinary*, 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

Paul's resolute conviction was the God is the **God of the both the Jews and the Gentiles**, as he wrote in **Romans 3:29**—

Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also.

Therefore, Paul became **passionate about persuading Gentiles** about Jesus Christ and used whatever **insights he gained from Gentile culture** in order to **gain their attention, understanding, and acceptance of the gospel.**

As he wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:22**—

I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

So Paul the Roman gained the benefit of a love for education, and the benefit of a keen insight into Gentile culture.

The third benefit of his birth in Tarsus was his Roman citizenship.

Paul enjoyed the **rare honour of being a Roman citizen**, as we see in his encounter with the military commander who said to him in **Acts 22:27-28**—

²⁷ **“Tell me, are you a Roman?” And he said, “Yes.”**

²⁸ **And the commander answered, “I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.” And Paul said, “But I have been born a citizen.”**

One historian explains the significance when he writes—

“Citizenship carried a number of advantages. Perhaps the primary one was that citizens were subject to Roman law, not to the local laws of the provincial cities....”

A citizen could not be scourged or imprisoned without a hearing and the establishment of sufficient cause. In capital offences, a citizen had the right to appeal the decision of a lower court to the emperor.”¹⁰

In the book of Acts we see **Paul take advantage of this** on numerous occasions to **escape unjust punishment**, such as in Philippi and then later in Jerusalem.

In God’s providence, it was through **Paul’s appeal to Caesar** in **Acts 25:11** that he would eventually fulfil his desire to visit Rome, albeit under house arrest.

The **privileges that Paul enjoyed** as a Roman citizen were providential throughout his missionary endeavours and without them, it is unlikely that Paul would have had such a significant ministry as an apostle.

II. Paul, the Jew

More important by far in Paul’s own eyes than his birthplace and his Roman citizenship was his **Jewish heritage**.

He refers to his heritage in **Romans 11:1**—

I too am an Israelite, a seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

As Paul says in **Philippians 3:5** of the **natural advantages** in which he had formerly taken pride, he was—

circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews...

¹⁰ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 15–16.

Circumcision was the **external mark** which set a man apart as a Jew.

It was viewed as the **badge of membership** in the covenant people of God.¹¹

Unlike some Jews who compromised on their obedience while living among Gentiles in the Diaspora, Paul's circumcision was **"by the book."**

Though he was born in a Gentile city, his family had raised him to **appreciate his Jewish heritage and zealously observe its laws.**

Paul was thus raised in the best of what Judaism was at that time, which according to **one scholar**—

*"combined the splendour of antiquity, the tenacity of a national faith, and the direct personal appeal of a religion of heart and life."*¹²

When Paul referred to himself as being **"of the nation of Israel,"** in **Philippians 3:5,** he was indicating that he was **a Jew by birth.**

In other words, he was a **physical descendant of Abraham,** not a Gentile proselyte who converted to Judaism.

He adds further details that indicating more specifically what kind of Jew he was.

¹¹ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 25.

¹² White, *Apostle Extraordinary*, 4.

Firstly, Paul belonged to the **tribe of Benjamin**.

Paul's Jewish pedigree was increased by belonging to **one of only two Jewish tribes** which survived the exile—Judah and Benjamin, the two tribes of the southern kingdom.

It was likely **because of this tribal connection** that Paul received **his Hebrew name, Saul**, in honour of Israel's king Saul who was of the same tribe.

It was common for Jews in those times to have **a Gentile name alongside their Jewish name**.¹³

Contrary to the misunderstanding that “Saul” was his name **prior to conversion** and that he took on the name “Paul” **after conversion as a Christian name**, he had both names from birth.

His Gentile name, Paul, was likely chosen because it **sounded similar to Saul**.

If you look at the book of Acts, Saul was converted in **Acts 9**. He then ministered in **Damascus, Jerusalem, Tarsus, and Antioch** all while using the name “Saul.”

It was only when, as **Acts 13** records, he set out with Barnabas on his **first missionary journey to the Gentiles** that he began to use the name “Paul,” as **Acts 13:9** indicates.

¹³ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2012), 37.

Therefore, he was likely known as “Saul” to the Jewish Christians and “Paul” to the Gentile Christians, something that would have been very common in that period.

Secondly, he was a “**Hebrew of Hebrews.**”

In the NT writings, “Hebrew” is probably a **more specialised term** than “Israelite” or “Jew”.

In **Acts 6:1** “Hebrews” is used **in contrast to the “Hellenists,”** although both Hebrews and Hellenists were Jews.

As **commentator F. F. Bruce** says—

“The distinction was probably linguistic and cultural: the Hebrews... attended synagogues where the service was conducted in Hebrew and used Aramaic as their normal mode of speech, while the Hellenists spoke Greek and attended synagogues where the scriptures were read and the prayers recited in that language.”¹⁴

So while a Jew **born in a Greek-speaking city like Tarsus** would naturally be expected to be a **Hellenist**, Paul’s parents made sure of an **orthodox upbringing in both language and religion.**

In fact, as he says in **Acts 22:3**, though he was born in Tarsus, he was “**brought up**” in Jerusalem, meaning that he **spent his formative years there**, doubtless to ensure the strictest observance of Jewish culture and religion.

¹⁴ Bruce, *Paul*, 42.

Paul's heritage was **extremely important to his later Christian faith** because, as he would discover, all the core beliefs of Christianity **have their origin in the Hebrew Scriptures**.

In fact, as **one author** argues—

“Paul found that little of essential Judaism had to be left behind when he accepted Jesus as Judaism's heir, fulfilment, and goal.”¹⁵

Thus, Paul's Jewish heritage **played far more significance** in his life than Paul's birthplace of Tarsus and his Roman citizenship.

It was his **strict, orthodox Jewish heritage** that set the stage for him to become not just Paul the Roman and Paul the Jew, **but even more significantly**, Paul the Pharisee.

III. Paul, the Pharisee

In **Philippians 3**, Paul continues to discuss his background as he writes in **verses 5–6** that—

⁵ **as to the Law, [I was] a Pharisee;**

⁶ **as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.**

Even as a Pharisee, **Paul distinguished himself** as having a **religious passion of rare intensity and force**.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ White, *Apostle Extraordinary*, 6.

That is noteworthy considering who the Pharisees were.

The term “Pharisee” is associated with a **Hebrew and Aramaic word meaning “separate.”**

It likely referred to their **policy of strict separation** from everything which might convey **moral or ceremonial impurity**.

We can see that in the way they applied **Leviticus 19:2** which commands—

You shall be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy.

The Pharisees paraphrased that into—

“As I am holy, so you also must be holy; as I am separate, so you also must be separate.”¹⁷

To that end, the Pharisees built up **a body of interpretation and application** of the Mosaic Law that was known as the **“oral law,” or as “the tradition of the elders”** as we see it in the Gospels.

While there were **different schools of thought** within the Pharisees, they all agreed that it was **necessary to apply the written law in terms of the oral law**.

That is precisely what Jesus rebuked in **Mark 7:8** when He said **“Leaving the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”**

¹⁷ Bruce, *Paul*, 46.

Despite this glaring hypocrisy, the Pharisees were **exceptionally zealous to be holy**—or “separate”—and **thereby earn God’s favour**.

It was, therefore, a **perversion of the OT faith into a religion of works**, which Paul came to soundly reject after his conversion.

As Paul writes in **Romans 9:31**, Israel pursued a law of righteousness but did not attain that law.

Then as he asks in **verse 32**—

Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.

Prior to conversion, though, Paul was an **exceptionally zealous Pharisee**, standing out as someone extraordinary even from a young age as we read in **Galatians 1:14**—

I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being far more zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

This is explained, at least in part, by the **preeminent education and mentorship** that Paul received after moving to Jerusalem.

Again, as he says in **Acts 22:3**—

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but having been brought up in this city, having been instructed at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strictness of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.”

This is the same Gamaliel that we read of in **Acts 5:34** during the trial of Peter and the other apostles. Luke refers to him as

A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people...

He was so honoured by the Jews that it was said when he died that, “*the glory of the Torah ceased, and purity and ‘separateness’ died*”—which is to say that he was regarded as **the last of the true Pharisees**.¹⁸

So it is unsurprising that Paul’s **exceptional intellect and religious passion** were profoundly shaped by Gamaliel to make him **one of the most promising young leaders** within the Pharisees.

Sadly, one point upon which Paul **departed from the counsel of his tutor Gamaliel** was his approach to Christianity.

In **Acts 5**, Gamaliel **urged moderation** in dealing with Peter and the apostles, as Luke records in **Acts 5:38-39**, he counselled—

³⁸ **“So in the present case, I also say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown;**

³⁹ **but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or you may even be found fighting against God.”**

As Paul described his religious zeal in **Philippians 3:6**, he admitted that he was **“a persecutor of the church.”**

¹⁸ Bruce, *Paul*, 50.

He referred to this in **Galatians 1:13** when he wrote—

You have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.

Luke records Paul's horrific persecutions of Christians when, as **Acts 8:1**, he **“was in hearty agreement with putting [Stephen] to death.”**

That seemed to **only whet Paul's appetite**, because in **Acts 8:3** we read that—

Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he was delivering them into prison.

In fact, **Acts 9:1** describes him as **“breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.”**

As **one author** insightfully remarks—

“The impatience of youth, and the obvious failure of more moderate policies to stem the growing Christian contagion, doubtless help to explain Paul's passion against the Church.”¹⁹

Paul's zeal as a Pharisee and a persecutor of the church is what makes his **transformation into Paul the Christian** so astounding.

Quite simply, there is no way to account for Paul's conversion **to the very faith that he was murderously opposed to**, other than by what he said of the gospel **Romans 1:16** that, **“it is the power of God for salvation.”**

¹⁹ White, *Apostle Extraordinary*, 9.

IV. Paul, the Christian

Three details of Paul's life—Paul, the Roman; Paul, the Jew; and Paul, the Pharisee—set the stage for the **most significant detail of all**—Paul, the Christian.

Paul's conversion to Christianity is recorded for us by Luke in **Acts 9**, along with Paul's own testimony of his conversion in both **Acts 22** and **Acts 26**.

Turn with me to **Acts 26:12-18**—

**12 “While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,
13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.**

14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

15 And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

16 But rise up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a servant and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;

17 rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,

18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”

As we can see in Paul's testimony, his encounter with the risen Christ the **occasion for both his conversion to Christianity and his commissioning to be an apostle.**

We simply **cannot overstate the significance** of Paul's conversion in the plan of God.

As **White** puts it so well—

“That brief but astonishing encounter outside Damascus won for Jesus His most attentive disciple, His greatest apostle, His most devoted servant.

It removed at one stroke the Church's ablest and most violent enemy. It gave to Christianity her most valiant champion, her most brilliant leader, her profoundest thinker, her most ardent evangelist, one of her most attractive saints.

It made possible the rich legacy of his writings for the counsel and encouragement of all later centuries.

It defines, more clearly than any doctrine, the essential purpose and meaning of the gospel, and it demonstrates with inescapable force the divine power that is at work in Christianity.”²⁰

That is why, even in **his conversion and his commission** as an apostle, **Paul's life and ministry compels us to focus on God** and the display of His glory in His work of saving sinners.

Paul's message and ministry continued to be shaped by the fact that he was a Roman, a Jew, and formerly a Pharisee.

²⁰ White, *Apostle Extraordinary*, 45.

He never forget that in his **misguided zeal for a righteousness by works**, he persecuted those who found the righteousness of God by faith in Christ, according to the gospel.

However, he knew that the story of his conversion and commission **magnified God and displayed His glory** in His work of saving sinners, as we read in **1 Timothy 1:12-16**—

12 I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He regarded me faithful, putting me into service,

13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor....

15 It is a trustworthy saying and deserving full acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost.

16 Yet for this reason I was shown mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Christ Jesus might demonstrate all His patience as an example for those who are going to believe upon Him for eternal life.

Paul knew that his life was the **greatest illustration of his message**, because his **life had been transformed by the gospel**.

PROPOSITION

With that extended focus on the life of Paul **laying the foundation**, let's briefly study the **remainder of the verse** as Paul introduces himself to the Roman church.

Paul introduces himself with **three designations** that **identify his master, his office, and his purpose** and further describe a life transformed by the gospel.²¹

1. PAUL'S MASTER

As we learnt from last Sunday's overview of the letter, the church in Rome was likely founded by **Jewish Christians who had been converted under Peter's preaching** at Pentecost after they returned home.

Since, therefore, the church to which Paul addressed his letter was not planted by him or one of his close associates, he must have felt the need to **establish his credentials as an apostle and to summarise his gospel**.²²

That's why Paul's introduction to his letter is the lengthiest of any of his epistles.

²¹ cf. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 38–39.

²² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 46.

While it is **structured similarly to a typical letter** of the day, **Tom Schreiner** aptly notes that, “*Paul reshaped the greeting in all of his letters to convey his gospel.*”²³

As Paul then introduces himself, **especially focussing on his authority and mission**, the first designation he chooses is that of, “**slave of Christ Jesus.**”

Paul patterns this designation on the **familiar OT title** of “**slave,**” or “**servant,**” of **Yahweh.**

In the OT, those who spoke for Yahweh, such as **Moses and the prophets**, were sometimes called “**slaves**” of **Yahweh.**

Here Paul introduces himself as a slave of Christ because **he speaks for Christ.**

What is worth noting is **Paul’s view of Jesus** as he designates himself a slave of Christ Jesus.

Firstly, he uses the title “**Christ**” which indicates that he views Jesus as the **long-awaited Jewish Messiah.**

Secondly, by putting the name of Jesus in the place of Yahweh as he calls himself “**slave of Christ Jesus,**” Paul puts Christ in the **highest possible place** and acknowledges Him to be **the Lord, Yahweh—God Himself.**

²³ Schreiner, *Romans*, Second Edition, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 36.

Even in this designation, Paul's **introduction is God-centred** because as **one author** points out, "*the focus of the term [slave of Christ] is not on possessing a privileged office but on service to a greater authority.*"²⁴

So, as much as what Paul is introducing himself, he is also **identifying his Master**—Christ Jesus.

In fact, by describing himself as **a slave before an apostle**, Paul is emphasising that whatever authority he has is **delegated to him from a higher authority**.

He is a **humble servant of Christ** and all he seeks to do is fulfil his Master's will.

The designation of slave conveys the idea of **complete and utter devotion** since he is **completely at the disposal** of his Lord.

As **Leon Morris** wrote, "*Paul is affirming that he belongs to Christ without reservation.*"²⁵

Paul's life was **so profoundly transformed by the gospel** that while he had once persecuted Christ, as Jesus Himself put it in **Acts 9:4**,

after his conversion he was **totally devoted to Christ** as the **spokesperson and representative of the Messiah** he formerly rejected and raged against.

²⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 37.

²⁵ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 36–37.

2. PAUL'S OFFICE

Paul continues his introduction of himself with a **second designation** that particularly **clarified his authority and mission**—“**apostle**.”

The term “**apostle**” can mean “**messenger**” in general, and sometimes Paul uses it in that sense.

For example, in **2 Corinthians 8:23** Paul refers to **Titus** as a “**messenger**” of the churches, using the Greek term **ἀπόστολος**.

Paul also seems to use the term in a **second sense** to describe **accredited missionaries**, as many commentators argue is the case in **Romans 16:7** with “**Andronicus and Junia**.”²⁶

Here in **Romans 1:1** though, Paul is clearly using the term in **the narrowest sense** in which it refers to those who have been **commissioned by Christ Himself** to the formal office of Apostle.

The requirements for this office were very strict.

The initial qualification of an apostle was to possess **firsthand experience of Jesus' life and ministry** and, most importantly, to be an **eyewitness to His resurrection**.²⁷

²⁶ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 40. Cf. Schreiner too.

²⁷ Mark L. Strauss and Tremper Longman III, eds., “Apostle,” in *The Baker Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2023), 59.

We find this in **Acts 1:21-22** where Peter announces the need for a **replacement of Judas** who betrayed Christ—

21 It is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—

22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.

Those who were commissioned to this formal office of Apostle were **chosen by Christ to be the foundation of His church**, as Paul indicates in **Ephesians 2:20** when he writes of the church, **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.**

Much of the ministry of the Apostles was concerned with **establishing and caring for churches**, though their **primary responsibility** was, as **one author** put it—

“to serve the gospel by an authoritative and normative proclamation of it.”²⁸

In other words, the apostles were given **authority by Christ Himself** to **proclaim the gospel and to guard the message** from error by authoring the inspired books of the NT.

Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus **met these strict requirements** as he saw the resurrected Christ and was commissioned by Him to the office.

In **1 Corinthians 15:8** Paul writes that, **“last of all, as to one untimely born, [Christ] appeared to me also.”**

²⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 53.

However, Paul also never got over how much his **life and ministry had been transformed** by the gospel because he remembered with **deep regret and humility** what he wrote in **1 Corinthians 15:9**—

I am the least of the apostles, and not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Christ's commission to Paul was to focus on proclaiming the gospel **primarily, though not exclusively**, to the Gentiles.

In **Romans 11:13**, Paul calls himself, "**an apostle of Gentiles**," and in **1 Timothy 2:7** he writes—

I was appointed a preacher and an apostle... as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

In fact, in Paul's testimony of his conversion and commissioning, he says in **Acts 26:18** that Jesus told him that he was sending him to the Gentiles—

"to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me."

As Paul uses this designation to introduce his office, he is careful to indicate that this ministry is **not one that he chose for himself**, nor was it one **mapped out for him by men**, but it was **given to him by God's own call**.

This "**calling**," as Paul uses it here in **verse 1**, refers to the **effective work of God** by which He calls people to both **salvation and office**.²⁹

²⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 37.

Paul elaborated in **Galatians 1:1** where he introduced himself as, “**an apostle—not sent from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.**”

So, as **Doug Moo** points out, Paul, “*writes not as a private individual, nor even as a gifted teacher, but as a ‘called apostle’ whose words bear the authority of God himself.*”³⁰

The transformation of Paul’s life is seen in to **exchange of his former promising career** as a Pharisee in which he was doubtless already being groomed to be one of Israel’s great leaders, for the call of apostleship.

Though Paul held a position of great affection and respect in the church, he was often despised by both those within the church and without, as he says in **1 Corinthians 4:9**—

I think that God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men.

This was a truly transformed life, as **White** eloquently elaborates—

*“This man exchanged his proud and ancient religion for the despised creed of a hunted [community] of obscure folk; his ardent, racist nationalism for a world-wide dream of brotherhood; and a glorious career amid admiration, scholarly repute, increasing power, and great wealth, for a friendless, arduous, poverty-haunted life, doubly despised as renegade and as Christian.”*³¹

³⁰ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 40.

³¹ White, *Apostle Extraordinary*, 46.

3. PAUL'S PURPOSE

Finally, Paul introduces himself with a third designation that **elaborates and explains** the first two—“**having been set apart for the gospel of God.**”

As Paul indicates, he was **specifically set aside, or selected**, for his **great task as an apostle** who would give his life and ministry to the gospel of God.

As the LSB translation demonstrates, Paul uses the **perfect tense** of “**set apart**” which emphasises that God’s action of setting him apart in the past **continues to shape who he is** in the present.³²

He says the same in **Galatians 1:15-16**, indicating that God had chosen him even before his birth—

¹⁵ **God, who had set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased**

¹⁶ **to reveal His Son in me so that I might proclaim Him as good news among the Gentiles....**

Paul’s words remind us of God’s words to Jeremiah when he commissioned the prophet in **Jeremiah 1:5—**

“Before I formed you in the innermost parts I knew you, And before you came out from the womb I set you apart; I have given you as a prophet to the nations.”

³² Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 59.

God had certainly chosen Paul to proclaim the gospel in his apostolic ministry, as the Lord said to Ananias in **Acts 9:15**—

“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.”

When Paul writes that he was chosen or **“set apart”** specifically for **“the gospel of God,”** he is referring to the purpose of both his life and his ministry.

As **Moo** wrote so well—

“Paul is claiming that his life is totally dedicated to God’s act of salvation in Christ—a dedication that involves both his own belief in, and obedience to, that message as well as his apostolic proclamation of it.”³³

Morris said it just as well—

“It means to be a gospel man, to live the gospel. Preaching is important, but then so is living. Paul’s call was to a way of life as well as to a task of preaching.”³⁴

Paul’s life had been **so transformed by the gospel** that he who had **once raged against Christ** came to love Him and worship Him;

he who had **once persecuted the church** then gave his life and ministry to serve the church;

he who had **once despised the gospel** came to be its greatest champion as he preached the good news to both Jew and Gentile.

³³ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 41.

³⁴ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 40.

CONCLUSION

Paul lived an **incredible life** and had an **unsurpassed ministry** as an apostle.

Any study of Paul will surely lead to the conclusion that he was the **greatest of all Christ's apostles and followers** because of the **nature of his conversion, the impact of his ministry, and the legacy of his writings.**

However, Paul's life which was so **radically transformed** by the gospel **compels us to focus on God** and the display of His glory in His work of saving sinners.

Indeed, you cannot help but see **God's providential hand** in the life of Paul, the **Roman**; Paul, the **Jew**; Paul, the **Pharisee**; and Paul, the **Christian.**

The life of the greatest of all Christ's apostles perfectly **illustrates the gospel**—the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived which leads to the greatest display of the glory of God possible.

Therefore, as Paul introduced himself to the church in Rome, **his transformed life bore out the message** he would detail for them in his letter.

His designations that introduced **his Master, his office, and his purpose** may have explained his authority and mission to his readers, but **it was his life that would compel them to focus** not on a great apostle, but on his great God who **saves sinners and transforms lives through His gospel.**

BENEDICTION

Romans 15:13—

**Now may the God of hope
fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you will abound in hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Romans 1:1b–1c LSB

1:1

Paul,

b

a slave of Christ Jesus,

c

called as an apostle,

d

having been set apart for the gospel of God

| Specifies the letter's author

| Describes 1a