

Christ's Obedient Slave: Paul's use of Ethos in Romans 1:1–17

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Flannery O'Connor observes that "[t]he Judeo-Christian tradition has formed us in the west; we are bound to it by ties which may often be invisible, but which are there nevertheless."¹ St. Paul the Apostle is one of the great architects of this Judeo-Christian tradition, and by extension of the Western world, though he may not have set out to achieve this status. His influence has impacted so many realms of the West that many of "the invisible bindings" we may sense are directly tied to the very words he wrote. One of his most important letters (perhaps the most important) is his letter to the Romans, which moved the hearts of such men as St. Augustine and Martin Luther. Paul understood that a rhetor is most able to persuade when his audience trusts him; thus, Paul used the rhetorical means of ethos in order to bring about his desired aims in writing his letter to the Romans.

Rhetorical criticism provides a beneficial route for understanding Paul's use of ethos. Paul writes Romans in order to establish a relationship with the members of the Roman church and to gain their trust through establishing his ethos. Paul establishes his ethos under the title of apostle, which is an ambassadorial ethos² of both authority and humility; since his call to be an apostle comes from Christ, he has both authority and humility in Christ. Paul also demonstrates the orthodoxy of his gospel through establishing its ethos, which entails the ethos of both God the Father and Jesus. Furthermore, Paul confirms the ethos of the Roman church. His use of ethos will prove advantageous when he attempts to unify the Roman church, to prepare the way for his visit, and to ask for their aid in sending him to Spain. Paul does so by inventing (in the rhetorical sense) the phrase "the obedience of faith." This paper will demonstrate Paul's use of ethos first by giving a brief overview of ethos, second by outlining the rhetorical

1 O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners*, 155.

2 Jewett, *Romans*, 101.

situation of the letter, third by discussing the rhetoric of obedience, and fourth by covering Paul's three uses of ethos—his own, his gospel's, and his audience's.

ETHOS

Aristotle defines ethos as “the character of the speaker,”³ and he states that “character . . . is the most authoritative form of persuasion.”⁴ Moreover, Aristotle states that since it is the audience's job to make judgments, the rhetor not only is supposed to have persuasive arguments (logos), but also, his duty is “to construct a view of himself as a certain kind of person and to prepare the judge” (2.1.2). In *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the author gives the following advice in regards to ethos and pathos:

From the discussion of our own person we shall secure goodwill by praising our services without arrogance and revealing also our past conduct . . . likewise by setting forth our disabilities, need, loneliness, and misfortune, and pleading for our hearers' aid, and at the same time showing that we have been unwilling to place our hope in anyone else. From the discussion of the person of our adversaries we shall secure goodwill by bringing them into hatred, unpopularity, or contempt. (I.v.8)

Thus, the rhetor's task is to first establish his own good intellectual and moral ethos, and he may also seek to prove that his opponent has a questionable ethos. In fact, the “winning of sympathy should run through the whole argument, but is especially important in the *exordium* (*prooimion*) and the *peroratio* (*epilogos*).”⁵ Paul's aim of winning sympathy is clearly evident in Rom. 1:1–17, which functions as a *prooimion*, or introduction.

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION OF ROMANS

Paul writes his letter to the Romans in order to prepare the Roman church to judge him. The best way to explore how Paul does this is to look at the rhetorical situation,⁶ which consists of identifying the rhetor, the audience, the subject or issue, the means, and the ends. First, Paul is the rhetor,

3 Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 1.2.3.

4 Ibid., 1.2.3–6. According to Aristotle, rhetoric is “the ability in each situation to perceive the available means of persuasion” (1.2.1). The means of persuasion are ethos, pathos, and logos. These means of persuasion are accomplished through the task of the rhetor in invention, arrangement, memory (added by Cicero), style, and delivery. Thus, the task of the rhetor is to establish that he is trustworthy (ethos), to prove his case through various proofs (logos) that move the audience through an emotional appeal (pathos).

5 du Toit, “Persuasion,” 202.

6 I am indebted to Dr. Scott Crider of the University of Dallas for this paradigm.

but he is not a rhetor speaking on his own behalf. Rather, he is God's apostle and slave. God has set Paul apart to preach the gospel, and he has appointed Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles/nations (Gal. 1:16, 2:9; Rom. 15:15–16). Even though he did not found the Roman church (15:20), Paul believes that its members are under his jurisdiction by God's calling upon him (1:13). Thus, according to Paul, the rhetor is God, who speaks through Paul.

Second, the audience is the Roman church, which is in discord between the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians.⁷ The reason for the discord is not specifically stated in the letter, though chapter 14 suggests that the Gentile Christians ("the strong") and the Jewish Christians ("the weak") disagree over individual conscience and purity, as evidenced in the concerns about the appropriateness of certain foods and drinks. Paul understands that it is his duty as the apostle to the Gentiles to re-unite the feuding sects within the church, and he also desires to seek their support for his mission to Spain.

Yet Paul is most likely known to them in a negative light. Ambrosiaster, who writes a commentary on Romans around 375 AD, states that "the Roman church received the faith although with a Jewish bent."⁸ This comment identifies that the Roman church was probably first started by missionaries from Jerusalem. If this is the case, then the church in Rome almost certainly would have had strong communication with the church in Jerusalem and may even have been warned about a certain apostle preaching a "law-free" gospel in Galatia. Thus, Paul would need to be diplomatic and subtle in his letter to the Romans if he was to gain their support. Paul could only achieve this by correcting their misconception about him, and his most promising approach for accomplishing this is by establishing his ethos.

Third, the subject—or issue—is two-fold. The first issue is

7 The occasion of the letter has been a hotly debated topic. Karl Donfried, in "False Presuppositions in the Study of Romans," divides the scholarship into two groups. The first group, following Wiefel, assumes that the occasion of the letter arises from the conflict between Jewish Christians (the weak) and the Gentile Christians (the strong), which is due to the lifting of Claudius's edict to expel the Jews in AD 49. Claudius's death in AD 54 canceled the edict allowing Jews to re-enter Rome. When the Jewish Christians re-entered Rome, the Gentile Christians had established the church in at least one of their homes. Since the Synagogues were closed in AD 49, Jewish Christians had few, if any, options for worship. The second group assumes that the occasion is "non-historical," meaning that Paul had no real knowledge of the historical situation of the Roman church, but that he was merely writing his letter to address multiple congregations. This second group interprets chapter 14 in light of 2 Cor. 8–10, which may be an integral part of Paul's gospel, or posits that Paul is still thinking about the situation in Corinth and is simply rehashing his statement.

8 Quoted in Brown, *An Introduction*, 562.

socio-ecclesial. Paul exhorts the church to unity (15:7),⁹ and he prepares the church to receive him with the aim of sending him off to preach in Spain (15:23–32). The second issue is theological. Paul instructs the Roman church by explicating the dialectic between God's righteousness (God's own ethos), as revealed in the gospel and displayed in Christ's faithfulness (Christ's ethos),¹⁰ and the church's responsibility to faithful obedience through the rubric of "the obedience of faith" (the audience's ethos) (1:5, 16:26). The phrase "obedience of faith" will be discussed in detail below.

Fourth, the means that Paul uses is a letter of introduction in which he aims to establish both his ethos and that of his gospel. There have been many attempts to identify further the letter type of Romans in light of Greco-Roman epistolography, and there are three groups that bear the most fruit. The first group, represented by Stanley Stowers and David Aune, understands the form and function of Romans as a *protreptic* letter.¹¹ Stowers notes that the major functions of a *protreptic* letter are "to convert to a way of life, join a school, or accept a set of teachings as normative for the reader's life."¹² Moreover, some Christians wrote "longer *protreptic* letters that not only exhort their audience to the life which they advocate, but also introduce them to their teachings and beliefs in a more comprehensive way."¹³ Finally, an author of a *protreptic* letter might also attempt to persuade the audience away from other teachings or refute his opponents.

The second group identifies Romans as a "letter-essay."¹⁴ There are three major characteristics that distinguish a letter as a "letter-essay." First, the letter functions as a supplement, or even an abbreviated form, of the author's instruction. Second, it has the intention of instructing the audience. Third, the letter has a public character that sets up a triangular relationship among the author, the receiver, and the extended public audience.

The third group argues that Romans is best understood as an "ambassadorial letter."¹⁵ The major characteristic of the ambassadorial

9 See Miller, *Obedience of Faith*, 61–95.

10 Rom. 3:21–26, 5:12–21. See Johnson, "Rom 3:21–26," 87–90.

11 Stowers, *Letter Writing*, 113; Aune, "Romans as a *Logos Protreptikos*," 278–296.

12 Stowers, *Letter Writing*, 113.

13 *Ibid.*, 113.

14 See Stirewalt, *Paul*; Fitzmyer, *Romans*; Donfried, "False Presuppositions," 102–127.

15 Jewett, "Romans as an Ambassadorial Letter," 5–20; Jewett, "Following the Argument of Romans," 265–277; Jewett, *Romans*. For criticism on this classification see Weddenburn, *The Reason*, 10; Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 19–20; and Witherington, *New Testament Rhetoric*, 14–15.

letter is that its “aim is to reinforce some aspect of the ethos of the audience.”¹⁶ (One example of an ambassadorial letter that Jewett gives is of Alexandria’s *Embassy to Gaius*.¹⁷)

Romans seems best to fit the description of a *protreptic* letter, yet with ambassadorial undertones. M. Luther Stirewalt, who identifies Romans as a letter-essay, argues that one dissimilarity between Romans and the letter-essay is that Paul writes “in a more rhetorically conceived and stylized manner than the letter-essayists wrote.”¹⁸ One example of this is Paul’s use of diatribe, which helps identify it as a *protreptic* letter. The diatribe was an effective rhetorical tool that authors, especially letter writers in the first century, could use both to persuade and to dissuade.¹⁹ The diatribe stems from the rhetorical genre of dialogical argumentation, and it is a figure of thought belonging to invention. The author uses diatribe by setting up a “fake” opponent in order to have a “pseudo-conversation,” whereby the author raises and refutes the objections to his argument.²⁰ Most Pauline scholars, if not all, recognize that Paul is employing diatribe throughout Romans 1–11.²¹

In regard to the ambassadorial undertone, there are a number of examples within Paul’s own letters that demonstrate that he had some conception of being an ambassador for Christ. This is most clearly seen in 2 Corinthians 5:20, where Paul legitimizes his apostolic calling and office by stating, “[W]e are ambassadors for Christ.” Moreover, Jewett argues that the title of “Apostle” has ambassadorial undertones, a point of view supported by Paul’s sense of vocation as the Apostle to the Gentiles.²² Paul’s ethos as an ambassador of God is thus established by his obedience of faith in carrying out this calling, which is also established by his obedience to God’s will (1:10).

The final element of the rhetorical situation is Paul’s ends. Paul writes a *protreptic* letter introducing himself in order to unify the Jewish Christian and Gentile Christian groups and to correct any misconceptions

16 Jewett, “Following the Argument of Romans,” 266.

17 Jewett, “Romans as an Ambassadorial Letter,” 9.

18 Stirewalt, *Paul*, 108.

19 Stowers, *Letter Writing*, 113–114.

20 Aune, “Diatribe,” 127–129.

21 See Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans*.

22 Jewett, “Romans as an Ambassadorial Letter,” 10–12. This is seen in Paul’s comments in Romans 10:8–10 about the nature of faith as being a response by believing with one’s heart and confessing with one’s mouth after hearing the gospel (see Gal. 3:2, 4). The implication is that no one would come to faith without the preaching of the gospel, and no one would preach the gospel unless apostles are sent (Rom. 10:14–15). Finally, Paul’s sense of calling as a missionary of Christ to the unreached nations is to preach this message given to him by God (Gal. 1:11–12; Rom. 15:18–20).

that they might have about Paul or his gospel. The Gentile Christians had established themselves in at least one house church, and the re-entry of the Jewish Christians (who wanted to hold on to what made them distinct) into Rome possibly led to divisions and to "anti-Semitic" behavior from the Gentile Christians. Paul attempts to unify the two groups with his argument for the obedience of faith in that they are to accept one another as Christ has accepted them (15:7). He also needs to correct the arrogance of the Gentile Christians and their contempt for the Jewish Christians by demonstrating that Gentile Christians are indebted to the Jews (Rom. 9–11).

Moreover, Paul intends for the church to share in "the spiritual fruits" (1:13) of gospel ministry by sending him off to Spain.²³ In this way, Paul extends his ambassadorial role and priestly duty of bringing Gentiles to the obedience of faith (15:15–19). The effect that these ends will have is the ultimate end of building up the church by instructing its members on "the obedience of faith." By building up the church Paul will fulfill his duty as Apostle to the Gentiles because, as he brings more Gentiles to the obedience of faith, he will present an acceptable and sanctified offering to God (15:16). Thus, Paul's rhetorical aim is his need to go to Spain, and the Roman church's obligation as a church of the nations is to support his mission.

THE RHETORIC OF OBEDIENCE

Paul uses the phrase "the obedience of faith" to frame his letter (1:5, 16:26),²⁴ forming an *inclusio*,²⁵ which gives the phrase central importance for understanding Paul's rhetorical ends. There is much debate surrounding the genitival relationship of this phrase, εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως ("unto the obedience of faith"). There are three proposals that carry the most weight. First, faith may be understood as an adjectival genitive meaning "faith's obedience" or "the obedience characterized by faith."²⁶ Second, and the majority view, is that this is a genitive of apposition, "the obedience which consists in faith."²⁷ A third option is a subjective genitive, "obedience

23 Jewett, *Romans*, 130.

24 There is much debate surrounding the Pauline authorship of the Doxology (16:25–27). I am following those who believe it to be Pauline. See Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 936–941; Miller, *The Obedience of Faith*, 181–186; Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 34–38; Hurtado, "The Doxology," 185–199.

25 An *inclusio* is a framing device used by the author either to give great importance to a theme or to resume an argument after regressing.

26 Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 30.

27 Cranfield, *An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, I.66 no. 3; Miller, *The Obedience of Faith*, 42–49.

which faith works,” or a genitive of source, “the obedience which springs from faith.”²⁸ Paul’s phrase is ambiguous and multi-faceted. Because of the great importance that Paul places on the phrase in his letter, one of these options should not be chosen over any of the others. The phrase is “programmatic”²⁹ and rhetorical in the sense that Paul uses it as a catchphrase for the argument of his letter. In other words, the phrase should be read with all three renderings of the genitive in mind. Douglas Moo states:

[W]e understand the words “obedience” and “faith” to be mutually interpreting; obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience. They should not be equated, compartmentalized, or made into separate stages of the Christian experience . . . the phrase captures the full dimension of Paul’s apostolic task.³⁰

The obedience that Paul seeks to win is characterized by, consists in, and springs from faith. Through the obedience of faith one participates in Christ, and this participation is made evident by following the “law of faith,” as it is contrasted to “the works of the law” (3:27–28). The works of the law are the sociological and theological boundary markers of first century Judaism, such as circumcision, dietary laws, the Sabbath, the Temple, and monotheism.³¹ Moreover, the law of faith (3:27) is to be observed because it appropriately reveals the righteousness of God. Therefore, it is crucial to the ethos of Paul’s gospel because the law was always understood to disclose the righteousness of God. Paul’s argument is that God’s righteousness is not bound to the law, but rather, it belongs to the faithfulness of Christ. This is not to set the law against the gospel, but merely to demonstrate the eschatological function of the law in that it anticipates Christ and is fulfilled by Christ (10:4). According to Paul, the gospel does not nullify the law, but rather fulfills the law (3:31). What the law lacked was power, but the law of faith (3:27) has the power to save because of the person and work of Christ (8:1–2). Therefore, through the rubric of the obedience of faith, Paul establishes the ethos of his gospel as the law of faith, which opposes the works of the law in that it is the appropriate means to righteousness, and the gospel fully reveals God’s righteousness (i.e., God’s ethos).

For Paul, faith is the great equalizer because Gentiles become

28 Davies, *Faith and Obedience*, 27–29; Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, 218–226; Jewett, *Romans*, 110.

29 Garlington, *The Obedience of Faith*, 1.

30 Moo, *Romans*, 52–53.

31 See Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, I.lxiii–lxxii.

participants in the covenant community by faith in Christ. Thus, Paul is not setting up a new legal system, but rather he understands that the future promise of Gentile inclusion will one day be realized as the restoration of Israel.³² Paul's personal ethos and the ethos of his gospel are tied to his eschatology because he is called by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles in order to bring them to the obedience of faith with a gospel that is God's power to save. According to Paul, God is fulfilling his promises to restore Israel through the gospel, and he is doing so through Gentile inclusion on the basis of faith in Christ. Thus, God's own ethos is established by Paul through the motif of the righteousness of God, which is God's faithfulness to his covenantal promises. In order to demonstrate this, Paul "invents" (in the rhetorical sense) two important rhetorical paradigms.³³

First, Paul "invents" Abraham as a paradigm for the obedience of faith (Rom. 4) of the Gentile believer who is deemed righteous on the basis of faith and not Torah observance (Gal. 3:17–18). Thus, Paul's use of Abraham would be important to both Gentile and Jewish Christians because both groups considered themselves to be children of Abraham. Furthermore, this rhetorical paradigm also grounds Paul's argument in the scriptures of the Old Testament (a "non-artistic" proof).

Second, Paul "invents" Jesus as the paradigm *par excellence* for exhorting the Roman church to the obedience of faith, providing another "non-artistic" proof. Paul argues in Rom. 3:21–26 that God's righteousness has been revealed apart from the law, though being witnessed by the law and the prophets, through Jesus's faithful obedience unto his death,³⁴ and Christ's faithful obedience is the public display of God's righteousness (i.e., God's ethos). Moreover, Jesus's faithfulness is further explicated in Rom. 5:12–21, when his obedience (τῆς ὑπακοῆς) is contrasted with the disobedience (τῆς παρακοῆς) of Adam (5:19).³⁵

These two paradigms are central to Paul's argument in Romans, which is the display of God's righteousness in Christ and humanity's duty to respond in the obedience of faith. The audience's responsibility to respond in faith is twofold: first, they are to respond by putting their faith in Christ (3:22b),³⁶ by which God justifies them as he did Abraham when Abraham put his faith in God (4:3); second, they are to participate

32 See Isa. 54:3, 55:5, 56:6–8, 60:10–14, 61:11, 62; Hos. 2:23; Zeph. 3:9–13.

33 A rhetorical paradigm is "a story that provides a pattern or example to be either imitated or avoided" (Aune, *Dictionary*, 334).

34 Here reading, δὲ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, as a subjective genitive. See Campbell, *Rhetoric of Righteousness*.

35 Johnson, "Rom 3:21–26," 85–90.

36 Here "faith" is understood as both intellectual assent and trust.

in Christ by imitating him.³⁷ Therefore, the obedience characterized by faith is founded upon and rooted in Jesus's faithful obedience as one participates in Christ; it is animated by the Holy Spirit (6:12, 16–17, note Paul's rhetoric of obedience), given power in the gospel—which reveals God's righteousness (1:16–17) established and displayed in Christ's faithful obedience unto death—and finally manifested in the daily lives of the Roman church by being a living sacrifice (12:1) and mutual reception of one another as Christ has received each one of them (15:7). In this way Paul instructs the Roman church to live out the obedience of faith.

PAUL'S THREE USES OF ETHOS

Paul's Ethos

Paul opens his letter in his typical fashion in order to identify himself as the author and to establish his ethos. As noted above, Romans 1:1–17 functions as the *prooemium*,³⁸ which introduces the author and puts the audience in a position of goodwill towards him. It was also shown that Paul establishes his ethos as a humble and authoritative servant of Christ through the titles he uses to characterize himself. George Kennedy recognizes the subtly with which Paul does this:

It is interesting that he does not make an effort at the outset to establish his personal ethos, perhaps by a narrative of his conversion. He asserts and illustrates, but does not justify his claim to be an apostle until the epilogue. This could be regarded as a subtle appeal to the Romans; they are assumed to take an ecumenical view suitable for the capital of the world.³⁹

Paul subtly establishes his ethos by calling himself “a slave of Christ.” A slave was the lowest and most shameful “member” of the Greco-Roman society. By calling himself “a slave of Christ,” Paul is denoting that he is a willing servant of Christ and that he is reversing the current social structure characterized by honor and shame. Robert Jewett aptly notes the connection to the obedience of faith: “Paul’s qualification of ‘obedience’ by ‘faith’ removes the stigma of slavishness and inserts a large measure of honor, because the gospel to which one has freely responded in faith centers in the grace of God offered to the formerly shamed through

37 Furnish states, “For it is precisely the obedience character of faith which makes it the means of the believer’s participation in Christ’s death and resurrection” (*Theology and Ethics*, 184–185). See also Hay, “Paul’s Understanding of Faith,” 52–57.

38 See Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, 3.14.

39 Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 152–153. See also du Toit, “Persuasion,” 204–206.

Christ's death and resurrection in their behalf."⁴⁰ Thus, for Paul, humility in submission to Christ restores the honor intended for the *imago Dei*.

Roman culture was principally structured on patron-client relationships. Caesar was the principal patron of the empire, and every citizen was a client. The patron would do "favors" for a client that would indebt the client to the patron, whereby the client would give honor to the patron for his benevolence. Moreover, different levels of honor were also bestowed upon clients who had elite patrons because this relationship connected the client to a higher position on the social pyramid.⁴¹ The patron-client paradigm was imitated throughout the social structure within smaller patron-client relationships.⁴² In this light, it is clear that Paul establishes his ethos as a humble servant to his patron, Jesus Christ, by calling himself a slave of Christ. This designation also functions rhetorically as a paradigm for the obedience of faith by which Paul can call his audience to imitate him. Paul does so by explicating his apostolic agenda and duty in 1:9–15 as an obedient slave of Christ who obeys God's will (1:10) and fulfills his obligation to God (1:14)⁴³ for the purpose of bringing about the obedience of faith amongst the Roman church and other Gentiles. Paul Minear notes the importance of obligation to Paul's gospel: "Obligation to him who died produces obligation to those for whom he died. . . . Thus faith in Christ inevitably creates a mutuality of indebtedness."⁴⁴

Paul further establishes his ethos by stating that he is "called to be an apostle" (1:1). In verses 1:1–7, Paul uses the call motif to establish both his ethos and the Roman church's ethos as faithful servants (1:5).⁴⁵ K.L. Schmidt, noting the importance of the call motif for Paul, states that "[t]he response of the man who is called can only be πιστεύειν ["to believe"] in the sense of ὑπακούειν ["to obey"]."⁴⁶ Thus, being called by God is connected to the obedience of faith.

Paul's ethos as faithful servant to God is further established by his "having been set apart to the gospel of God" (1:1). Jewett notes that

40 Jewett, *Romans*, 110–11.

41 Jewett notes this dynamic amongst the slaves of Caesar who were the most influential of the slaves and proudly associated themselves as "slave of Caesar" (*Romans*, 100–101).

42 See Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 4–6.

43 Paul's rhetoric of obligation is subtle. In 1:14, he speaks of his own obligation as apostle to the Gentiles. In 15:26–27, Paul speaks to the Roman church's obligation to support the apostolic mission to the Gentiles by using the example of the churches' support in Macedonia and Achaia.

44 Minear, *Obedience of Faith*, 104.

45 κλητός ("called") is used 10 times in the New Testament, and three of the occurrences are in Rom. 1:1, 6, 7. Two of the occurrences are in reference to the Roman church (1:6, 7).

46 K.L. Schmidt, "καλέω" *Theological Dictionary*, III.489 (bracketed translations mine).

the reference that the gospel is God's gospel is a "reference to God as the commissioner and thus the source of Paul's message" and that it emphasizes the unifying character of the gospel of God, who is the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles. This unifying character of the gospel further serves Paul's rhetorical ends (see 15:7).⁴⁷ Central to Paul's understanding of himself and his vocational aim is that he is the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9; Rom. 15:16). Paul has the authority to speak God's word and the responsibility to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul appeals to this authority and responsibility in order to establish his ethos as a slave of Christ (1:1) who is obedient to God's will (1:10). In verse 5, Paul states that he has received grace, which characterizes his mission and apostleship from the Lord. Finally, the goal of Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles is to bring them to "the obedience of faith."

The Ethos of the Gospel

Closely related to Paul's ethos is the ethos of his own gospel. If the Roman church is to receive Paul as trustworthy, it will judge him based upon the ethos and logos of his message. In the letter's opening, Paul establishes his gospel's ethos by claiming that it came from God.⁴⁸ Therefore, Paul subtly implies that if one questions or disagrees with his gospel, that person is actually questioning and disagreeing with God.⁴⁹ In other words, the ethos of Paul's gospel is intimately tied to the ethos of God himself, since God is the one who called him and gave him the gospel.

Paul creates this link in two different ways in the letter's opening. First, in verse 2, he states that the gospel of God "was proclaimed beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning his son." Here Paul claims that his gospel, which was given to him by God, is the eschatological continuance of the gospel of the Hebrew Scriptures. The gospel is the culmination and climax of all that was said beforehand in the Hebrew Scriptures. Furthermore, the gospel is about Jesus, God's own son. God's ethos is fully realized in his son since he fully establishes God's ethos. Paul furthers his argument by quoting an early Christian creed or hymn in verses 3 and 4.⁵⁰ Paul's aim in quoting this creed/hymn is not just to use a "non-artistic" proof to gain the church's trust in his

⁴⁷ Jewett, *Romans*, 102.

⁴⁸ According to Paul, there is no difference between the gospel of God (Rom. 1:1, Gal. 1:1), the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:12), and his own gospel (Rom. 2:16). In Rom. 1:1, Paul uses the aorist passive participle (ἀφωρισμένος), which is a divine passive, implying that Paul understands that it was God who set him apart.

⁴⁹ Cf. Gal. 1:8-9.

⁵⁰ Jewett, *Romans*, 103; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 230.

gospel by showing that his gospel is the same as their gospel.⁵¹ Rather, as Elliot points out:

Paul's adaptation of the sender formula also points toward a 'deep exigence,' God's action in establishing Jesus Christ as Lord, that now brings Paul and the Romans into relationship as those whom God has called: him, to be an apostle bound to secure the obedience of the Gentiles, and them, 'who are also among the Gentiles,' called 'to belong to Jesus Christ,' 'to be holy.'⁵²

Since the gospel is about Jesus, the ethos of the gospel is dependent upon the ethos of Jesus. In verses 3 and 4, Paul argues that Jesus is the promised son of David ("born of the seed of David") and that God appoints Jesus as the Son of God in power because God vindicates Jesus by raising him from the dead. Thus, Paul's claims about himself and his gospel are clearly Christo-centric. Jesus is the basis from which he can appeal to and exhort the Roman church to unity (15:7) and to the reciprocity of sharing in the faith (1:12). As stated above, Romans 3:21–26 and 5:12–21 demonstrate Jesus's ethos as a faithful servant who is obedient unto death, and Jesus's ethos is the full display of God's ethos since it is through Jesus's obedience that God reverses the curse of death originating in Adam's disobedience. On the basis of Christ's obedience Paul appeals to God's ethos through the motif of the righteousness of God (3:21–26). This motif is rightly understood as his covenant faithfulness and power to save.

Second, Paul establishes his gospel's ethos in the *propositio* (the theme) of the letter in 1:16–17. Paul states that the gospel is the power of God to save all who believe and that God's salvation is not for the Jews alone, but also for the Greeks. This statement fits well into the rhetorical ends of uniting the feuding groups within the church.⁵³ Finally, Paul argues that faith in Christ is the fullest expression of Habakkuk 2:4, which states that "the righteous shall live by faith." Paul's modification of the Habakkuk text⁵⁴ serves his claim that the gospel is the power of God to save those

51 "The formula performed the service of showing that he shared the same basis of faith as the Christians at Rome; To assume, however, that the church actually knew the formula (e.g., Kuss) exceeds the limits of permissible conjecture" (Käsemann, *Romans*, 13).

52 Elliot, *The Rhetoric of Romans*, 74-75. For Elliot, "exigence" is the aspect of a situation that elicits a response (74 no. 6).

53 This is especially noted with reference to "all" and "for both Jew and Greek." See Jewett, *Romans*, 139–140.

54 The original text of Hab. 2:4 (both MT and LXX) has the personal pronoun "my" and Hebrew's quotation of the text also has the first person personal pronoun ("μου," Heb. 10:38), but both times Paul uses the text he drops the personal pronoun (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11).

who believe. The ethos of the gospel is displayed and effected by Jesus's obedience in that his obedience gained for the gospel the power to move people to salvation and is empowered by the Spirit, who also indwells and empowers God's people to bring about the obedience of faith (8:9–11).

The Ethos of the Church in Rome

Paul makes his final use of ethos when he confirms the ethos of the members of the Roman church as fellow-slaves of Christ and participants in Christ unto the obedience of faith. Paul states five things in confirming the church's ethos. First, he states that they exist in, and are called to be of, Christ Jesus (1:6), and, as stated above, this call motif links into the obedience of faith. Second, he states that they are the beloved of God (1:7), a term denoting God's election (9:13). Third, they are saints, holy ones (Rom. 1:7; see also Lev. 19:2). Fourth, they have the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7), which means that through saving them God has reconciled them to himself. Fifth, Paul states that "their faith is being proclaimed in the whole world" (1:8).⁵⁵

Paul's confirmation of their ethos as fellow slaves of Christ anticipates their participation in the sharing of spiritual fruit (1:11, 13), which is the mutual reciprocity of faith as comforting one another and the support of the gospel proclamation, which in their case is to support Paul's trip to Spain. Paul hopes that the Roman church will receive him, will be built up by his preaching, and will encourage him with their faith (1:12). Moreover, he hopes that, by receiving him, the Roman church will contribute to his apostolic agenda of winning the obedience of faith from the Gentiles as other Gentile communities of faith have done (1:13), and this agenda can be accomplished specifically by sending him off to Spain (15:24). Finally, Paul hopes that, through his letter's instruction to them about their responsibility to be obedient slaves, they will put aside their differences and be unified as they already are in Christ. Since they are one of the churches of the nations, it is Paul's responsibility as apostle to the Gentiles to bring about the obedience of faith among them too, which in their case may be the maturation of faith evidenced in their imitation of Christ by accepting each other (15:7).

55 Compare with 16:19, where Paul commends them for their obedience which has reached into every region. This is one parallel that demonstrates Paul's ability to use faith and obedience as synonymous, which is one reason why the genitive of apposition ("the obedience that consists in faith") has so many advocates.

CONCLUSION

Paul writes a *protreptic* letter to the Roman church in order to introduce himself and prepare the way for his arrival in Rome. A fundamental necessity to the Roman church receiving Paul and accepting his message is the trustworthiness of both Paul and his gospel. Paul subtly appeals to his own ethos by identifying himself as a fellow slave of Christ and his gospel as being given to him by God, and this gospel is the righteousness of God in Christ and the power of God to save. By doing so, Paul links his own ethos to the ethos of the God, who called him, and to Jesus Christ, whom he serves. Paul's hope in writing to the Roman church is to unify them, to encourage them, to implore them to obedience, and to extend his apostolic mission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles by winning their support for his mission to Spain. Paul's message to the Roman church is that their ethos is identified with his own as fellow participants in Christ. Finally, Paul uses the rhetorical phrase "the obedience of faith" to achieve this end. God has appointed Paul as apostle to the Gentiles in order to win them to the obedience of faith (1:5, 15:18, 16:26). Thus, it is not just any obedience that Paul is to win from the Gentiles (and especially not the obedience to Torah), but rather Paul is to win the obedience of the Gentiles that is characterized by, that consists in, and that springs forth from faith. In this way, they are true children of Abraham and faithful slaves of Christ. Paul's aim of winning the obedience of faith amongst the Gentiles was not only accomplished in his own time, but also, as evidenced by the profound impact his letter has had on countless generations since, is successful in establishing his ethos now. Therefore, by understanding Paul's use of ethos in Romans 1, the Western reader is better able to understand not only one of the great architects of Western civilization, but also his letter to the Romans, a letter which has been formidable in constructing the invisible bindings that continue to define the Western world.

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