

After all these years it was an interesting exercise to think myself back into the situation I was in when the team and I wrote the letter. Lots of the time I found myself writing in the present tense, as though I had gone back in time. At other times there's evidence that the intervening years have given me a slightly different perspective on the letter. I hope the shifting tenses do not make things too confusing!

Chapter 1

Verses 1–7 Making introductions

This is my greeting to the people in Rome. It's pretty formal because we only really know one another by reputation. At this point, I'm really trying to accomplish two things; firstly to introduce myself as someone worth listening to, and secondly to establish lots of common ground. I think it would be helpful if I comment on a few of the specific names, words and phrases that I use.

Verse 1:

Paul

That's the name that I go by these days. It's not the name that my parents called me, nor the one that I was known by in my days as a Pharisee. I was from the tribe of Benjamin and perhaps the most famous of our number was Saul, Israel's very first king. It was quite an honour to be named after him. However, in non-Jewish circles I went by the name Paul and that's the name by which I'm known to the churches. The scriptures are full of stories about people who change their name when God calls them. I rather like the idea that I'm counted among them.

A slave

As far as I can gather, about half the population of Rome were slaves. The whole system was an indication of the utter moral corruption of the city and its empire. I've always held out the hope that little by little the story of God's action in Jesus would help expose this wickedness for what it was. Of course, it's easy to think things like that without it being either easy or appropriate to say them. I never argued that slavery is a good thing. I simply accepted that, for the time being, economic and social life was unthinkable without it. When I get the opportunity, I argue that slaves should be freed.¹

Lots of the Jesus-followers in Rome are slaves. Among the groups of believers, they should be treated with the same respect as everyone else. Sadly, that is not always the case. So, in order to identify with them, and to try to find a helpful way to express my relationship to King Jesus, I use the word 'slave' to describe myself. It communicates something significant – I'm under orders; I'm not the master of my own destiny; King Jesus is my owner. Of course, there's a vital difference. Most slaves want to be free but I wouldn't swap belonging to Jesus for anything.

Jesus Christ

These days you can easily read lots of the stories about Jesus. Back then, the stories about him simply circulated round the churches. Anyway, if you've read the gospels in the collection that came to be called the New Testament, then you know about him. Calling

¹ See my letter to Philemon.

him Jesus Christ is simply a way of according him the status God has given him. He is the Messiah, the king through whom God is keeping his ancient promises. He is the one I belong to. I tend to refer to him as King Jesus because this is as close as I can get to communicating the emotional force of his title to today's readers.

Called an apostle

'Called' is a big word. In the scriptures, that is to say, the books that most of you call the Old Testament, God calls people when he's got a special purpose for them. I've been known to compare myself with Jeremiah who felt that he had been set apart by God even before he was born.² He was appointed over nations and that makes me think of my own calling to go to foreigners. And like Jeremiah, I don't really feel I've been given a say in the matter. There's a sense of compulsion for me in the work that I do.

An apostle is somebody sent for a purpose. King Jesus had commissioned me to be an ambassador for him and for his message. It's like being given a mandate from heaven with something vital to say to the earth. But it's more than that – there's a sense in which I, like the other apostles, am the King's representative, his agent; I've got his full authority.

Set apart

You know how it is. Lots of us have some things that we only use on particular occasions or for special reasons. There's the best china; the plate that only comes out of the cupboard when a parent visits; or a ring that holds a romantic significance. In the temple in Jerusalem there were things that were set apart for the worship of God and could never be used for anything else. This is how I felt about God's call on me. It was my purpose. I did other things too, of course, but they were always secondary.

The gospel

As you've all been told about a million times, the word gospel means good news. However, in my time it was often used for a specific piece of news; that a new king had been crowned and was establishing his authority. Actually, when this happened, it was, most of the time, very good news indeed. The last thing anybody wanted was any uncertainty at all concerning who was making the rules. When there was doubt about who was in charge, there was often fighting, people found they could go back on the deals they had made, and the situation was unsettled and worrying. Even a bad king was usually better than no king at all. So, when a new emperor gained power, messengers went out and proclaimed a gospel; a new ruler was in power. That was the meaning of 'gospel' in a Roman imperial context. Now, the wise people who translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek also made use of the word. There's a passage in Isaiah – these days you call it chapter 52 – that we Pharisees had always regarded as a promise about the time when God would establish his rule anew. It was always an important text for me, and it played a central role when I rethought things after I met King Jesus. It's an announcement that God has become king and has returned to his capital. I realised that this is what King Jesus represented. This is the gospel.

God

Let's be clear. There's only one god and that's the God of Israel, the God of the scriptures. He is the creator of everything there is and so he is beyond everything but, at the same

² Jeremiah 1.5. I also believe that King Jesus fulfilled the purposes that Isaiah prophesied when he spoke of the servant. As the servant's servant and representative, I think some of the language applies to me and to all who follow Jesus. See Isaiah 49.1.

time, he sustains the whole of creation and so is constantly active within it. He is characterised by justice, generosity and faithfulness; God keeps his promises.

Verse 2:

Promised

The gospel is the announcement that God has kept his promises. The promises are recorded in the Old Testament. By sending King Jesus, God has made good on those promises. As I said to the Corinthians, in Jesus 'every one of God's promises is a "Yes"'.³ The unexpected things were the timing and the methods that God had chosen to keep his promises. That was what threw me and meant that the Lord had to ambush me to get me to see what was going on in front of my own eyes.

Prophets

These are the inspired men and women who spoke God's word to his people and to others. The books of the prophets make up a significant section of the scriptures. While I do not call myself a prophet, I find myself borrowing their imagery when I think about my own calling.

Holy scriptures

When I wrote Romans the collection called the New Testament did not exist. When I refer to the scriptures, I have in mind the books that are now called the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. The scriptures are inspired by God. I recognised even then that they could be interpreted in different ways. From my present perspective I can see the possible approaches even more clearly. However, at the time I understood them to be telling the story I have already set out. That story contained lots of divine promises and, through King Jesus and the message about him, God was making good on them.

Verse 3:

There are a number of ways to set out the content of the gospel. I spelt it out for the Romans using a traditional formula that developed in the earliest years of the church. You can tell that it's not original to me because it doesn't say things in quite the same way that I would normally express them. For example, it refers to the spirit of holiness. I was trying to send a signal to the Jewish Christian leaders that I'm not an innovator. I hold the same truths as they do. The other thing to notice is that it's a story, not just a set of doctrines.

Son

This is one of the titles we give to King Jesus. It's one of the ways he spoke about himself and it's a title given to some of Israel's ancient kings. We are all God's sons and daughters – but we are adopted into the family. He was always the Son; his resurrection made that plain.

David

David was the greatest of the kings of Israel. He succeeded my namesake Saul. The nation divided into two kingdoms after the death of David's son Solomon but, from their capital in Jerusalem, David's descendants ruled the kingdom of Judah for as long as it existed. To

³ 2 Corinthians 1:20.

say that a man is descended from David is to acknowledge his royal status and that the promises God made to David are fulfilled through him.

Flesh

This is a word that I use in a number of related ways. Here it simply means something like ‘according to human ways of reckoning’. That was the meaning in the old formula I had borrowed. The family of King Jesus was from the tribe of Judah and could trace their ancestry back to David. At other times, when I’m not dependent on other people’s words, I use the word flesh to mean other things. Sometimes it refers to physical descent. At other times I use it as a shorthand way to speak of the part of humanity that has a particular tendency to disobey God. I use the word in both those ways later in the letter.

Verse 4:

Spirit of holiness

This was a way of speaking of the Holy Spirit in some Jewish Christian circles. I kept to the traditional wording because I was seeking to persuade the Jewish Christians in Rome that my core beliefs were the same as theirs.

Lord

This is another word with a whole range of possible meanings. Here it refers to the ancient confession of the church, ‘Jesus is Lord’; he is the one to whom we owe allegiance. However, the word is also used in the Greek translation of the scriptures to translate the name of God. As a result, there is a hint, for those who spot the allusion, that I am saying Jesus is YHWH, the name that is translated LORD – in capital letters – in most of your Bibles.

Verse 5:

Grace

Grace is another word with a range of meanings. Sometimes it’s just a nice way of greeting people. At other times it’s a word that speaks both of God’s scandalous and extravagant generosity, his unwarranted goodness that outrages so many people, and of the attribute of God that generates that generosity. King Jesus told stories about this kind of apparently indiscriminate benevolence; you call them things like the Prodigal Son and the Labourers in the Vineyard. It is grace that motivates God to go to the lengths he does to get the world back on track; grace is the reason there is such a thing as salvation.

Apostleship

I’ve already said something about this but here I was filling out my sense of calling. I was stressing that my calling was to the nations and that my purpose was to bring them to the obedience of faith. To say I’m King Jesus’ apostle is to say that he has sent me; I’m his envoy, his spokesman, his herald.

Obedience of faith

This is not the kind of expression I often use but I thought it was important to include it here. One of the outcomes of faith is obedience to God. My putting it like this may have surprised some of those in Rome. They had been told, or had assumed, that since I gave a different value to the Instruction than was usual among conservative Jews, I was not interested in people being obedient to God. Talk about missing the point! This was far

from being the case. I wanted to stress this near the beginning, to put down a marker, as it were, even though I wouldn't be able to spell it all out until later in the letter. Lots of people imagine that I think that faith need have no practical consequences, or that if you have faith then the way that you live does not matter. I wanted an opportunity early in the letter to make it clear that this is a crass misunderstanding of my thinking. I'm sure the misunderstanding was sometimes deliberate. Let me be completely clear, the gospel I preached was intended to promote obedience because it is what brings Life – humans living in the way God intended at the beginning.

And I should probably say something about the word 'faith'. Lots of people tend to use it to mean the same thing as 'belief', in the sense that you believe in certain facts. It gets used to refer to giving intellectual assent to a list of propositions. But the word also carries the idea of faithfulness and so suggests relationship. And on top of that, it carries the idea of personal allegiance. If I say I have faith in someone, it means I have offered that person my loyalty; they have become the thing around which my life revolves. Perhaps this helps to explain the strong connection in my mind between faith and obedience.

Gentiles

This is another word with a degree of ambiguity. Most of the time I use it to mean the non-Jewish peoples of the world. This means that humans can be divided into two groups – Jews and Gentiles. However, sometimes the word simply means 'nations' and could be understood to include the Jewish nation alongside all the others.

Name

This is a way of speaking about a person, their character and their reputation. When I say that God does something for the sake of his name, I mean something like, for the sake of his reputation. In other words, God does things to show he is true to his promises. He can be trusted.

Verse 6:

Including yourselves

Here, I am referring to the Roman Jesus-followers who are hearing the letter read aloud. They are among those to whom I am sent as an apostle. In my mind, this applies to all of them, whether they are Jews or non-Jews.

Verse 7:

Saints

Technically this refers to those who are holy but I use it to speak of those who follow Jesus; they are the ones who will one day join me, and all the others, in the cloud, where we await our own resurrection and the renewal of all creation.

Peace

Like 'grace', this is a word that means different things in different contexts. It can just be a greeting; you say peace because you wish someone well. However, it can also mean the situation that exists when hostilities have ceased. It can even be used to describe the time when justice and righteousness are established. When this happens you can be sure that everyone is living in a good relationship with God, with one another and with the whole of creation; that's peace.

Father

King Jesus did not invent the idea that God is the Father of his people. However, he is the one who made this word his main way of addressing God. Those who follow Jesus tend to adopt this word and use it as the basis for their understanding of their relationship with God.

You might notice how closely I connect the Father with King Jesus. If I'm asked who God is, I say he's the Father of King Jesus. If I'm asked who Jesus is, I say he's the Son of God. In my mind they are defined by their relationship to one another.

Verses 8–15 Words of thanks

This is the thanksgiving section of the opening of the letter. It's traditional that one should be included and it gave me an opportunity to say some nice things about the Roman Christians, to assure them of my genuine concern for them, and to tell them of my longstanding desire to meet them face-to-face. Obviously, I had some important things I wanted to say to them, but I also wanted to be careful not to overplay my hand; I had not founded their church and so I couldn't expect to be granted the same authority there as I claimed in, say, Galatia or Corinth. That's why I seek to assure them there is an element of mutuality in the relationship; I can learn from them just as they can learn from me. Nevertheless, I end the section by mentioning my calling that gives me a duty to preach the gospel. This applies just as much to Rome as it does to everywhere else.

8. The presence of Jesus-followers in Rome was well known to the churches everywhere. Their existence was sometimes used to illustrate a point. Someone would be aware that their congregation was facing a degree of local opposition; the preacher would ask, 'how much more difficult must it be for the brothers and sisters in Rome?' Another congregation would wonder if the church would ever really flourish. And the preacher would remind them of the Christians in Rome and of the opportunities for influence in high places that this represented.

Part of me always had the feeling that my call to follow King Jesus would take me to the emperor. We all knew that Jesus had spoken truth to Pilate, Caesar's representative; someone would now have to speak of King Jesus to Caesar himself! And it might as well be me. That's part of the reason that, when I was taken prisoner after my last visit to Jerusalem, I kept appealing to the emperor.⁴

9. I did a lot of praying. I prayed for the churches I'd started and for the ones I didn't, the ones I knew well and the ones I hoped to learn about. It was a significant – if largely hidden – part of my ministry.

10. One of the things I often prayed for was that I would get to Rome. It did happen, but not quite in the way I'd envisaged when I wrote this.

11. At this point I was being vague. I had nothing specific in mind. I certainly did hope to offer the Roman Jesus-followers something when I saw them – and the goal of that would be to strengthen them – but other than helping them to understand my perspective on the

⁴ Luke tells the story in Acts 21–28.

work of God, I had no particular plans. In writing the letter I was concerned to avoid giving the impression that all I was interested in was their support for the proposed mission to Spain. It was one of my motives but was far from being the only one. My concern for them was genuine.

12. Here I am stressing that the relationship I hope to establish with the Jesus-followers in Rome is one that benefits me as well as them.

13. I had longed to go to Rome because I wanted to engage in mission there. There were lots of ways in which we spoke about the task of mission. King Jesus himself often used the illustration of fishing. Then again, lots of his stories draw on agricultural images. What I mean by the language of harvest is that people, both Jews and non-Jews, will believe the message and join one of the groups of Jesus-followers in the city. They will therefore experience the process that we call 'salvation', in which God's original purposes for humans are being recovered. Of course, speaking of harvest is also a metaphor for judgement. Our response to the message about King Jesus is an act of judgement; it makes clear who we are. I shall expand on this point in a few verses time.

14. As I've already suggested, in my time as a Pharisee I had a tendency to divide humanity into two basic categories, Jews and non-Jews. The Jews had the Instruction and the non-Jews didn't. The Jewish men were circumcised and non-Jewish men were not. However, I was aware that other people worked with different categories. For example, those who spoke Greek tended to distinguish between themselves and those who spoke gibberish, or what seemed to the Greeks to be gibberish; they just muttered bar, bar, bar. Therefore, one way to refer to everyone is to speak of Greeks and Barbarians. There was also a tendency for those who spoke Greek to think of themselves, or certainly of their educated elites who knew philosophy, as the wise, while dismissing everyone else as foolish. The point of study was to become wise. I was carefully making no judgement on any of this at this point. I was still seeking to build common ground. So, another way to refer to everyone is to speak of the wise and the foolish.

15. My main purpose was to say that I felt a burden to ensure that the gospel was preached to every category of person, however you choose to divide them up. And that included those in Rome.

Verses 16–17 The theme of the letter

16. The preliminaries are over. This is where I state, in rather a condensed form, the basic theme of the letter. There is deliberate understatement here. I expressed myself this way because of the reference to the wise. My point is that I'm deeply passionate about the gospel. It is the means that God is using to put the whole of humanity back on track; those who grasp it make a step towards understanding what it means to be human in the way that the one who made us always intended.

This gospel was delivered first to the Jews and then to the non-Jews. You will notice that my use of the word 'Greek' is a little slippery and I can see how it could be confusing. Earlier on I used the phrase Greek and Barbarian to indicate every type of person where Greek is specific and Barbarian the rest. Now I use Jew and Greek to speak of everyone; Jew refers to a particular group and Greek to the rest. It's a way of speaking of Jew and non-Jew. In terms of my theology, this is the only important distinction. However, I have to

say that it is a much less significant distinction than I used to think it was before I started to follow Jesus.

17. Now, I need to say something about the word translated 'righteousness'. It has quite a range of overlapping meanings. One of the key meanings is the idea that something is fulfilling its original purpose. So, God shows his righteousness when he acts in a way that puts the world back onto the path that he originally intended. Since this is something that he consistently said that he would do, God's righteousness is shown in the way God keeps his promises. Where people are concerned, the word relates to the purposes God had for them when they were first created. They display righteousness when they live that way. Of course, the only human who has ever fully done this is King Jesus.

The gospel, the story of God's action in King Jesus, reveals God's 'righteousness'. Essentially, what I meant when I wrote the letter was that the gospel demonstrates that God has kept his promises; it shows how he has been true to his ancient oaths. Although I don't explicitly mention the word 'covenant' or 'pact' very often, the idea is always in the background. It's a way of thinking about the framework of God's promises to his people and his dealings with them. Basically, I'm insisting that through his action in King Jesus, God has kept his side of the bargain. This has happened from faithfulness unto faithfulness or, I suppose I might have said, from God, the faithful one, to his faithful people. Or even, out of faithfulness and for the sake of faith; God's faithfulness leads to people having faith; God's promise keeping enables human allegiance to God.

Next I quote the prophet Habakkuk. You will remember that his prophecy begins with the great question of God's faithfulness. The speaker wants to know how long it will be before God acts. This was like my cry as a Pharisee. When would God act to put things right? Or rather, when would God act to put his people right, so that God could then put everything else right? The answer that God gives to Habakkuk, who sees himself as a watchman looking out for God to act in response to his prayers, is that God's action may seem slow, but it is in process. 'The just will live by faith' says the prophet, meaning that the one who shows themselves to belong to God will do this by trusting that God is indeed acting. God is the promise-keeping God. His people live as though their God is keeping his promises. They should not live as though everything depended on them, but instead ought to trust God to act. This was just like the answer that God had given to me. Through King Jesus, God was keeping his promises. As a result, Death is no longer our destiny; instead, we will live. When I say 'live' I don't simply mean 'survive'. I mean 'live' in the sense of living Life as God originally intended. All this is about God's way of enabling humans to recover Life as God said it would be.

Verses 18-32 The Human dilemma

Having set out my theme, I now set about the task of expounding it. I don't think there is anything in this section that any of the intended first readers would have disagreed with. I was still working on establishing our common ground. Basically, I am setting out the human dilemma; the way in which we have failed to be human as God intended us to be. Humans are shown to be unfaithful, to have distorted God's purposes. This is the context in which God demonstrates that he is a promise-keeper.

Just as the gospel shows us that God is keeping his promises, it also shows us God's motivation for exercising judgement; the world is distorted and has to be put right. The

word I use for God's motivation in judging and in putting right is 'wrath'. The word has caused me no end of problems and I suppose this is understandable. In a couple of my other letters, I include the word in a long list of the things that humans should avoid.⁵ People inevitably wonder why they should avoid something that I elsewhere claim is a characteristic of God. I suppose that I use the word in two different ways. One is to describe the kind of inappropriate anger that many humans express. The other is as a kind of technical term for the thing that motivates the exercise of judgement by those responsible for maintaining justice. This is true of the human institutions that carry this responsibility and of God who is the judge of the world.

God exercises his judgement in two different ways, within history and beyond it. Of course the two are not unconnected; the one is both a sign and a warning of the other. The judgement beyond history is something that we must all face one day. We will all have to answer to our creator as to whether we have been human as he intended that we should be human; were we 'fit for purpose'? The judgement within history is the way in which God acts within our human story to show his own character. For example, in the story of Israel, the prophets tell us that God allowed his people to be taken into exile because they failed to live in the way they had promised. My argument is that there are other ways in which God's wrath is seen in human societies and cultures. This is God at work demonstrating that, as our creator, he knows how we should live if we are to be truly human; some of the questionable things that people do show that we are not living in accordance with God's original purposes. The gospel provokes a choice. Either people – and communities – offer God their allegiance and experience salvation, or they do not and manifest the signs of God's wrath. These are indications in the present of the divine verdict in the judgement that lies beyond history.

In this section of the letter I was exploring the way in which this wrath can be observed in human history and leads to the kinds of issues I saw in my own time and have seen in many others since then. The process begins with humans failing to acknowledge their 'createdness' or 'creatureliness' and instead honouring things they have created themselves. This primal disorder leads to the ethical disorder I saw in my own day. Then people struggled to tell right from wrong and were prepared to act as cheerleaders for others who did things that were obviously wrong. At different points in telling this story, I use the language of God 'giving people up' or 'handing them over'. I was trying to say that God doesn't rush to judgement; he lets the consequences of his purposes being rejected play out. In addition, I was deliberately using a word that the readers might recognise from the earliest traditions about Jesus; that he was the one who was handed over for our sins. It's a kind of foreshadowing of the conclusion of the longer argument in this part of the letter.

In this section I was not explicitly telling the story of Adam and Eve, but that tale is in the background of my argument. All my thinking was shaped by the Bible and so, when I told the story of humans and creation, the story of our first ancestors was never far away. References to Adam become much more explicit later in the letter. The thing about this story is that, while it is told in the Hebrew Bible, it is a story about humanity rather than about the Jews. Adam and Eve lived before the time when God introduced any distinction between Jews and non-Jews. So, while the things I talked about are usually associated with pagans, and the issues are certainly more obvious among them than they are among

⁵ Ephesians and Colossians. I know that there are people around who question whether I actually wrote these letters. Let's just say that if I didn't write them, I wish I had.

the Jews, all humanity is implicated to some degree in the patterns of behaviour I sketched out.

18. Basically, the truth of human createdness, and the purposes for which we are created, has been deliberately suppressed. This stops us from being human in the way that God originally intended. The result is that this provokes what I call 'wrath'. Distorting God's goals comes with consequences.

19. Clearly, you can't know everything about God on the basis of observing the universe around you, but you can get the sense both that you were created and that this was for a purpose. We are not our own creation. Yet humans manage to suppress even this awareness. We behave as though we are accountable only to ourselves and to our own desires.

20. This means that enough can be known for us to honour the creator rather than ourselves, or the things we have made ourselves. As we have, collectively, failed to do this, we have no excuse if our maker decides to hold us to account.

21. I was trying to argue that one thing leads to another. Humans failed to acknowledge their createdness; if they had done so they would have honoured their maker and given thanks for his sustaining of them. They didn't and the result was that all their thinking became distorted. If you don't know what you're made for, then all your understanding of yourself becomes twisted. It ends up missing the point and so becomes futile.

22. We thought we were so clever! How daft can you get? All that clever thinking, and all of it missing the point! All that wasted effort.

23. So instead of honouring the one who made us, we made pictures and statues of the things he had made and honoured the images instead! This is the heart of the issue and is the reason that Jewish people have such a thing about idolatry. Humans, who are created to offer allegiance to their creator, instead offered it to themselves or to things they had made themselves. Instead of looking beyond ourselves for meaning and purpose, we looked inward. As a result everything became distorted.

24. One of the things that got distorted was human desire; it got the wrong focus. It turned in on itself. Humans dishonoured God and ended up dishonouring themselves. If you stop seeing your life, including your body, as a gift with a purpose and see it instead as your own to do with as you please, there will be consequences.

25. Here I am summing up what I've been trying to argue. Basically, we swallowed a lie and ended up in a situation where we cannot be human as intended; we serve not the maker but things we made.

26–27. Again, the consequences are seen in the distortion of human desire. I think it's important to understand that I am talking about human cultures as a whole. The activities described in these verses are symptoms of an underlying disorder not necessarily in the individuals involved but in the culture of which they are a part. And these things all have consequences. If we do not see the creator God as the one who gives meaning and purpose to us and to the world, then we will find that meaning and purpose in ourselves.

28–31. I am still arguing that certain things follow from a failure to acknowledge God. We fail to be human as God intended and so you get the list of wrongs contained in these verses. The list might seem like I've gone overboard, but piling idea on idea, and thought on thought, was an important rhetorical strategy at the time I wrote this.

32. The final outcome of moral chaos is that although we know certain things are wrong, we do them anyway and we cheer others for doing them too. We all know, at some level, that God is against such things. When I speak of God's decree, I am not thinking of anything in the laws given to Moses so much as the things that God said to humanity in general, through Adam and through creation itself. Do you remember how God tells Adam that if he gives in to a desire for something that is not his to take, he will die? If we live in God's way, that leads to Life. If we live in some other way, the consequence is Death. That's the idea here.

To summarise the argument; whether God has spoken to you directly or not, you can tell from the universe we inhabit that we humans are not our own creation. Nevertheless, humans choose to suppress this knowledge and this stops us from being human in the way that our maker intended. Instead of honouring our creator, we honour ourselves and the things we have made. This distorted way of living is inexcusable and has consequences. Since something is twisted at the heart of our self-perception, all of our thinking and desiring becomes distorted. The outcome is moral chaos where people have no means to tell right from wrong.

There are a number of different ways to look at the dilemma. The rejection of God's purposes for humans is something that elsewhere I call 'Sin'. This is like a power from which humans need to be set free. In addition, Sin has certain consequences that can be summed up in the word 'Death'. Humans need the consequences of Sin to be averted or the penalty to be waived. In other words, they need to be forgiven. Another way to look at things might be in terms of a relationship that has broken down. What is needed is therefore reconciliation. Lots of the rest of the letter argues that God has acted to resolve these issues and teaches how humans are now enabled to live in the light of this. However, before we get to that, I knew that I had to deal with those who would have agreed with everything I said but believed it was true of others but not of themselves.