

Week 9: Paul and the Roman Empire

1. Topic Overview

- 1) Paul preached the gospel under the rule of the Roman Empire.
 - 2) His epistles contain more than religious proclamations—they include theological and political challenges to the imperial ideology of his time.
 - 3) This week explores how Paul's gospel confronted the power structures of the Roman Empire.
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2. Learning Objectives

- 1) Understand the political, social structure, and emperor worship of the Roman Empire.
 - 2) Interpret the anti-imperial meaning behind Paul's proclamation "Jesus is Lord."
 - 3) Recognize how the gospel challenged the values of the Roman Empire.
 - 4) Reflect on how modern Christian faith must distinguish itself from imperial mindsets.
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3. The World of the Roman Empire

1) Political Structure:

Emperor-centered military dictatorship and colonial rule.

2) Social Structure:

Hierarchical society—nobles, commoners, and slaves.

3) Emperor Worship:

The emperor was hailed as "Lord," "Savior," and "Son of God."

4) Pax Romana (Roman Peace):

Order through military strength and suppression.

4. Paul's Gospel and Imperial Ideology

1) Gospel (εὐαγγέλιον):

A term used for announcing the emperor's accession or military victory Paul reclaims it for proclaiming Jesus' lordship.

2) "Jesus is Lord":

A political and theological declaration in a time when Caesar was called “Lord.”

3) “Son of God”:

A title attributed to emperors like Augustus—now applied to Jesus.

4) Salvation and Peace:

Contrasted with Pax Romana, Paul presents peace through the cross.

5. Key Texts from Paul’s Epistles

1) Philippians 2:5–11:

Jesus’ humility and exaltation—a reversal of emperor worship.

2) 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10:

Turning from idols to the living God a break from emperor veneration

3) Romans 13:

Submission to authorities—yet pointing to the ultimate reign of God.

4) 2 Corinthians 10–13:

Theology of weakness—undermines imperial notions of power.

6. Contemporary Applications

- 1) Develop a theology critical of imperialism and political power.
 - 2) Understand the Church not as a tool of the state but as an alternative community of God's Kingdom.
 - 3) Reconsider the political engagement of the modern Church in light of Paul’s gospel.
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7. Reflection Questions

- 1) What might Roman citizens have thought when Paul proclaimed “Jesus is Lord”?
- 2) How did Paul’s gospel impact the social order of his time?
- 3) How effectively is today’s Christianity resisting imperialist culture?