

I. Rome Wasn't Built in a Day

September 1/2/3, 2015

Romans 1:1-7

Aim: To introduce Paul's epistle to the Roman church.

The epistle of Paul to the Romans has been the written force behind some of the most significant conversions of church history.

One day in the year 386 AD, Aurelius Augustine was pacing in a garden where a copy of the New Testament was chained to a lectern. As he was walking, he overheard children playing in the grass, singing a refrain to one of their childhood songs: *Tolle lege, tolle lege*, which means 'take up and read.' He went to the Scriptures that were there, allowed the volume of the sacred writ to fall open where it would, and in the providence of God read Romans 13:11-14. As Augustine read these words, the Spirit of God took them and pierced between joint and sinew, bone and marrow, to the very depths of this young man's soul. In this way, St. Augustine, the most brilliant theologian of the early centuries, came to conviction of sin and salvation after reading some verses from the thirteenth chapter of Romans.

In 1515 an Augustinian monk who had diligently pursued his doctoral studies in the works of Augustine was consigned to a university to be the professor of biblical studies. As he was preparing lectures on the book of Romans, he found a notation from an ancient manuscript of Augustine defining the righteousness of Christ. For the first time in his life, Martin Luther, whose conscience had been wounded by the burden of the law of God that daily exposed his relentless guilt, understood the gospel of Christ. Thus, Martin Luther recovered the doctrine of salvation by faith from his study of Romans 1:17 and went on to lead the Protestant Reformation.

In the year 1738, a man who was already ordained to the ministry in the Anglican church in England was listening to a message being delivered outside in London at Aldersgate. He mentioned later that as he was listening to the reading of Luther's preface to the book of Romans, he felt his heart was 'strangely warmed.' He said that was the moment of his authentic conversion, and it defined the life and ministry of John Wesley, the catalyst of the great evangelical revival of the eighteenth century, for the rest of his days.

John Bunyan was so inspired as he studied the great themes of Romans in the Bedford jail that he wrote the immortal *Pilgrim's Progress*. In our own time, while we may not always agree with his theology, Karl Barth's arguments from the book of Romans devastated liberal Christianity. There is no doubt about the power of the book of Romans. God has richly blessed those who have devoted themselves to the study of this book.

A. An Introduction to Romans

1. Author

Romans claims to be written by Paul (1:1), and there has been no serious challenge to this claim. In keeping with regular ancient custom, Paul used an amanuensis, or scribe, to write the letter, identified in 16:22 as Tertius.

Paul made three extensive missionary journeys, reported in Acts 13:4-21:17, and then a final journey to Rome to be heard before Caesar (27:1-28:16). On the third journey he went a third time to Corinth, a thriving but wicked port city in the province of Achaia, in what is now

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southern Greece. It was probably during that stay in Corinth to collect another offering for needy believers in Palestine (15:26) that Paul wrote the letter to the church at Rome.

2. Situation

If the authorship of Romans is not in doubt, neither is the general situation in which it was written. Paul tells us in 15:22-29 that three localities figure in his immediate plans: Jerusalem, Rome, and Spain. Jerusalem is his immediate destination. Paul has completed his collection of money from his largely Gentile churches and is now on his way to Jerusalem to deliver the money to the Jewish saints there. This collection was an important project for Paul, as may be gauged from the fact that he talks about it in every letter written on the third missionary journey (cp. 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9). Its importance goes beyond meeting the material needs of the poor Christians in Judea; Paul views it as a practical way to cement the fractured relationship between the Gentile churches of the mission field and the Jewish churches in the ‘home’ country.

Rome is the second stage in Paul’s itinerary (15:24, 28). But, while sincere in his desire to visit the Christians in Rome, Paul views Rome as little more than a stopping-off point in his projected journey to Spain. This is not to minimize the importance of the Christian community in Rome but reflects Paul’s understanding of his call: ‘to preach the gospel in regions where Christ has not yet been named’ (15:20). Paul has set his sights on virgin gospel territory in the far western end of the Mediterranean.

When we compare these indications with Luke’s narrative in Acts, it is clear that Romans must have been written toward the end of the third missionary journey, when Paul, accompanied by representatives from the churches he had founded, prepared to return to Jerusalem (Acts 20:3-6). Since Luke tells us Paul spent three months in Greece before beginning his homeward journey, we can also surmise that while staying here, with the next stage of his missionary career about to unfold, Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. It was probably in Corinth that Paul stayed while in Greece (see 2 Cor. 13:1, 10); and that Romans was written from here is suggested by the fact that Paul commends to the Romans a woman, Phoebe, from Cenchrea, a seaport adjacent to Corinth (16:1-2). Moreover, the Gaius with whom Paul is apparently staying (16:23) is probably the same Gaius whom Paul baptized at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14).

We know when and where Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome. It was in the year 57 when he spent three months in Corinth as houseguest of a wealthy man named Gaius (Acts 20:2). Paul arranged for the letter to be brought to Rome by Phoebe, a servant in the nearby church of Cenchrea.

The date at which Romans was written will depend, accordingly, on the dating of Paul’s three-month stay in Greece; and this dating, in turn, is dependent on the hazardous process of constructing an absolute chronology of the life of Paul. The best alternative is probably 57 AD, though leeway of a year or two either way must be allowed.

3. The Roman Church

The tradition that the church in Rome was founded by Peter (or Peter and Paul together) cannot be right. It is in this very letter that Paul enunciates the principle that he will ‘not build on another person’s foundation’ (15:20). This makes it impossible to think he would have written this letter, or planned the kind of visit he describes in 1:8-15, to a church that was founded by Peter. Nor is it likely that Peter could have been at Rome early enough to have founded the church there. The most likely scenario is that Roman Jews, who were converted on the day of

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Pentecost in Jerusalem (see Acts 2:10), brought their faith in Jesus as the Messiah back with them to their home synagogues. In this way the Christian movement in Rome was initiated.

Contrary to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, the church at Rome was not established by Peter or any other apostle. Paul makes that clear at the end of the letter that he was determined not to ‘build upon another man’s foundation’ (15:20), that is, not to instruct and lead a congregation that had been founded by another apostle or Christian leader. It is likely the church at Rome had been founded by a group of Jewish Christians who came there from Judea. It is possible that there had been Christians in Rome for many years, converts from among the ‘visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes’ at Pentecost (Acts 2:10). Although they were a dedicated and faithful group and lived in the strategic heart of the Roman Empire, believers in the city of Rome had not had the benefit of apostolic preaching or teaching.

The church in Rome began in much the same manner as the church in Antioch. Both churches began through the witness of believers who had been present in Jerusalem during the events described in Acts 2, where 3000 were converted on the day of Pentecost. In each case, the church was not the result of ‘professional’ teachers but of believers reaching out to others.

Acts 2:10 indicates that Jews and proselytes from Rome were among the pilgrims in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost who heard Peter’s Spirit-inspired preaching of the crucified, risen, and ascended Christ. Mention of these Roman Jews implies they were among those who accepted baptism at the hands of the apostles. Based on this Acts reference, it seems likely that the first Christians in Rome were Jews.

An important event in the history of the Jews in Rome is mentioned by the Roman historian Suetonius. In his *Life of Claudius*, he says that Claudius ‘expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus’ (25.2). Most scholars agree that ‘Chrestus’ is a corruption of the Greek *Christos* and that the reference is probably to disputes within the Jewish community over the claims of Jesus to be the *Christos*, the Messiah. This event likely occurred in 49 AD, and receives incidental confirmation from Acts 18:2. As with similar expulsions of specific groups from Rome, this one did not stay in force for long. Jews, like Aquila and Priscilla (cp. Rom. 16:3), were able to return to Rome within a short period of time, certainly soon after Claudius’ death in 54 AD.

In the year 49 AD, there were serious problems within the large Jewish community in Rome (estimated between 40,000 and 50,000 members). According to the biographer Suetonius, writing in the next century, these ‘disturbances’ were ‘at the instigation of Chrestus’ (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25:44). Many scholars regard ‘Chrestus’ as a misspelling of ‘Christus.’ Riots among the Jews were probably over the claims that Jesus was the long-awaited ‘Christ,’ the Messiah-king of Israel. Claudius did not tolerate civil disturbances. His simple remedy was to expel the entire Jewish population. Among those driven out were the Jewish tent-makers Aquila and Priscilla, who were probably also Christians (Acts 18:2-3). Since the majority of believers in Rome were likely Jewish and therefore forced to emigrate, it follows that those able to remain during Claudius’ remaining five years were a relatively small number of Gentiles.

Nevertheless, since the Roman authorities would not have distinguished between Jews and Jewish Christians, this expulsion, however temporary, must have had a significant impact on the development of the church at Rome. Specifically, the Gentile element in the churches, undoubtedly present before the expulsion, would have come into greater prominence as a result of the absence for a time of all (or virtually all) the Jewish Christians. Theologically this would

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also have meant an acceleration in the movement of the Christian community away from its Jewish origins.

Although the expulsion under Claudius eliminated the Jewish element in the church for a time, we can be certain that by the date of Romans, at least some Jewish Christians (like Priscilla and Aquila) would have returned. Certainly by the date of Romans, Gentiles made up a significant portion of the church in Rome (cp. 11:13-32 and 15:7-12). We may, then, be fairly certain that when Paul wrote Romans the Christian community in Rome was made up of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, with Gentile Christians being in the majority.

4. Genre

While Romans displays clear evidence of its ‘occasional’ nature in its epistolary opening (1:1-15) and closing (15:14-16:23), the really striking feature of the letter is the general and sustained argument of 1:16-11:36. Unlike, for instance, 1 Corinthians, where Paul’s agenda is set by questions and issues raised by his readers, these chapters in Romans develop according to the inner logic of Paul’s own teaching. Even the questions and objections that periodically interrupt the argument arise naturally from the flow of Paul’s presentation. Not once in these chapters does Paul allude to a circumstance peculiar to the community at Rome, and even the direct addresses of his audience are so general as to be applicable to almost any church. Nor does the situation change much in 12:1-15:13.

These features show that the main body of Romans is what we may call a ‘treatise’ or ‘tractate.’ It addresses key theological issues against the backdrop of middle first-century Christianity rather than within the context of specific local problems. Nevertheless, Romans is not timeless treatise. We must not forget that Romans as a whole is a *letter*, written on a specific occasion, to a specific community. While these specifics have not played a large role in Paul’s presentation, they have undoubtedly determined the agenda of theological and practical issues with which Paul deals. In this regard, we must note that Romans is far from being a comprehensive summary of Paul’s theology. Many issues near and dear to him are absent, or only allusively mentioned: the church as the ‘body of Christ,’ the Parousia, and Christology (in the ‘formal’ sense). Moreover, the issues that Paul does treat are oriented to a specific, though broad, theological topic: the relation between Jew and Gentile, law and gospel.

5. Purpose

The interesting mixture of the general and the occasional gives rise to one of the most debated questions about Romans: Why has Paul written *this* letter to *this* particular church. The question of the purpose of Romans has been given so many different answers because Paul says almost nothing on the subject. In the introduction (1:1-15), Paul talks about his plans to visit Rome and preach the gospel there, but he says nothing about the purpose of the letter. The conclusion of the letter elaborates these plans to come to Rome. But about the purpose of the letter he says only that he ‘has written on some points by way of reminder’ (15:15). This statement is so general and stereotyped that little can be gleaned from it.

Opinion on Paul’s motivation and purpose for writing the letter may be divided into two basic types: 1) those that stress Paul’s own situation and circumstances as the occasion for Romans; and 2) those that focus on problems within the Roman community as the occasion for the letter.

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a) Paul's Circumstances

Paul mentions several purposes for writing the book of Romans. First of all, he had wanted to visit the church on numerous occasions, but thus far had been prevented (1:13). Because they had not had the benefit of apostolic instruction, Paul wanted to remedy that by visiting with them for a period of instruction and encouragement. Paul also wanted to do evangelistic work there, suggested by his saying that he eagerly desired 'to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome' (1:15). In addition to those reasons, Paul wanted to visit the church at Rome for his own sake, that 'I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine' (1:12). He wanted to go there not only for Christ's sake, but also for the sake of the church, for the sake of the lost, and for his own sake.

Paul longed to get to know the believers in Rome and to have them get to know him. First of all, he wanted them to know him so they could pray for him (15:30, 32). He perhaps also wanted them to get to know him so that, after his stay at Rome, they would be willing to help provide the needed resources for his journey on to Spain, where he hoped to minister at a later time (15:28). Paul's letter to the church at Rome was, among other things, an introduction of himself as an apostle. He clearly set forth the gospel he preached and taught, so that believers in Rome would have complete confidence in his authority. He penned a monumental treatise to establish them in the truth and to show that he was indeed a true apostle of Jesus Christ.

Most scholars, whatever weight they give to other circumstances, think that one of Paul's purposes in writing to the Romans was to prepare for his mission to Spain. A church-planting enterprise so far from Paul's home base in Antioch would create all kinds of logistical problems. It would be natural for Paul to try to enlist the help of the vital and centrally located Roman community for this mission (cp. 15:24). We may view, then, Romans as Paul's 'letter of introduction' to a church that he hopes to add to his list of 'sponsors.' This would explain the general theological focus of the letter, for Paul would want to assure the Romans that they would be sponsoring a missionary whose orthodoxy was without question.

Preparation for the mission to Spain was certainly one of Paul's purposes in writing, probably even a major purpose. But it cannot stand alone as an explanation for the epistle. For one thing, had this been Paul's sole concern, we would have expected him to mention the visit to Spain more prominently – in the introduction, not just in the conclusion of the letter. For another, it is difficult on this interpretation to account for Paul's focus on questions of Jew and Gentile within salvation history.

One way of accounting for this emphasis on Jewish issues is to regard Romans as Paul's summary of the position he had hammered out in the course of his struggle with Judaizers in Galatia and Corinth. Paul's three-month stay in Greece came after the resolution of intense battles for the gospel in these churches; before he enters a new stage of missionary work, with fresh challenges and problems, Paul may well have decided to put in writing his settled views on these issues. There is probably much to this suggestion. But it leaves too much unexplained. Most important, why send this 'last will and testament' to Rome?

The same objection applies to the suggestion that Romans contains the 'speech' that Paul is preparing to deliver in Jerusalem when he arrives with the collection. Since Paul expressly requests the Romans to pray for the success of this mission (15:30-33), what is more natural than that he would outline his own theological position on the issue to the church? Paul's impending

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visit to Jerusalem clearly loomed large in his mind as he wrote Romans. But there is no evidence that it was his overriding concern.

b) Roman Problems

We note that Romans is not addressed to ‘the Church in Rome,’ but vaguely to ‘all God’s beloved in Rome’ (1:7). The various greetings in the final chapter draw attention to various persons as having ‘households.’ Most likely, small house churches gathered in the homes of these named persons. From chapters 14 and 15 it is evident that Paul saw a need to consolidate and unify the believers in Rome. Clearly, then, Paul saw this letter as his ‘spiritual gift’ in strengthening the Christians in Rome to have a sense of identity as a people of common faith and hope, despite their ethnic differences. This raises the question how much Paul knew about the precise situation in Rome at the time he wrote, in Nero’s early years. By then his friends Priscilla and Aquila had returned to Rome and established a church in their home (16:3-5). It is reasonable to assume that these missionary colleagues told Paul about the fortunes of the faith in the City.

In the Reformation era Melancthon called Romans ‘a compendium of Christian doctrine.’ More recently Bornkamm referred to the letter as ‘Paul’s last will and testament.’ Most scholars today, however, think Paul knew about the situation in Rome and wrote the letter to address the concrete circumstances of church life in the Gentile capital. Paul’s knowledge of his readers’ situation points to a conclusion that Romans is an ‘occasional’ letter, written to ‘strengthen’ (1:11; 16:25) the Romans in areas of perceived weakness.

Instead of focusing on Romans as a timeless theological manifesto, some commentators believe that this letter, like all the other letters of Paul, must be directed to specific issues in the church addressed. Paul does, indeed, write with an eye on specific problems in the community at Rome. What he says in 14:1-15:13 is too specific to allow us to consider it as general teaching with no direct application to the Roman community. And his direct address of Gentiles in 11:13-24 shows that Paul intends the theology he is developing to have direct practical relevance to his audience. However, the complete omission of any direct reference to the Romans until 11:13 makes it very difficult to think that the problems of the Roman church were foremost in Paul’s mind.

c) For All Ages

The purpose of Paul in Romans, then, cannot be confined to any one of these suggestions; Romans has several purposes. But the various purposes share a common denominator: Paul’s missionary situation. The past battles in Galatia and Corinth; the coming crisis in Jerusalem; the desire to secure a missionary base for his work in Spain; the need to unify the Romans around ‘his’ gospel to support his work in Spain – all these forced Paul to write a letter in which he carefully rehearsed his understanding of the gospel, especially as it related to the salvation-historical question of Jew and Gentile and the continuity of the plan of salvation.

These may have been another reason for Paul to give such prominence to these particular issues. Paul’s battle against Judaizers (cp. Galatians, 2 Corinthians) had gained for him a reputation as being ‘anti-law’ and perhaps even ‘anti-Jewish.’ Rumors of Paul’s stance on these matters had probably reached Rome, as 3:8 might suggest. As Paul introduces his gospel to the Roman community, he is aware that he must defuse these rumors and perhaps even win over some who were already hostile toward him. But, unlike the situations he faced in Galatia and elsewhere, at Rome these doubts about Paul and his gospel did not, apparently, come from only one side.

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Hence Paul fights on two fronts: criticizing Judaism for its overemphasis on the law and its presumption of ‘most favored nation’ status, while affirming Israel as the ‘root’ of the church and emphasizing its continuing place within the plan of God.

That Paul was dealing in Romans with immediate concerns in the early church we do not doubt. But, especially in Romans, these issues are ultimately those of the church – and the world – of all ages: the continuity of God’s plan of salvation, the sin and need of human beings, God’s provision for our sin problem in Christ, the means to a life of holiness, and security in the face of suffering and death. We need to recognize that Romans is God’s word to *us* and read it seeking to discover the message that God has for us in it.

6. Theme

a) *The Gospel – Moo*

Christology is the theological ground and starting point of the letter. Paul’s understanding of Christ is the only topic broad enough to unify his various emphases. While Christology is nowhere in Romans the expressed *topic*, it is everywhere the underlying point of departure.

What, then, is the theme of the letter? The gospel. The word ‘gospel’ and the cognate verb ‘evangelize’ are particularly prominent in the introduction (cp. 1:1, 2, 9, 15) and conclusion (15:16, 19) of Romans – its epistolary ‘frame.’ And this is the word that has pride of place in Paul’s statement of the theme of the letter: 1:16-17. Paul goes on to speak of the interplay of salvation, the interplay of Jew and Gentile, and justification by faith; and each had been advanced as the theme of the letter. But they are all elaborations of the main topic of these verses, the gospel. And we require a theme as broad as ‘the gospel’ to encompass the diverse topics in Romans. Romans is Paul’s summary of the gospel he preaches.

b) *The Gospel – Schaeffer*

In each city Paul visited, he taught a whole circle of truth, covering the basics in a complete and integrated way. Romans is just such a systematic teaching Paul sent to a church he had not seen in person. Romans differs from all the other letters in the New Testament in one important way. No other New Testament writing gives such a systemization of the doctrine of the gospel. All others are addressed to churches or people who had heard sermons when apostles had visited personally. All the others address specific problems, special needs, or dubious practices. They address believers with specific teachings and admonitions against the backdrop of what they had already heard in the body of belief.

In Rome, however, no one had every preached the complete gospel. Therefore, the Roman letter can be said to be a unified statement of what the Old and New Testament present concerning our situation before God and in the world. The entire truth is summed up in the theme verses of 1:16-17. The rest of the letter is an unpacking of these two verses: why they are true, what is the dilemma, what is the solution, and how to live now. Paul declares that there is no reason to be ashamed of Christianity, neither intellectually nor in the experience of life under God.

By inviting people to believe God (not ‘in God’) – His existence, His being, and His promises about God’s solution to our guilt from sin in the finished work of Jesus Christ – Paul shows God to be the One who is morally just and the One who will justify those who believe.

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c) The Gospel – Barnett

Of all Paul's letters, only Romans is directed to a church that he did not found, directly or indirectly. Pre-eminent, therefore, among a cluster of inter-related reasons, was his need to send a letter on ahead of his forthcoming visit. Much of the letter is addressed to matters of special interest to Jews (ch. 2-4, 7, 9, 11). It appears that some Jewish believers were attempting to look to Law-keeping (as well as to Christ) for their acceptance by God. Paul must point that Jews as much as Gentiles need the justifying mercy of God in the death of Christ. To Jews in particular, Paul insists that the gospel of God is Christ-centered, grace-based, and Law-free. At the same time, we detect Paul's concern for Gentile Christians among his reader. A great goal, may I say *the* great goal of Romans, is for the practical expression of Jews' and Gentiles unity in Christ displayed in the church. Due to Adam's sin, Jews and Gentiles are both culpable before God. Only in Christ do they find the righteousness of God. The only source of that salvation is God Himself.

7. Theology

Apart from everyday words like 'and,' the word most frequently appearing in Romans is 'God' with more references than any other book in the New Testament. Romans is not so much about who God is as about what God *does*, about God in action, saving men and women from the nations and from his historic nation, Israel. This saving work God does through Jesus Christ, whose names are the second most frequent occurrences in the letter.

The next most frequent references are to 'Law' and 'sin.' These two words represent the sources of the human predicament that God acts to redeem. 'Sin' originates with the rebellion of Adam, the patriarchal head of the human race and through him, with its penalty 'death,' spreads to all (3:9, 23; 5:12, 19). 'Law' (focused on the commandments) came from God, by the hand of Moses. The sinful predisposition from Adam (called 'the flesh') is so deeply ingrained, however, that Law served only to identify sinful behavior and, indeed, inflame Law-breaking (5:13, 20). The many references to 'Law' in Romans tell us that Law-keeping was a big issue at the time, most likely from some Jewish Christians who insisted that the old covenant was still in place and that man could be redeemed through the Law (as the Jews believed).

That Law-based covenant, however, has been overtaken by a new covenant in the merciful action of God 'sending' and 'not sparing' Christ, 'His own Son.' Through Christ, the sinful descendants of Adam find God's just verdict in their favor ('justification') now through the hearing and believing of the word of God, the gospel (1:16-17; 5:18).

As a consequence the Spirit of God is now powerfully at work within believers, strengthening them to live righteously in a manner pleasing to God (7:6; 8:4), in particular to love others (13:8, 10). The age of Law has been replaced by the age of Christ and the Spirit, the preaching of the gospel leading to justification.

Thus, Romans is about God in action in Christ saving sinful people from Israel and the nations for His coming kingdom. This he does through the proclamation of the gospel by His apostle Paul (1:5; 15:18-19) and by those men and women who were co-workers in his mission (16:1-7).

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B. The Introduction of Romans (Romans 1:1-7)

The entire thrust of the sixteen chapters of Romans is distilled into the first seven verses. The apostle apparently was so overjoyed by his message of good news that he could not wait to introduce his readers to the gist of what he had to say. He burst into it immediately.

Romans, with 7114 words, is the longest of Paul's letters. Fittingly, Romans also has the longest prescript. The typical Greek letter began simply with a one-sentence identification of the sender and recipients, and a greeting: A to B, 'greetings' (*chairein*; cp. James 1:1). Paul expands this form considerably in all his letters but nowhere more than in Romans. The superscription, or identification of the sender is particularly long, occupying the first six verses.

In this, Paul's most expansive letter, we are not surprised to find his most expansive opening section. These seven verses are packed full of critical detail, including the introduction of major teachings that will be developed throughout the letter, two of which are Paul's 'apostleship' and 'the gospel of God,' both of which appear in the first verse.

Paul begins his letter with an introduction that is longer than usual. It is also more theological and personal than any of his other epistles' introductions.

Paul introduces himself by stating his divine call (v. 1), the message that he has been called to proclaim (vv. 2-4), and the specific task with which he is occupied (vv. 5-6). Finally comes the address in v. 7a, followed by the usual Pauline salutation in v. 7b. The length and theological orientation of this prescript are due mainly to the fact that Paul was introducing himself to a church that he had neither founded nor visited. He wanted to establish his credentials as an apostle with a worldwide commission to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

1. The Gospel Messenger (1:1)

¹*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...*

Paul alone is the sender; unlike his earlier letters no other name is bracketed with his. At the end of the letter, however, he sends greetings from Timothy and seven others from Corinth.

God called a unique man to be the major spokesman for His glorious news. Paul was God's keynote speaker, as it were, for heralding the gospel. Paul introduces himself to the Roman church with three parallel designations that, respectively, identify his master, his office, and his purpose. These three designations are connected and flow from what happened to Paul near Damascus twenty-five years earlier.

a) *Slave*

Unlike a 'servant' (*diakonos*) who was free to serve a master, a 'slave' (*doulos*) belonged to an owner. 'Slave of Christ Jesus' connotes total devotion, suggesting that the servant is completely at the disposal of his or her Lord. Only in the prescripts of Titus and Philippians does Paul call himself a 'slave.'

Doulos ('bond-servant') carries the basic idea of subservience and has a wide range of connotations. It was sometimes used of a person who voluntarily served others, but most commonly it referred to those who were in unwilling and permanent bondage, from which often there was no release but death.

That he introduces himself as a 'servant' (*doulos*) is very significant. He could have introduced himself as 'Paul, an eminent theologian, master of the Old Testament Scriptures, frontline

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warrior, brilliant of intellect,’ but he chooses *doulos*. Paul was well aware that to the Romans this was an abject, servile term. However, he also knew that the Jews viewed it as a title of great honor when attached to God. Paul has both views in mind—and both were glorious to him.

The Greek word Paul used here is *doulos*. A *doulos* was not a hired servant who could come and go as he pleased. A *doulos* was a person who had been purchased, and once purchased he became his master’s possession. When Christ sets us free from slavery to the flesh, He calls us to the royal liberty of slavery to Him. That is why we call Him ‘Master.’ We acknowledge that it is from Him that we get our marching orders. He is the Lord of our lives. We are not our own. We are not autonomous or independent. Unless people understand their relationship to Christ in these terms, they remain unconverted.

Paul is writing to the church at Rome, and Rome knew a great deal about slaves. Slavery was legal in the Roman Empire. The world understood what it meant to be a slave, and Paul begins by declaring himself a slave of Christ. There was a great distinction, however, between the slavery of the Roman Empire and Paul’s slavery to Christ. Slaves in the Roman Empire were slaves not because they wanted to be, but because they had to be. Paul’s slave relationship to Jesus Christ, however, is something quite different. He is a slave not because he had to be a slave, but because he wishes to be one. We too must adopt this attitude if we are to be fruitful in the things of God. Just as the slave must ‘will’ the will of his master, our usefulness to Jesus depends on the extent to which we will the will of God. So when Paul introduces himself in this way, it is not just a pious expression. Rather, it introduces a theme central to Romans: that after accepting Jesus as our Savior, we are to live for Him.

So we see that the key to Paul’s self-image is servanthood. At the root of his psyche this incredibly productive man views himself primarily as a slave of Christ. No matter who we are, if we are to be productive for God, we must be servants (Mark 10:45).

b) *Apostle*

Paul next establishes the authority of his ministry, based on his being ‘called an apostle.’ Here Paul describes his ‘call’ in terms of an Old Testament prophet (cp. Is. 49:1; Jer. 1:5), though in a sense his vocation was greater since it fulfilled the promises of the and other prophets. Perhaps a better rendering would be ‘a called apostle,’ which more clearly points up the fact that his position as an apostle was not of his own doing. He did not volunteer for that office, nor was he elected by fellow believers. He was divinely ‘called’ by the Lord Jesus Christ (cp. Acts 9:15; 22:14-15; 26:16-18). ‘Apostle’ translates *apostolos*, which has the basic meaning of a person who is sent. It referred to someone who was officially commissioned to a position or task, such as an envoy or ambassador.

The second designation of ‘apostle’ is used in every Pauline prescript except those in Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Paul occasionally uses ‘apostle’ in a general way to mean simply ‘messenger’ (Phil. 2:25; 2 Cor. 8:23). But here the title carries a stronger sense, marking Paul as one among that unique group appointed by Christ Himself to have the salvation-historical role as the ‘foundation’ of the church (Eph. 2:20). This divine initiative in Paul’s apostleship is made evident by the verbal adjective ‘called.’ As is Paul’s custom, then, he specifies at the very beginning of his letter that he 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.

In the ancient world, an apostle was like an ambassador who spoke on behalf of the king. The ambassador’s message carried with it the authority of the one who sent him. The word *apostolos*

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in Greek means simply ‘one who is sent.’ This means that all of the apostolic writings carry the delegated authority of Jesus Himself. That is what it means to be an apostle. That is why the New Testament church is built on the foundation of the apostles. Paul speaks with the authority of Jesus.

Paul was not self-appointed! God called him! How essential this was to Paul’s ongoing service. Whenever things got rough, he could always reflect upon the evidence of his election: God had summoned him. At the base of Paul’s self-perception was the fact that his lifework was God’s doing. What a comfort—what a motivation!

c) *Calling*

(1) Set Apart

The word order here makes it likely that the ‘set apart’ clause is simply a further definition of ‘called.’ Paul, as a ‘called apostle,’ has been set aside by God for a special purpose in God’s plan for history. 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.

The phrase Paul uses involves a part of speech in the Greek language called the genitive, which indicates possession. He is not saying, ‘I have been commissioned to announce a message or good news about God.’ Rather, he is saying that the gospel he has been separated and called to proclaim is God’s gospel. God is the author and owner of it. Paul is simply the messenger whom God has called and set apart to proclaim to people a message that comes from God Himself.

Separation always has two actions: separation from and separation to. Separation from is easy to understand. Many things can keep us away from God, and it is not possible to be separated *to* God unless we are separate from such things. It is a means to the end of being separated to God to preach to the Gentiles.

Because Paul was called and sent by God as an apostle, his whole life was ‘set apart’ in the Lord’s service. Throughout the Old Testament, God provided for the setting apart of His chosen people. In the Septuagint, words translated as ‘set apart’ are all forms of *aphorizō*, the term Paul used for his being ‘set apart.’ It is used of setting apart to God the firstborn, of offering to God first fruits, of consecrating to God the Levites, and of separating Israel to God from other peoples. There was to be no intermingling of the chosen people with the Gentile nations or of the sacred with the profane and ordinary.

The Aramaic term *Pharisee* may share a common root with *aphorizō* and carries the same idea of separation. The Pharisees, however, were not set apart by God or according to God’s standards but had rather set themselves apart according to the standards of their own traditions (cp. Mt. 23:1-2). Although Paul himself had once been the most ardent of the self-appointed Pharisees, he was now set apart divinely, not humanly (Gal. 1:15).

The word translated ‘set apart’ has the same root as the word ‘Pharisee.’ In fact, the Greek sounds very much the same. A Pharisee set himself apart for the Law, but God set Paul apart for the gospel. He was a Pharisee of the highest order.

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(2) Gospel

The term *euangelion* ('gospel') is used some sixty times in this epistle. William Tyndale defined it as 'glad tidings.' It is the good news that God will deliver us from our selfish sin, free us from our burden of guilt, and give meaning to life and make it abundant. The most important thing about the gospel is that it is 'of God.' *Euangelion* was a common term used in the cult of emperor worship that was common in Paul's day. Especially because he was writing to believers in the Roman capital, Paul wanted to be certain that his readers understood that the good news he proclaimed was of an entirely different order than the trivial and vain proclamations concerning the emperors. The fact that it was 'of God' meant that God was the source of it. It was not man's good news, but God's good news for man.

The word 'gospel' and the verb 'gospelling' is critical in the first sixteen verses of the letter. Furthermore, if we turn to the end of the letter we find a striking similarity between the final paragraph and the one that now follows. Both are about the gospel, (1) that it is in fulfillment of the prophetic writings, (2) that it is focused in Jesus Christ, (3) that it is now proclaimed, and (4) that it is a message to be obeyed (by believing it). In other words, the entire letter is 'framed' (technically called an *inclusion*) with references to 'the gospel,' indicating that Romans is, first and foremost, about the gospel.

When Paul writes that he was 'set apart for the gospel of God,' he could mean either 'the gospel which is *from* God' or 'the gospel that is *about* God.' We do not have to choose. 'The word *from* God' is 'the word *about* God,' His character, and His saving acts. The challenge to us is clear. When we preach (or share) the gospel we must remember that this is *God's* word which we must submit to, be true to and not take liberties with so as to make it something we would prefer it to be.

2. The Gospel Message (1:2-4)

a) *The Gospel Promised (1:2)*

...² *which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures...*

In a relative clause dependent on 'gospel' (*euangelion*), Paul further defines the gospel as something promised in the OT. In a manner typical of Paul's emphasis throughout Romans, he draws a line of continuity between the new work of God and His Son, the content of the gospel (vv. 3-4), and the OT. By adding the redundant 'ahead of time' to the verb 'promise,' Paul touches on what will become two key themes in Romans: the promise (cp. Rom. 4) and the grounding of God's salvific revelation in His previous purpose and work.

Paul's task was not to proclaim a theological novelty. The gospel was in the Old Testament Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3). Sometime we make an artificial separation or distinction between the Old and New Testaments. We talk about the Old Testament as law and the New Testament as gospel, as if there were no law in the New Testament and no gospel in the Old Testament. Paul says at the very beginning that the gospel is not a novelty; it is the same gospel that was promised numerous times before.

The gospel, which originated with God, was not a divine afterthought, nor was it first taught in the New Testament. It does not reflect a late change in God's plan or a revision of His strategy. Perhaps especially for the sake of his Jewish critics, Paul emphasizes in the very beginning of the epistle that the good news did not originate with him or even with Jesus' earthly ministry. But

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here he makes clear that the good news he teaches is really old news of the Hebrew Scriptures now fulfilled and completed in Jesus Christ.

This means Jesus Christ is no last-minute appearance on the scene. He came by God's appointment as the fulfillment of promises and hopes that went back to the very beginning of the Bible, with the failure of Adam. Thereafter, on page after page of its unfolding story, those Scriptures point onwards to the Coming One.

Verse 2 is important, because it expresses the unity of the Old and New Testaments, a theme emphasized constantly throughout the Bible. Paul says God promised the gospel 'afore' in the Holy Scriptures. How far back does that go? Romans 16:20 will give us a clue: 'And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.' Surely this refers to Genesis 3:15, which states that the woman's 'seed,' is going to bruise the serpent's head. Jesus Christ is the seed of the woman. He is the one who crushed the serpent's head. The gospel goes back literally as far as we can go.

People often try to pit the Old and New Testaments against each other. But the emphasis throughout the New Testament is on its unity with the Old. This was true in Christ's preaching, in the book of Acts, in Paul's epistles, and in all the other epistles. There are not two messages, only one. Paul knew that the church in Rome included Jews as well as Gentiles, so it was important to remind them that there is just one message.

There is no greater source than the Word of God. It annoys me (R.C. Sproul) when I see the bumper sticker that says: 'God said it, I believe it, that settles it.' We must get rid of that middle term. If God says it, it is settled, whether we believe it or not. There is no higher court of appeal than the voice of God. So it is perfectly appropriate for the apostle Paul, when defending the gospel he has been commissioned to proclaim, to say, 'It is found in Scripture.'

b) The Gospel Personified (1:3-4)

Both of these verses emphasize the divine sonship of Christ. The focus on the gospel is a person, God's Son. 'His Son' is further defined in vv. 3b-4 with two parallel participial clauses. Most likely these words originated as a creed about the 'Son of God.' Their close parallelism is evident when they are set side by side:

'who has come'	'who was appointed'
'from the seed of David'	'Son of God in power'
'according to the flesh'	'according to the Spirit of holiness'
	'from the resurrection of the dead'

Important teaching about 'the Son of God' is found in this gospel 'creed.' According to verses 3 and 4, Paul's task was to preach that Christ was both *human* and *divine*. Verse 3 stresses Christ's humanity, while verse 4 equally stresses His divinity.

(1) Son of David (1:3)

...³concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh...

The first participial clause (v. 3b) focuses on the Son of God coming into human existence. This clause assumes the preexistence of the Son. Although *genomenon* ('has come') is not the usual word for 'give birth,' it can sometimes take this meaning. However, Paul is likely using this term to suggest that more than a simple 'birth' was entailed in the 'becoming' of the Son; a change in

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existence also took place. This appearance of the Son on the human scene is qualified as being ‘from the seed of David,’ a clear allusion to the messianic stature of the Son.

This ‘Son of God’ who ‘came’ did not come into being at the time of His birth; He must always have pre-existed and ‘come’ from another ‘state of being.’ The verb ‘came’ implies movement from one place to another, that is from pre-existence to incarnate life as the son of David. In short, Paul is teaching that the Son of God was always there, in an absolute and eternal sense.

Paul probably has his Jewish readers in mind here. It is extremely important for them to be reminded that Christ is indeed the son of David, because the Old Testament prophesied specifically that the Messiah would come through Abraham and David (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:11-16; cp. Ps. 2; Is. 11:1-5, 10; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-17; Ez. 34:23-24). Jesus was descended from King David, ‘according to the flesh’ as the writings of the New Testament make clear (e.g., Mt. 1:1, 17; 20:3-31; Lk. 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4; 3:23-31; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 5:5; 22:16).

Clearly in His humanness Jesus was ‘born of a descendant of David according to the flesh.’ Both Mary (Luke 3:23, 31), Jesus’ natural mother, and Joseph (Mt. 1:6, 16; Luke 1:27), Jesus’ legal father, were descendants of David. In order to fulfill prophecy (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:12-13; Ps. 89:3-4, 19, 24; Is. 11:1-5; Jer. 23:5-6), the Messiah had to be a descendant of David. Jesus fulfilled those messianic predictions just as He fulfilled all others. As the descendant of David, Jesus inherited the right to restore and to rule David’s kingdom, the promised kingdom that would be without end (Is. 9:7).

God’s Son is the Christ, ‘who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.’ This is important to the Jew, because the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah said He would be from the lineage of David. He was to be David’s son, yet at the same time David’s Lord. The Greek here is *ek spermatos*, from the very seed of David—thus emphasizing His intense humanity. Jesus was a man. He was not play-acting.

This ‘coming’ of the Son is qualified as being ‘according to the flesh.’ ‘Flesh’ (*sarx*) is a key Pauline theological term. It refers essentially to human existence, with emphasis on the transitory, weak, frail nature of that existence. ‘According to the flesh,’ used 21 times in Paul, denotes being or living according to the ‘merely human.’ Obviously, by ‘flesh’ Paul means ‘human.’ He does not have in mind the sinful connotation of that word, as he will later in 7:5.

Jesus was descended from David *kata sarka*, ‘according to the flesh.’ Paul is saying that ‘according to the flesh,’ in His physical humanity, Jesus was ‘born of the seed of David.’ Paul is not denying the virgin birth. The virgin birth bypassed the normal human reproductive process; nevertheless, concerning His human nature, He descended from David. However, we have not arrived at a full understanding of Jesus if we look at him only from the standpoint of ‘the flesh.’ Verse 4 goes on to fill out this picture of Jesus by looking at him from another perspective.

(2) Son of God (1:4)

...⁴and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...

(a) *Son*

Though the plan was eternal, the title ‘Son’ is reserved as an incarnational term, applied to Jesus in its fullness only after He put on the robe of humanity. He was the ‘Son of God’ in the sense of oneness of essence and in the role of dutiful, loving submission to the Father in His self-

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emptying incarnation. There is, of course, no question that He is eternally God and eternally the second Person of the Godhead. We could say, then, that Christ was the Son of God from eternity in expectation and was declared God's Son in fulfillment at the incarnation and forever.

(b) *Declared*

What is the meaning of the word 'designated'? Some think it should be translated 'declared,' but this verb does not appear to have this meaning in first-century Greek. In its seven other NT occurrences (Lk. 22:22; Acts 2:23; 10:42; 11:29; 17:26, 31; Heb. 4:7), the verb means 'determine, appoint, fix,' and we must assume that the word has this meaning here also: the Son has been 'appointed' Son of God by God the Father by virtue of His resurrection. The verb is in the Greek passive voice and indicates reverently that God set His Son apart. In speaking this way, Paul and other NT authors do not mean to suggest that Jesus becomes the Son only at the time of His resurrection. Being appointed Son has to do not with a change in essence – as if a person or human messiah becomes Son of God for the first time – but with a change in status or function.

'Declared' in this place is better translated 'determined.' Determined means it is certain. It is certain that Christ is also the Son of God. Why? Because of a particular 'power'. Christ's deity, to be believed, must be demonstrable. The thing that demonstrated with certainty that Christ was God was His 'resurrection from the dead.'

When God the Holy Spirit raised the corpse of Jesus from the tomb, God was announcing to the world the sonship of Jesus. By what evidence do we believe that Jesus is the Son of God? By the testimony of God, who has declared Him to be His Son through the power of the resurrection (cp. Acts 17:30-31). Paul is saying, 'I'm not the one declaring to you that Jesus is the Son of God. God has declared that to you by the Holy Spirit in the power of the resurrection.'

The resurrection 'declared' that Jesus was the Son of God. The Greek word is very helpful in getting the force of the idea because it is related to our English word *horizon*, 'the boundary between heaven and earth.' God's mighty deed in raising Jesus from the dead 'horizoned' him—that is, it clearly marked out Jesus as the divine Son. Paul's entire view was dominated by Christ as the Son of God.

Horizō ('declared') carries the basic idea of marking off boundaries. From that term comes our English 'horizon,' which refers to the demarcation line between the earth and the sky. In an infinitely greater way, the divine sonship of Jesus Christ was marked off with absolute clarity in His incarnation.

(c) *Power*

The second key exegetical issue in this verse is the function of the phrase 'in power.' What Paul is claiming is that the preexistent Son, who entered into human experience as the promised Messiah, was appointed on the basis of (or, perhaps, at the time of) the resurrection to a new and more powerful position in relation to the world. By virtue of his obedience to the will of the Father (cp. Phil. 2:6-11) and because of the eschatological revelation of God's saving power in the gospel (1:1, 16), the Son attains a new exalted status as 'Lord' (cp. v. 4b). Son of God from eternity, he becomes Son of God 'in power,' 'able (*dynatai*) for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him' (Heb. 7:25, RSV). The transition from v. 3 to v.4, then is not a transition from a human messiah to a divine Son of God (adoptionism) but from the Son as Messiah to the Son as both Messiah *and* powerful, reigning Lord.

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The most conclusive and irrefutable evidence of Jesus' divine sonship was given 'with power by the resurrection from the dead' (cp. Acts 13:29-33). By that supreme demonstration of His ability to conquer death, a power belonging only to God Himself (the Giver of life), He established beyond all doubt that He was indeed God, the Son.

(d) *Spirit*

This brings us to the third and most difficult question: What is the meaning of 'according to the Spirit of holiness'? This phrase is the antithetical parallel to 'according to the flesh' in v. 3. The contrast of 'flesh' and 'Spirit' is part of Paul's larger salvation-historical framework, in which two 'aeons' or eras are set over against one another; the old era, dominated by sin, death, and the flesh, and the new era, characterized by righteousness, life, and the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' earthly life (His life in 'the realm of the flesh'), He was the Davidic seed, the Messiah. But while true and valuable, this does not tell the whole story. For Christians, Jesus is also, in 'the realm of the Spirit,' the powerful, life-giving Son of God. In Christ the 'new era' of redemptive history has begun, and in this new stage of God's plan Jesus reigns as Son of God, powerfully active to bring salvation to all who believe (1:16).

'According to the spirit of holiness' is another way of saying 'according to the nature and work of the Holy Spirit.' It was the Holy Spirit working in Christ who accomplished Jesus' resurrection and every other miracle performed by Him or associated with Him. Here, then, is the Person of the good news. He is full man ('a descendent of David') and fully God ('declared to be the Son of God'). Throughout His ministry, both Jesus' humanness and His divinity were portrayed.

(e) *Lord*

With 'Jesus Christ our Lord,' Paul returns to the beginning of v. 3: 'His Son,' the inner content of the gospel, is no finally and climactically identified. Jesus' lordship is linked to His investiture in power after and because of His resurrection. For Paul, 'Lord,' expressing both Jesus' cosmic majesty and His status as master of the believer, is the single best title to express the true significance of Jesus. Verses 3-4 leave the reader, then, with an impressive accumulation of Christological titles: Son of God, Seed of David, Messiah, and Lord. Here, Paul makes clear, is the heart of the gospel that he will be setting forth in great detail for the Romans. But these verses remind us that the gospel cannot be understood without reference to the person of Christ, whose resurrection ushers in the new age of redemption.

'Jesus' means Savior, 'Christ' means Anointed One, and the 'Lord' means sovereign ruler. He is 'Jesus' because He saves His people from their sin. He is 'Christ' because He has been anointed by God as King and Priest. He is 'Lord' because He is God and is the sovereign ruler of the universe.

3. The Gospel Impact (1:5-6)

a) *Impact on Paul (1:5)*

...⁵*through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...*

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(1) Grace

‘Jesus Christ our Lord’ is the mediator of this apostleship. What Paul has received is ‘grace and apostleship.’ Again we hear echoes of the momentous event near Damascus when, ‘through God’s Son,’ Paul ‘received grace and apostleship.’ It is likely that the second term explains the first: Paul has received the special gift of being an apostle. (Paul often uses a plural form to speak of himself alone).

‘Grace’ is unmerited, unearned favor, in which a believer himself does not and cannot contribute anything of worth (Eph. 2:8-9). Grace is God’s loving mercy, through which He grants salvation as a gift to those who trust in His Son. A believer has no cause for self-congratulation, because he contributes nothing at all to his salvation. Human achievement has no place in the divine working of God’s saving grace.

Here Paul means grace in the widest sense of God’s favor—that is, salvation, guidance, wisdom, illumination, and power to serve. Grace is always an amazing thing to Paul (cp. 5:20). The grace of God is infinite and eternal. It has no beginning and no end. Paul views his apostleship and ministry to the Gentiles as the overflow of God’s mysterious grace to him.

(2) Apostleship

Paul then draws attention to three aspects of his apostleship in prepositional phrases.

(a) *Obedience of Faith*

First, Paul’s purpose in his apostolic ministry is to bring about ‘obedience of faith.’ We 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 Christian experience. Paul called men and women to faith that was always inseparable from obedience – for the Savior in whom we believe is nothing less than our Lord – and to an obedience that could never be divorced from faith – for we can obey Jesus as Lord only when we have given ourselves to Him in faith. Viewed in this light, the phrase captures the full dimension of Paul’s apostolic task.

The message of the gospel is to call people to ‘the obedience of faith,’ which is here used as a synonym for salvation. Although Paul does not use the definite article before ‘faith’ in this passage, the idea is that of *the* faith, referring to the whole teaching of Scripture, especially the New Testament. To call men to ‘the obedience of faith’ is to fulfill the Great Commission, to bring men to Jesus Christ and to the observance of everything He commands in His Word (Mt. 28:20). It is not that faith plus obedience equals salvation but that obedient faith equals salvation. True faith is verified in obedience. Together, faith and obedience manifest the inseparable two sides of the coin of salvation, which Paul here calls ‘the obedience of faith.’

(b) *For the Sake of His Name*

The second modifier of ‘grace and apostleship’ is ‘for the sake of His name.’ The phrase expresses the ultimate focus of Paul’s ministry: the *name* of Jesus his Lord. As generally in Scripture, ‘name’ connotes the person in his or her true character and significance. Ultimately, Paul ministers not for personal gain or even the benefit of his converts, but for the glory and benefit of Jesus Christ his Lord.

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It must be recognized that the primary purpose of the gospel is not for man's sake but God's, 'for His name's sake.' Man's salvation is simply a by-product of God's grace; its main focus is to display God's glory. All of redemptive history focuses on the glory of God, and throughout eternity the accomplishments of His redemption will continue to be a memorial to His majesty, grace, and love.

(c) *Among All the Nations*

The third prepositional phrase specifies the arena of Paul's apostolic labors: 'among' all the Gentiles (*ethnesin*). Paul's call was not so much to minister in many different nations (*ethnē*) as it was to minister to Gentiles in distinction from Jews.

Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles was special. To no other apostle was there so specific or individualized a 'call' to take the message of Christ to the Nations.

Paul's mission is not only to Jews, but also to 'all nations.' He is leading up to 1:7, where he states that he is now writing to Rome, the capital of his known world.

b) *Impact on the Romans (1:6)*

...⁶*including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ...*

This verse, inasmuch as it characterizes the readers before Paul actually addresses them in v. 7, is somewhat parenthetical. It is connected grammatically to 'Gentiles' in verse 5. The purpose of this remark is to show the Roman Christians that they belong within the sphere of Paul's apostolic commission. Paul is sent to 'all the Gentiles;' and the Romans are 'among' the Gentiles. They are thereby subject to his authority.

Paul now faces away from himself and the 'we' of verse 5 and turns toward those to whom he is writing. These are the Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike, making up the church at Rome. They all have a place 'among the nations' that Paul has been called to reach.

More important than the Roman Christians' ethnic origin is their spiritual destination. They have been 'called to belong to Jesus Christ.' As Paul has been 'called to be an apostle (v.1), so the Roman Christians have been 'called' to be people who name Jesus as Christ and Lord. What is meant is not an 'invitation' but the powerful and irresistible reaching out of God in grace to bring people into His kingdom.

Paul moves quickly from his own call as an apostle to the call shared by every Christian in the church at Rome and by every Christian in every church in every age. The Bible calls them elect, 'the called out ones.' The church is the *ekklesia*, a Greek word that comes from the verb *kaleō*, meaning 'to call,' and the prefix *ek-*, meaning 'out of.' Every Christian is called out of the world, out of bondage, out of death, and out of sin, aid into Christ and into His body.

4. The Gospel Beneficiaries (1:7)

a) *Recipients (1:7a)*

...⁷*To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:*

(1) Rome

With verse 7 Paul finally returns to the standard letter opening begun in v. 1 and identifies those to whom the letter is written: 'to all in Rome.' Not much should be made of Paul's failure to address himself to the 'church' in Rome, since Paul does not consistently use the word in his

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letter openings. But its absence may reflect the fact that Roman Christians met in several house churches.

There is no mention of the receivers as ‘church’ as in most other letters by Paul (but see Philippians 1:1). Most likely this omission reflects the unusual origins and history to date of Christianity in the Eternal City. The absence of the word ‘church’ (*ekklēsia*) here points to the non-existence of a specifically Christian assembly in Rome. Most likely Jews continued to gather with fellow-Jews in the synagogues as well as in distinctly Jewish house groups. Gentile believers appear to have gathered in their house groups. This would explain Paul’s address to the Christians in Rome merely as ‘beloved’ and ‘saints.’ Paul’s teaching about the roles of Jews and Gentiles in the purposes of God (ch. 9-11) and his appeal to both groups to find unity in one assembly (ch. 14-15) may point to a major reason for the writing of this letter, that is, to create a ‘church’ in Rome.

We are now brought face to face with the church in Rome, probably meeting in a home, a church perhaps founded by laypeople rather than by an apostle. Paul had not been to Rome, and neither, despite the traditional Catholic view, had Peter. If Peter had been in Rome, it is inconceivable that Paul would not have mentioned him in this letter.

(2) Loved

In designating the Roman Christians as ‘beloved by God’ and ‘called to be saints,’ Paul implies that they are God’s chosen people; for both phrases echo OT designations of Israel. In so transferring language used of Israel in the OT to Christians, Paul initiates an important theme of the first eight chapters of the letter.

Paul here addresses ‘all’ his fellow believers in Rome as the ‘beloved of God.’ One of the most repeated and emphasized truths of Scripture is that of God’s gracious love for those who belong to Him. Paul does not mention the believer’s love for God, but rather that which is far more fundamental—God’s love for the believer.

(3) Called

Those who have come to Christ by the obedience of faith are also ‘called’ of God. Paul is not referring to God’s general call for mankind to believe; rather, he is speaking of the specific way in which those who have responded to that invitation have been sovereignly and effectually called by God to Himself in salvation. ‘Called’ here is a synonym for the terms ‘elect’ and ‘predestined’ (cp. 8:30). The references to being ‘called’ to salvation are always, in the epistles of the New Testament, efficacious calls that save, never general invitations. Thus calling is the effecting of the plan of election.

(4) Saints

Believers are also God’s ‘saints.’ ‘Saints’ is from *hagios*, which has the basic meaning of being set apart. Frequently in the Old Testament, however, *holy* refers to a person’s being set apart by God from the world and to Himself, and thereby being made like Him in holiness. To be set apart in that sense is to be made holy and righteous. Whether under the Old or the New Covenant, ‘saints’ are the ‘holy ones’ of God. Under the New Covenant, however, such holy things as the Temple, priesthood, Ark, and tithes no longer exist. God’s only truly holy things on earth today are His people, those whom He has sovereignly and graciously set apart for Himself

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through Jesus Christ. The new temple of God and the new priesthood of God are His church (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 Pe. 2:5, 9).

The word for ‘saint’ in the New Testament is the word that means ‘sanctified one,’ one who has been set apart by the Holy Spirit and called inwardly by Christ to Himself. If you put your trust in Christ, you are right now a saint. You are set apart.

As soon as we accept Christ as our Savior, we are saints in God’s sight. Paul likewise addresses the Ephesian and Philippian Christians as saints (Eph. 5:3; Phil. 1:1). This speaks of something quite different than the traditional Roman Catholic view that a saint is someone special. The New Testament teaches that you are a saint as soon as you accept Christ as your Savior.

We are not called because we are saints, but we are saints because we are called. And as saints we are set apart for holiness. Thus, we are in continuity with the saints of all the centuries and are in continuity and unity with each other.

b) Greetings (1:7b)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Old Testament times the Jews greeted one another the same way they do today: *Shalom Aleichem*, ‘Peace be unto you.’ The response to the greeting was *Aleichem shalom*, ‘Peace also to you.’ Jesus left us His peace, a peace that transcends earthly peace, a peace that is permanent and eternal, one in which the warfare between the sinner and God is over. ‘Grace and peace.’ They go together because the peace of God is not something we can ever earn or merit or deserve. The peace that comes from God is by His grace.

This greeting bears the poetry of redemption, for the regular Greek greeting was ‘Rejoice!’ (*chaire*), and the regular Jewish greeting was ‘Peace’ (Hebrew *shalom*, Greek *eirene*). But here Paul combines the two, and then replaces rejoice (*chaire*) with the similar sounding but far richer *charis*—‘grace.’ He in effect combines the greetings of the Eastern and Western worlds, then modifies the Western and gives the whole world the sublime Christian greeting. ‘Grace to you and peace.’ The two combine naturally and beautifully in cause and effect, because when God’s grace comes upon us, taking away our sins and making us objects of His favor, His peace floods our being.

The importance of Christology in this opening paragraph should not be missed. Paul shares with his Roman audience the conviction that Jesus is the heart of the gospel. He is the promised Messiah of Israel (‘seed of David’), the Son of God, the Lord. Confessing the gospel in our own day requires that we subscribe to Paul’s exalted view of Jesus; it is failure to do so that spawns many heresies. But Paul’s attention, as we have also seen, is especially on the activity of this Jesus: His coming to earth as the Messiah; His exaltation through resurrection to Lord of all; His dispensing power as the Son of God. It is what Jesus has done, not just who He is, that makes the gospel the ‘good news’ that it is. But make no mistake: what Jesus has done cannot be severed from who He is. Ours is an age not too much interested in theology; but correct theology – in this case, the person of Jesus – is vital to salvation and to Christian living.

For next time: Read Romans 1:8-17.