

OPENING THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Romans 1:1–7

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We're in the Book of Romans. I'm not sure whether we'll go through the entire book or just the first eight chapters. We'll make that decision when we have gone through the first eight chapters together on Sunday mornings. I don't want to hurry our way through this book, so we'll be taking it rather slowly—a paragraph at a time, or a smaller section at a time.

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ”
(Romans 1:1–7, NIV).

This short letter of Paul to the Romans may be likened to an Olympic flame, which is kept permanently kindled. Every four years, the Olympic flame is brought out again to be passed to the torch of another generation of Olympics. The Book of Romans is a flame lit in the apostle Paul's heart by the Spirit, and has been lighting the torches of Christians for some fifty generations. It was originally a short document written on papyrus by a little Jewish tentmaker on a back street in Corinth, Greece, somewhere between 56 and 58 A.D. It was hand carried, apparently because the mail service in those days doesn't appear to be any better than it is now.

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Hand-carried, apparently, by a woman named Phoebe, who was a deaconess of a church in a little city outside Corinth.

When Rome burned in 64 A.D., this letter survived. And in the resultant persecution that broke out against Christians after the fire, this letter—this frail epistle—survived yet once more. It has since then blazed the light of the gospel for fifty generations. It has been called a torch-lighter for good reason—for not only has it lit up so many individuals through an understanding of the gospel, but it has also served in significant moments to grab hold of key individuals. And this letter has proven to be the saving moment applied by the Spirit to their lives.

I think of several just to use as illustration. Augustine—in the later part of the fourth century—at the age of 33, was a worn-out man. He had rebelled against the Christian faith of his mother. He had tried Persian religion, Greek philosophy, and a playboy way of living. Finding satisfaction in none of these avenues, he began to turn back to the faith of his mother. He came under deep conviction of sin. He, in a garden, was travailing and agonizing before God in prayer, hoping for acceptance by God. While praying in a garden, he heard from a neighboring house the voice of a child crying, “Take and read! Take and read!” He hastened to the place where he had left his Bible, and found his Bible opened to the Book of Romans. He read Romans 13:13–14: “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (NIV). It was the word of the gospel made applicable to his life that changed him—for he found in the gospel the power to change, even as those verses had spoken.

Martin Luther, as a young Augustinian monk, took very seriously the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. He was tormented by the prospect of the wrath of God, the judgment

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of Christ, and he was in terror by the power of Satan. Upon completing the offering of his first mass as a priest, he described himself as full of dust and ashes and sin. He struggled with how he could have peace—for even though a priest, he had no inner peace or sense of acceptance by God. He sought the way of self-denial, the castigation of the flesh. But he found he could never be hungry enough, or could never be poor enough, to earn God’s grace. So he tried penance. He began to confess everything in his life. He spent up to six hours on end in a confessional booth—only to come out of the confessional booth and remember some trivial offense that he had failed to confess. His confessor finally grew weary of these long sessions and told him to go do something worthy of being confessed, like killing his mother! He felt rejected by God. He identified with the words of Jesus, as prophesied in Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1, KJV). For he felt that in Jesus, there was someone who was all-loving and was in terrible trouble and knew how he felt. From that experience in Psalms, he jumped to Romans, and he rediscovered the Scripture: “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17, KJV). He came to understand through this Book of Romans that what God requires is that we relinquish all reliance upon ourselves and trust in God wholly—in His goodness and His mercy. Trust in Him with faith, and He will save.

John Wesley lit his torch by Romans. He’d been a young man who had followed the call of God upon his life to go as a missionary to America from England. But even as he went, he had no personal assurance of salvation. He spent three years as a missionary to the state of Georgia, now our thirteenth state. John Wesley came back from Georgia and still had no assurance that he was saved. On May 24th, 1738—at the age of 35, a broken missionary—John Wesley walked down a street in London and happened to come upon a meeting of Moravian brethren. He describes his experience as follows: “About a quarter after nine, while Luther [he was listening to the reader

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simply read from Luther's commentary on the Book of Romans. Imagine being excited about hearing someone stand up and read from a commentary on the Book of Romans!] was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed, and I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation. An assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Notice the phrase, "I felt my heart strangely warmed." It was the impact of this book. Having been converted at the age of 35, John Wesley lived for another 53 years. In those 53 years, he rode a quarter of a million miles on horseback, preaching 42,000 sermons; translating, editing or writing 200 books; and winning thousands of people to the Lord Jesus Christ.

These months together as we spend time with Romans, I trust that there will be warm fires kindled in our heart by this letter. There's a beautiful way to look at Romans that's been described to us by William Tyndale, who is the first translator of the Scriptures into the English language. And, by the way, sometimes in our prayers we probably ought to thank God for people like William Tyndale and Martin Luther and Augustine and others. I don't know if you've ever thanked God for people like that who you'll never meet. But the benefits of their work are still living. Tyndale, at great personal cost, translated the scripture. Having translated the Bible into English while he was in exile in Holland, he thought the time was safe for him to come out of hiding, and he came to Belgium. While there, he was arrested in Antwerp, and he was strangled and burned at the stake about six miles from Brussels. He writes in his prologue to the Book of Romans the following: [It's in Old English. It's quaint. But yet I think it's very neat. He says of his attitude toward this epistle and what the attitude of every Christian should be toward it:] "For as much as this epistle is the principle and most excellent part of the New Testament, and most pure evangel, that is to say glad tidings, and that we call gospel, and also a light and a way into

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the whole Scripture, I think it meet that every Christian not only know it by rote and without the Book, [that is, know it by memory] but also exercise himself therein ever more continually as with the daily bread of the soul. No person, verily, can read it too oft or study it too well. For the more it is studied, the easier it is. The more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is. The more groundly it is searched, the preciouser things are found in it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein.”

With that way of looking at Romans, let's see how Paul introduces the letter to us in verses 1–7. In these short seven verses, he tells us who he is. He tells us what his gospel is. He tells us what his purpose is. He tells us, also, something about the Christians in Rome.

I. Paul begins by describing himself as a servant, a servant of Jesus Christ.

There are many ways that Paul could have introduced himself, no doubt. He could have described himself as a leading missionary. Or perhaps even described himself as the leading missionary of the Christian church. He could have described himself as one who had shaken cities for Jesus Christ or turned the world upside down, as someone said of him. He could have described himself as a great scholar and thinker and writer. But he chooses to begin his self-description by noting that he is a servant. And, as you may know, in the Greek, the word servant here is really “slave.” A bondservant. There would be many within the million-population city of Rome who would be slaves. There would be many in the Christian congregation at Rome who likewise would be slaves. Every slave in Rome who heard Paul use this word of himself must have been struck that a freeman, a Roman citizen, would so voluntarily call himself a slave. Yet that's what Paul was. He saw himself as a person who was owned. He saw himself no longer having his own priorities or his own will or his own lifestyle. Everything belonged to Jesus, from whom he took his orders. Not only does that term “servant” convey this aspect of total bondage

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to Jesus Christ—a bondage of freedom, a bondage of willingness—but it also, in Hebrew thought, was used consciously to identify oneself with the spokesmen for God of the past. For that term “servant of God” was used of Moses, of David, of Isaiah, and of the prophets. So Paul, by using one term, means two things. He is, on the one hand, a servant like the slaves of the Mediterranean world—a servant of the higher master Jesus Christ. But on the other hand, when he speaks, he speaks as Moses; he speaks as the prophets; and he speaks as Isaiah.

A. He calls himself, also, “apostle.” Literally, the word apostle means, “one sent.” We often think of it as being limited to that special group, including Paul, which was commissioned by Jesus to be the foundation of the Church. It can have a wider meaning as persons who plant churches or start churches. But here, probably in its use, Paul is thinking of himself as belonging to that select company who had been especially commissioned by Jesus to announce the good news to the world. Now he doesn’t start by calling himself an apostle. He starts by calling himself a servant of the Lord.

In his self-description, he is concerned first of all to describe his relationship to God. When he has completed describing that relationship, then he’s ready to talk about his relationship to men. There’s a sense of priority. He doesn’t talk about relationship to men before he talks about his relationship to God. That’s a wise priority to keep in mind. So an apostle—on the one hand—in respect to the Lord, is a slave. But in respect to men, he is a person who’s been sent on a special mission—an ambassador from God, if you will—one who is commissioned and acts with the full knowledge and the full power delegated by his Superior. When he describes himself, therefore, as “apostle,” he is writing the Word not only to the first church, but to all the Church, and even to us. Because he is especially commissioned by God to speak, his Message is reliable and it is unerring. It is trustworthy. It is meant for us. It is filled with truth and nothing but truth.

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B. He also describes himself as one who is set apart. In so describing himself, he is indicating that God has taken the initiative in his life. Throughout the Old Testament, God always takes the initiative with His great leaders and with His people. He called Abraham; He called Moses; He called Isaiah; and He called Jeremiah. These persons did not call themselves to be used by God. They only volunteered when God called. As a Pharisee, Paul had understood this. In fact, before he became a Christian, Paul wore that name “Pharisee” rather proudly. The word “Pharisee” itself means “set apart one.” Paul had had a sense of being set apart as a Jew. But now he has come to understand that spiritual Phariseeism is something more dynamic. It is being set apart—set apart for the gospel of God. It’s being called to a higher mission and task. As a Christian, Paul reflected back on the grace of God in his life and found that he had not saved himself. God had set him apart at birth. God had called him at conversion. God had set him apart at the outset of his missionary labors at the church of Antioch in Acts 13. He had this special sense of being on a mission for God.

If we take those three terms and apply them to ourselves, we make some interesting applications. If we are thinking about self-identity, we recognize that often we describe ourselves in terms of roles we wear in respect to our relationship to others. I am a husband. I am a father. I am a pastor. But these are not the kinds of things that are crucial for us, first of all, to think of ourselves in. We’re to think of the position God has called us to and the great and high calling God places on the life of every one of us. So we, in our own special way, may think of ourselves as servants of Jesus Christ, as being sent, as being an expression of the thought of God. We, individually, are not accidents which have happened in life. God has placed us here with purpose and with meaning, and God has sent us into the world to do some definite thing. Part of the

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exciting thing about knowing the will of God is grabbing hold of the ring and finding out what it was that God had in mind when He gave us life.

II. Having seen what Paul says about himself, we look next at what Paul says about the Gospel—the good news which he preaches.

He notes, first of all, that it is the gospel of God. Which means the message he brings did not have its origin in time. It did not have its origin in Palestine. It had its origin before time. It had its origin in eternity. It has its origin in God. Therefore, what we proclaim is not some passing temporal message. It is the everlasting news—the good news of God. This good news comes to society. It originally came to the society of Rome. It comes to our society today. It might be instructive just for a moment to see the kind of good news it has brought to the Roman society. Here was a society, like ours, that needed good news. It was a seat of government for the world, but as one of Rome's own writers said, "Caesar has the power to declare peace to the world, but he has no power to declare peace in the human heart." That was written by a non-Christian of the first century.

Rome was a place of conflicting religions. There in the city of Rome, being a cosmopolitan city, the intellectual, speculative, and philosophical religions of Greece and the West met with the eastern mysticism of the mystery religions coming from the eastern Mediterranean. Here in this welter of religion, this complex of people wondering what is truth, a message arrives—the good news of the gospel. There's good news for the human dilemma. There's good news for the questions: "Who is God, and where is God, and is there a God? And if there is, can I find Him and know Him?" That's what the good news is about. Yes, the affirmative is the answer.

This gospel of good news comes to a city of social injustice. Much of the one million population in Rome was poor and outcast. There were many slums in Rome. There were slaves. Racial

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prejudice was there. Inequality existed between the few inordinately rich and the many shockingly poor. Unparalleled luxury was there, as can be seen in the actions of one of the emperors who sprinkled the floor of the circus arena with gold dust rather than sawdust. Yet children went hungry. In a city of social injustice, the good news comes and tells us that not only are we children of God, but we are brothers and we are to treat one another with kindness and respect, and we're to do something about the inequities in society by caring in the church of Jesus Christ for each other. There was the birth of a new humanity and a new ethic by which men should relate to one another.

Here in the city of Rome was individual immorality. Seneca, the Roman writer, noted that women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married. The catalogue of vices of the city is noted by Paul himself in Romans 1:18–32. In a city like our time—where people cannot get hold of their passions, where they are in bondage to slavish desires of the flesh—the gospel comes as good news that the liberation of humanity has arrived in Jesus Christ. A Roman historian of the first century—who wrote about a generation after the apostle Paul—in writing of the period of time which was contemporary to this letter and contemporary to the apostle's life, said in his view of history, "I am entering upon the history of a period rich in disasters, gloomy with wars, rent with sedition, savage in its very hours of peace." To such a society this changing, transforming seed of the gospel comes. It's inevitable that wherever the gospel is allowed to be planted, it is going to grow and it is going to break the bonds which have fettered men.

As Paul announces what the gospel is, he briefly describes it in his introduction as concerning two things. This good news concerns a promise that God has kept. And it concerns God's Son.

A. The gospel concerns a promise. Thus Paul notes in verse 2: "he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures." Thus Paul is saying, "This message which we bring to you

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is no new innovation. It didn't simply originate thirty years ago in a Palestinian setting. It has always existed. It has existed from Adam. It has existed from a call of Abraham. It has existed from Moses. It has existed with Israel. It is no new thing we bring. It is simply the completion of what God has been doing for centuries and centuries. Now we must remember that the Early Church did not have much of the New Testament written. The church at Rome might not have even had a Gospel at all. They didn't have many of the letters that we have now. So the early Christians, all they had, basically, for their Scriptures were what we know now as the Old Testament. Paul, in writing and saying that Christ was promised in the Holy Scriptures, is saying to Christians at Rome, "As you look to the Bible, the Old Testament, you will see Jesus in there." And by the way, Romans is a marvelous book to help us as Christians see how we are to read the Old Testament. For the Old Testament is our book also. Christ is revealed. Romans is kind of an unfolding to the prophets. It unlocks the key to the interpretation of the Old Testament Christ comes to fulfill.

During World War II, the French underground often had occasions where need existed for agents unknown to each other to make connections. The problem existed as to how they would identify themselves. One solution that was used was that someone who knew of the meeting between the two and was setting it up tore a piece of paper in half and gave half to one of the agents and would see that the other agent got the other half. When the two agents met, their way of checking base with one another to see that identification was established was putting the two pieces of paper together and seeing that they matched.

This is what Paul is saying about Jesus. There was an old covenant and there was a new covenant. And a new covenant must perfectly match the old covenant. And by it, we know that God has left an authoritative Word. So the gospel is about a promise that God has kept.

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B. The gospel is about God's Son. We use the term "son of God" even to describe ourselves. We are sons and daughters of God. But when the term is used of Jesus, it is used uniquely of Him. In fact, Paul, in writing in Romans 8:3, described Jesus as God's own Son—designating His uniqueness. There are two aspects of that sonship that Paul notes in the introduction to this letter. He first of all says that the gospel is about this Son who is a descendant from David according to the flesh. And in this description, Paul locates the true humanity of Jesus. Literally, Paul—writing in the Greek language—says, "Jesus, who came of the sperm of David, according to the flesh." He is real man. Paul is writing, by the way, less than thirty years after the resurrection of Jesus. What he is saying by that designation to the Roman believers is, "You know that your faith is not some concoction of someone who sat down and made up a myth." For the world was full of religious myths, gods and goddesses who consorted with one another in the skies and who were kind of blown-up, larger-than-life human beings with all their vices and graces. Not so with Jesus. He is real man descended from David, and therefore having come from David, he is a king. Anybody could read that interpretation as a first-century person. Paul might avoid the use of the word "king" here so as to not trouble the volatile political waters by making Caesar nervous. But the implication is clear. Here is One who's come as man to inherit the promises made to King David that upon his throne should One sit who would reign forever and ever. This gospel not only concerns the humanity of Jesus, but it concerns His divinity. For He is, as Paul describes Him, "through the Spirit of holiness...declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4, NIV). This verse is a little difficult to understand in an initial reading. It's one of those verses that, as Peter says, "contain some things that are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16, NIV). Because there are several ways to understand this verse. Perhaps the simplest way to understand it is to say in verses 3 and 4 Paul is making a

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comparison. In verse 3 he is saying that according to the flesh, that is, the world of the senses—what I can see, what I can hear, what I can feel—according to the world of the senses, according to the flesh, Jesus is descended from David. But according to the Holy Spirit, according to the Spirit of God, Jesus is declared to be the Son of God. The term “declared” does not mean there was a time when Jesus was not the Son of God and only became the Son of God after His resurrection. Rather, it is used to contrast the way we look at Jesus before and after His resurrection. Before His resurrection, He is Son of David. He is a man, so to speak. We see Him in weakness and in humility. We see Him suffer, and we see Him vulnerable to the world. But after His resurrection, we see how He is declared, before our eyes, as the Son of God. For it is the Resurrection which establishes His claim to rule. It is the Resurrection which establishes the right of Him to wear the title “Son of God.” So indeed He is the Son of God in power. By the flesh we see He is the Son of David. By the Spirit yet today we see that He is the Son of God.

III. Having told us who he is and what his gospel is, Paul next tells us something about his task in life.

“Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith” (verse 5). He tells us the origin of his task. It comes from grace. God is well pleased with him. That’s a striking statement. It’s so simple that sometimes we take it for granted. It is almost stereotypical. Yet Paul, in his letters and especially in Romans, is always underlying that theme of grace. God is well pleased with him. It’s the grace which he has received even as a persecutor. Like a bull in a china closet, he was going through the church hauling men and women off to prison and even to martyrdom. While persecuting the church and totally doing everything not to earn the grace of God or the favor of God, Paul nevertheless had received grace.

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If you've done any inventory over the last year like I have, you can in your own mind connect together the things that please you and please God and the things that don't please you and don't please God. If you're anything like me, the things that don't always seem to outweigh the things that are good. Even if, in actuality, the list of the good may even be longer, it's the failures that stand out. We can strive and strive to make the scales balance so we can earn favor with God.

But we can privately wonder even as we do at times that God could be well pleased with such a person as I when I have just made great failures. Yet this announcement comes through that before we do anything in the kingdom of God, we start from a position of being accepted by God. And because we're accepted by God, we can have freedom to be and to do, to move.

A. Paul talks about his doing as a result of his being. His doing is apostleship. But his being is first—it's grace. He notes his purpose. His purpose includes, but is more than, saving souls or establishing churches or making converts. All these are part of his mission, but he says in one sweeping word that his real goal in life is nothing short of accomplishing a new humanity. It's to bring about the obedience of faith in all the nations. Paul has in mind the whole world coming to Jesus Christ, and he sees his mission in life is to help bring that about. Wow! No short-range goal planning there. He has a master scheme of what it is. Paul knew what had happened in his own life. He said if this could happen to everybody in the world, what a world this could be. So his purpose is large: the obedience of faith among all the nations.

B. Now notice how he starts out in this letter by defining faith. Because sometimes we get hung up on what faith is. Maybe we could never fully describe it—like God himself—because to describe it would be to circumscribe it, limit it, and narrow it. But Paul defines it as obedience of faith, which is his way of saying faith is something that is not passive. It is not sitting down with the church doctrines and saying, "Do you agree with this?" Part of faith is being right in the

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sense of theological rightness. But that's not really faith. Faith is more than that. It embraces more than that. Faith is a willingness to obey. God did not come to Abraham and say, "Abraham, do you believe Me?" Check yes. God came to Abraham and said, "Abraham, if you believe Me, you will act. Get out of where you are and go into Canaan." He didn't come to Moses and say, "Moses, do you believe Me?" He came to Moses and said, "Moses, I want you to get off the backside of the desert and go and lead My people out." Because faith in its true essence inevitably provokes the fruit of obedience. The obedience of faith Paul wants is not simply a passive checklist where everybody is baptized as they run through a river in order to get with it, be with the crowd, and join the group. The obedience of faith.

C. Now Paul says something else, though, about his readers. It's his first readers and also his readers yet today. He tells us that we are called to belong to Jesus Christ. Called to belong. These Roman believers—many of whom Paul himself never met; he had not been to the city; he is looking to go there—these persons at some point had already come to a living faith in the Lord. Church tradition has it that the church at Rome was founded by Peter. In all probability, Peter was there at a very early point of the church's existence, as was Paul later. But it seems more evident from Acts 2:10 that the gospel got to Rome through the witness of Jewish persons who had been in Jerusalem at the Feast of Pentecost and were converted as Peter preached—as the apostles shared the good news of the Resurrection—and then went back to Rome. Indeed, the events of Acts would need to suggest that Peter remained in Jerusalem for some time in the early days of the Church. I say this simply to point out this great church at Rome was founded, by and large, by ordinary human beings who didn't have a lot going for them in terms of resources. They couldn't carry back to the city at Rome the New Testament and say, "I picked up this wonderful book while I was in Jerusalem and would like you to read it. It's about Jesus Christ."

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They couldn't carry back a cart full of tapes. Peter hadn't even come out with his first book yet, and Paul wasn't a Christian. They couldn't go back with administrative techniques for Sunday School and how to have an on-the-ball youth program. They couldn't even go back with an architect's kit on how to construct a building. All they went back with was the announcement that Jesus, Son of David, had appeared, lived a marvelous life, died a saving death, rose again from the dead. They were filled with the Spirit to declare the message, and they had the key to the Old Testament in understanding—by the presence of the Spirit and by the example of how Jesus himself looked at the Old Testament. Starting out with just those thin resources, the church at Rome got its start.

Which is a way of saying you can have everything and have nothing. What is the good of everything unless we have the same power of the Spirit to anoint us with that same invigorating message, which helps us understand that Jesus is the promise of God who has come—Son of David, Son of God? These persons in Rome, many of them had never belonged to anything. Some of them had previously belonged to the synagogue, but many of them had never belonged to anything. They were slaves. They hadn't belonged to a social club. They hadn't belonged to a religious organization. They never belonged, but now they belong. Their home was in the church of the living God.

You belong to that Church if God has called you. Because inevitably God calls us not only to himself, He will call us to one another. "Beloved of God," Paul says of the Roman believers (Romans 1:7, KJV).

He also says we are called "saints." In the translation before us, the verb is used "called to be saints," verse 7 (NIV). But in the original translation, the verb "to be" is left out and "called" appears to be used in an adjective sense so it is really "called saints." You are a saint! You, right

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now, are a saint if you're a child of God. Set apart, called holy even though sometimes we don't feel like it. Often we don't feel like it. Yet God sees as acceptable because He's got a better idea of us than we have of ourselves.

Therefore we are recipients of grace and peace. Paul in this terminology has taken a word from the Greek and a word from the Hebrew to kind of sum up the blessing that comes to the Christian. The Greeks use the word *chairo* to greet one another. That meant "rejoice." Paul, rather than using that term as a Christian greeting, slips to a similar sounding word *charis*, which means "grace." God is well pleased. Then from the Hebrew he takes that great word *shalom*—peace, well being. Everything's together. You're an integrated personality. You have soundness. And he says now in Jesus Christ and God our Father, you have both grace and peace. Here is Paul—this dedicated-from-birth monotheist, this believer in one God—now, because of Jesus Christ, already has been transformed into understanding that he can associate the name "the Lord Jesus Christ" with "God our Father" in the same sentence, in the same greeting, which is way early in the Scriptures. In the New Testament, we see how the apostles are already understanding the work of Jesus and the nature of God and the aspect of the Trinity. "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." In one breath, Paul places the Lord alongside the Father.

These seven verses are an exciting introduction to the letter. An older commentator of the Scripture has said this about this introduction. It is so beautiful, I thought I would quote it: "In the Greek language, these seven verses are one sentence. Paul has this way of writing where if you're trying to diagram his sentence, I would suggest to you you'd get lost. You're not going to be able to do it successfully. Maybe you can if you really know what you're doing. But he just starts and he's so full of God and plain human brilliance and genius that language is a poor way

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of expressing what's really in him." But nevertheless, in these seven verses he has marvelously crafted something. This writer notes, "Notice the beauty and symmetry of Paul's opening sentence. It is a crystal arch spanning the gulf between the Jew of Tarsus and the Christians of Rome." By the way, think of the arch of St. Louis when I describe this. That's what these seven verses are—an arch. Paul begins the arch by giving his name. He rises to the dignity of his office: apostle. Then to the nature of the gospel he proclaims. From the gospel he ascends to its great subject matter: Him who is Son of David and Son of God. From this summit of his arch he passes on to the apostleship again and to the nations for whom he received it. Among these nations he finds the Christians at Rome. He began by laying down his own claims—servant, apostle, set apart. And he finishes the arch by acknowledging their claims—called, beloved, saints. The gulf is spanned. Across the waters of national separation, Paul has flung an arch whose firmly-knit segments are living truths and whose keystone—the top—is the incarnate Son of God. Over this arch he hastens with words of greeting—from his Father and their Father, from his Master and their Master—grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Closing Prayer

We now wait, Lord Jesus, in Your presence, very conscious of the reality of Your nearness to us and the power of the Spirit who speaks to us yet again through this book. You are the Son of God, the promised One who has come into the world, bringing us what we could never earn on our own. Telling us that God has already accepted us, and God, You've forgiven us. So today we reach out with the simplicity of faith and trust to acknowledge You, and to speak yet again from our hearts our love for You. As we gather around the communion table now, we gather around these emblems which express Your presence. May this time be a wonderful time for us today. A

OPENING THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Romans 1:1-7

time when praise arises from our hearts. A time when belief really takes hold. A time when we can say to You what is in us, and a time when You can say to us what is in You. For we ask this, Lord, in Your Name. Amen.